

Original Research Article

Academic Integrity among Nursing Students

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ABSTRACT

Academic integrity is the commitment and demonstration of honest and moral behavior in an academic setting. This is most relevant at the university level as it relates to providing credit to other people when using their ideas. In simplest terms, it requires acknowledging the contributions of other people. A descriptive study was conducted to assess the academic integrity among undergraduate nursing students in selected nursing college, Kollam. The students were asked to fill a demographic Proforma to obtain baseline data and a Likert scale to assess the behavior that compromises academic integrity like copying in exams, falsification of information / data, plagiarism, forging of attendance, and copying of assignments. The analysis of the data was done by using descriptive statistics. Results have shown that falsification of information/ data and copying of assignments from others is the most prevalent behavior observed by participants among their colleagues that reflected lack of academic integrity.

Key words: academic integrity, plagiarism, falsification, forging and copying.

INTRODUCTION

Academic integrity is the moral code or ethical policy of academia. Academic integrity refers to the expectation from a student to submit original work and give credit to other people's ideas. Academic integrity is the commitment and demonstration of honest and moral behavior in an academic setting. This is most relevant at the university level as it relates to providing credit to other people when using their ideas. In simplest terms, it requires acknowledging the contributions of other people. ^[1] A study conducted at Jesuit University, United States suggested that upper division and second-degree nursing students are less tolerant and more condemnatory of cheating than younger students. It also concluded that frequent dishonest classroom behaviors included

asking and telling other students what was on the exam whereas the most frequent dishonest clinical behavior included documenting findings that were not assessed or findings that were false. ^[2] Another study done in Pakistan pointed out a significant high level of prevalence of academic dishonesty at higher education level. ^[3]

A longitudinal study results reflected that the nursing students get accustomed to taking academically deceitful actions. The students come to consider their cheating behaviors as acceptable and normal, thereby stabilizing them. ^[4] A concept analysis identifies that the defining attributes to academic integrity among nursing students are honesty, ethical behavior and professionalism. Antecedents to integrity include an academic culture of respect, characterized by student-faculty

relationships derived from mutual respect, trust and a shared learning goal. It also indicates the importance of faculty as role models of integrity as paramount in building a culture of honesty. [5]

A descriptive cross-sectional study conducted in Duzce University; Turkey revealed that academic dishonesty was at a medium level in nursing students. It also identified that, though many of the students know cheating in university exams is unethical and are punishable, significant number still believe cheating to be socially acceptable. [6] A quantitative study results revealed differences in frequency of engagement in and attitudes toward academic dishonesty by gender, semester in the program, and ethnicity. The study also concluded that significant relationships were found among peer behavior, personal beliefs and values, and frequency of engaging in academic dishonesty. [7] Another study done in Ontario university among nursing students reported that situational factors, such as a caring curriculum, heavy workload, faculty attitudes, and technology, had an impact on both why and how these nursing students were collaborating with each other and cheating. [8]

A descriptive study was conducted at South Korea has shown that the awareness of 'irresponsibility in the class' was lowest, and 'cheating on examinations' was highest. [9] A cross-sectional survey-based study was conducted among medical students at a government medical college, in Saudi Arabia during the year 2014–2015, highlighted significant academic misconduct concerning cheating was found among the Saudi medical students; this misconduct is alarming in a reputable government institution. The implementation of strict punishments, requiring ethical courses and creating ethical awareness by exploiting the potential of Islamic religious belief might help to control this problem. [10] A quantitative study conducted at United States has identified socio-demographic and situational conditions have affected nursing students' engagement in academic

dishonesty, their attitudes regarding various forms of academic dishonesty, and the prevalence of academic dishonesty in which they engaged and witnessed. [11]

A study was conducted at Poland to investigate the direct relationship of values with academic dishonesty, as well as the moderating role of students' past achievements. It was found that socially orientated human values like Conformity and Tradition were negatively related to unethical behaviors, while personally focused values such as Hedonism, Power, and Stimulation correlate positively. Additional analyses revealed that the relationships of some values as Achievement and Security with academic dishonesty are significantly moderated by students' academic performance. [12]

A study conducted at private medical schools in Pondicherry, India, revealed that the prevalence of academic dishonesty is high. The study stressed that academic integrity and ethics should be emphasized to the students which might help them in becoming professional and honest professionals. [13] A quantitative, descriptive survey conducted in a nursing education institution emphasized that academic dishonesty was a reality at the nursing education institution and identified that cheating associated with plagiarism and assignments was the main problem area. [14] A study done in the University of the West Indies, Jamaica suggested that if academic dishonesty and misconduct is identified and recognized, along with stringent action like paying strict penalty, will prevent students from pursuing such acts and may serve as a deterrent for other students. [15] A systematic review of literature reflected that clearly defined behaviors, processes, and consequences should be delineated by school policies to guide implementation of specific cheating deterrent strategies. [16]

It has been identified by the investigators that the literature related to the prevalence of academic integrity among nursing students in Kerala is limited, though it is a predominant academic issue of this

era. Nursing is a profession which expects its personnel to be ethically and morally sound while dealing with human beings. The adoption and application of moral values at both individual and academic level by nursing students would ensure the development of their professional self as per the expected standards of care and scope of practice. The significance of academic integrity and ethical and honest practices executed by students during their learning period has observed a drastic change over time. With the advancement in technology, students also have been found to be involved in unfair means in their education related activities, either knowingly or unknowingly.

Statement of the problem: A descriptive study to assess the academic integrity among undergraduate nursing students.

Objectives: To assess the prevalence of academic integrity among undergraduate students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Quantitative research approach with descriptive design was used in the study. The study sample size consisted of 50 nursing students from third year and fourth year BSc nursing those who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. Non probability purposive sampling technique was used. The setting of the study was a selected nursing college, Kollam district. The following tools were used for the purpose of data collection.

Demographic proforma to assess the baseline variables

Likert scale: The Likert scale had two parts: An opinionnaire to assess the academic integrity

A three-point scale to assess the behavior noticed by the participants in relation to the academic integrity among their colleagues

The researchers ensured to follow the ethical principles. Ethical Clearance has been obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Bishop Benziger College of Nursing. After obtaining a prior formal permission from the administrators of the selected college of nursing data collection was carried out. Written consent was obtained from the subjects before conducting the research.

Statistical Analysis: The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULT

Section A: Demographic Proforma

All the samples (100%) were females.

A vast percentage of the samples (94%) have studied higher secondary school that followed state syllabus.

A majority of the samples (82%) joined nursing by their own choice.

A majority of the samples (88%) are interested in the course.

Majority of the samples (78%) have not observed any behaviour related to academic disintegrity among colleagues.

Section B: Likert Scale to Assess Academic Integrity

Opinions reported by B.Sc. Nursing students regarding Academic Integrity

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of opinion of B.Sc. Nursing students regarding academic integrity N=50

S. No.	Opinions	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
	Academic Integrity in educational environment is affected in many colleges now days.	40	80	9	18	1	2
	Academic Integrity means that you are accountable for your own work.	43	86	7	14	0	0
	Academic Integrity is the foundation of professional & educational careers.	49	98	1	2	0	0
	Ethical behaviour and independent thought is important for achieving academic success.	46	92	4	8	0	0

Table 1 shows that a majority (98%) of participants identified academic integrity as the foundation of professional and educational careers and 92% of participants believed that ethical behavior and independent thought is important for achieving academic success and a remarkable majority (more than 80 %) expressed that educational environment is affected in many colleges now days and each one is responsible for their own work.

Behaviours reported by B.Sc. Nursing students in relation to academic integrity among colleagues.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage distribution of behaviours reported by B.Sc. Nursing students in relation to copying in exams
N=50

S. No.	Behaviours	Never		Once		More than once	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
	Students taking prohibited notes/chits along with them to copy during exams.	40	80	2	4	8	16
	Students clarifying answers with other students during exams.	33	66	5	10	12	24
	Students trying to get the question paper before exams (internal).	45	90	3	6	2	4
	Students getting caught copying during exam.	43	86	4	8	3	6
	Students using an electronic/digital device/ an unauthorized aid during an exam.	47	94	2	4	1	2
	Students influencing their teachers by unfair means to get more marks.	44	88	2	4	4	8
	Students getting technical help during clinical practical exam.	39	78	10	20	1	2
	Students having prior knowledge about the exam case.	37	74	7	14	6	12

Table 2 shows that a negligible percentage (24% & 16%) of participants reported that they have observed colleagues clarifying answers with other students during exams and taking prohibited notes/chits along with them to copy during exams, and only (12%) have noted that their colleagues had prior knowledge about the exam case during practical exams more than once respectively

Table 3: Frequency and percentage distribution of behaviours reported by B.Sc. Nursing students in relation to falsification of information/data
N=50

S. No.	Behaviours	Never		Once		More than once	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
	Students staying away from college without a valid reason (Truancy).	38	76	10	20	2	4
	Students hiding information shared by teacher, from colleagues to ensure his or her success.	41	82	4	8	5	10
	Students giving false reasons for getting extension on assignment submission date.	13	26	24	48	13	26
	Students giving non-existent data/false data in their assignments like case study, care plan etc.	8	16	10	20	32	64
	Students performing procedure not according to the principles in the absence of supervision.	12	24	23	46	15	30
	Students falsely documenting clinical findings.	38	76	5	10	7	14
	Students reporting procedures that were not observed/performed for the purpose of getting sign in their log book.	40	80	6	12	4	8

Table 3 shows that a remarkable majority (84%) of participants reported that they have seen colleagues falsifying information or data either once or more than once by giving non-existent data/false data in their assignments like case study, care plan etc., and a considerable percentage (more than 70%) of participants have observed their colleagues giving false reasons for getting extension on assignment submission date and performing procedure not according to the principles in the absence of supervision either once or more than once.

Table 4: Frequency and percentage distribution of behaviours reported by B.Sc. Nursing students in relation to plagiarism
N=50

S. No.	Behaviours	Never		Once		More than once	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
	Students citing reference which they didn't use while writing their assignment.	12	24	27	54	11	22
	Students submitting assignment as an individual piece of work when it was done as group work.	19	38	25	50	6	12
	Students exaggerating the report of their participation in group assignment, when they did only little work.	30	60	15	30	5	10
	Students citing materials/ideas from other sources for doing their research work without referencing it.	31	62	13	26	6	12
	Students changing data to obtain desired results in research projects.	41	82	4	8	5	10
	Students reading an abridged version of a book, rather than the original.	31	62	13	26	6	12

Table 4 shows that a notable percentage (76%) of students reported that they have seen colleagues citing reference which they didn't use while writing their assignments either once or more than once, and an equal occurrence (12%) have seen colleagues submitting

assignment as an individual piece of work when it was done as group work, citing materials/ideas from other sources for doing their research work without referencing it and reading an abridged version of a book, rather than the original more than once.

Table 5: Frequency and percentage distribution of behaviours reported by B.Sc. Nursing students in relation to forging of attendance
N=50

S. No.	Behaviours	Never		Once		More than once	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
	Students appearing for examination in place of his/her friends.	44	88	3	6	3	6
	Students signing or giving proxy for attendance for other students.	42	84	2	4	6	12
	Students forging signature of the teachers.	45	90	3	6	2	4

Table 5 shows that a negligible percentage, (12%) of participants reported that they have seen colleagues signing or giving proxy for attendance for other students more than once.

Table 6: Frequency and percentage distribution of behaviours reported by B.Sc. Nursing students in relation to copying of assignments
N=50

S. No.	Behaviours	Never		Once		More than once	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
	Students copying from other's assignments and submitting as their own assignment.	15	30	10	20	25	50
	Students doing assignments for other students.	36	72	11	22	3	6

Table 6 shows that a good percentage (50%), of the participants mentioned that they have seen of colleagues copying from other's assignments and submitting as their own assignment more than once.

DISCUSSION

The present study was intended to assess the academic integrity among undergraduate nursing students.

The current study utilizes descriptive design as research design. The study findings reveal that that falsification of information/ data and copying of assignments from others is the most prevalent behavior observed by students in line with lack of academic integrity among nursing students.

This present study showed that a majority (98% & 92%) of participants identified academic integrity as the foundation of professional and educational careers and a remarkable majority (more than 80 %) expressed that educational environment is affected in many colleges now days and each one is responsible for their own work.

However ethical codes in relation to learning and evaluation may be included in the student hand book as a reference to students. [17]

A descriptive study done by Cecilia J. TheartIlzeSmithat reported that academic dishonesty was a reality at the nursing education. Cheating associated with plagiarism and assignments was identified as the main problem area. An unacceptably high level of dishonesty in completion of practical records was also an area of concern. [18]

The academicians need to develop focused policies and evaluation strategies that will reflect individual creativity of students to ensure academic integrity among students. It has been identified that the students that display unethical behaviours during their academic careers are likely to continue those behaviours in their professional lives, as well. [19]

Hence the faculty members have an indispensable role in the formation of a culture of academic integrity among students that reflects professionalism.

CONCLUSION

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Behaviour that compromised academic integrity even though reflects in less percentage has to be viewed seriously. All students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and

help to create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. In this study a notable percentage of participants revealed that they had observed academic dishonesty. Hence the study strongly recommends to conduct survey with more sample size among nursing students and highlights the need to educate students on significance of academic integrity in their journey to become professional nurses, so that they will never resort to intentional or unintentional behavior that can mount to academic dishonesty.

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