Building and Developing an Enhanced Culture of Academic Integrity in HEIs in Oman

By

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Abstract

Dishonesty in different forms is the biggest barrier and challenge to building a sustainable community. It may be in the form of terrorism, corruption, bribery, and dishonesty. Before COVID-19 academic dishonesty was confined to the Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs), nevertheless, the pandemic has bifurcated the academic dishonesty that spilled over to the junior level due to the online system of education. The study received responses from 25 HEIs, with most of them having affiliations with international institutes. Most of the institutions have set up technology tools to detect academic offenses that are made available to both students and faculty, such as Turnitin, student advising and counseling, peer review, revising course syllabi, etc. periodically to ensure academic offenses are not entertained. The analysis shows academic integrity is the main responsibility that can sustain quality in educational institutes. Also, failure to prevent academic offenses will tend to impair the quality of an institution and will also deter proper means to evaluate student performance. The major forms of academic dishonesty that are observed among students are in assignments, reports, and examinations. To address the issue, HEIs should adopt strategic mechanisms including strict enforcement of policies, and procedures to discourage academic offenses.

Keywords: Academic integrity, Conformity, Moral code, Plagiarism, Scholastic transgression

Introduction

Several explanations of honesty or integrity are widely referred to in academic education from different perspectives. Though integrity is not only confined to academics but also very significant to every aspect of life to maintain a meaningful life. Integrity is more profoundly understood in academics not just limited to students, but also includes the teaching community for plagiarism and indulging in academic dishonesty. Academic integrity principally is depicted through the five basic values which are honesty, fairness, trust, respect, and responsibility which are fundamental to every organization to establish them in the curriculum and teaching design (ICAI, 2021). Not only that, but academic integrity is also a process of adopting good practices in both teaching and learning practices which might require acquiring the skills and practices to demonstrate honesty in academic work.

Some practices are classified to maintain integrity while some can delineate academic honesty, which probably needs attention in every academic institution. Moreover, academic

dishonesty might translate to personal and professional life leading to unethical behaviors in higher education institutions that can eventually impede the learning environment (Boehm et al., 2009). Therefore, there is every need for academic institutions to strongly emphasize academic integrity by assessing the role that academic dishonesty can result in an institutional reputation. At the same time, it is a challenge for the academic community to preserve academic honesty on many occasions, which probably has worsened during the COVID-19 period, due to the migration from classroom teaching to online learning. The other facet delineating integrity in academic learning is practices such as plagiarism, cheating, falsification, and sabotage, which are considered acts of academic dishonesty (Jones, 2011). These acts are important to be dealt with properly to preserve an institution's recognition and reputation in an educational community.

Interestingly, statistical analysis shows that around 60 to 90 percent of university students voluntarily tend to admit to practicing academic dishonesty according to a survey by McCabe among 70 thousand university students from 2002-2015 (McCabe, 2011). Moreover, every academic institute would have established effective procedures, measures, and policies to oversee the elements that affect academic integrity, tracking academic dishonesty practices is nevertheless a serious concern that is growing among HIEs. Reports from educational testing services (ETS) state that only 20 percent have admitted to indulging in academic offenses during the 1940s while in the present century around 75 to 90 percent of students are admitting to practicing some form of academic dishonesty according to studies published in ProctorEdu (2022).

There are many factors surrounding the reasons for students' practice of academic dishonesty, which is extensively studied by various educators, researchers, and academicians in different settings. One of the most is the world wide web and internet that has facilitated online learning to a mass audience around the globe which has paved the way for learners all over the world to freely access content and use them for academic purposes. Ironically E-learning and online education invariably have thrown great challenges in preserving academic integrity (Dyer, 2010; Ayoub & Aladwan, 2021). To address the wide challenges, HEIs are governing the assessment platforms with technological applications such as online proctoring systems such as the use of speed exams, Exams, Proctor-U, Varificinet, etc. some of the tools to detect academic dishonesty practices in examinations.

Parallelly the drastic development of E-learning has led higher education to reach the student community anytime and anywhere thereby has reduced the cost of learning literally. However, it may increase the risk and challenges, which might considerably affect the prospects of higher education in maintaining academic integrity. On the contrary, several establishments are not positioned to sustain stress in maintaining academic integrity with such a massive online education system. Eventually, there is a high affinity that institutions might experience a decline in the quality of education, recognition, and accreditation at national and international levels. From this perspective, higher education institutions currently practicing different methods of teaching and learning must adopt consistent and efficient mechanisms to address the area of academic integrity. Hence this study intends to focus on investigating and identifying the ways, methods, and processes that the higher education institutions in Oman are adopting to maintain academic integrity and at the same time reduce the occurrence of academic offenses.

The article is structured by beginning with introducing the topic of study, followed by describing the background of the problem in light of the studies on academic integrity. The next section elaborates on the literature studies that are done on the topic of academic integrity

in educational institutions globally, later we described the framework of the study, outlining the approaches and methods adopted for collecting the data. Finally, the observations gathered from the analysis are presented in the findings regarding the perception of the various institutions on enhancing the culture of academic integrity. Lastly, the paper ends with the conclusion drawn stating specific implications of the study to the HEIs and society.

Background of the Problem

The study intends to find how to develop and build a culture of academic integrity in HEIs. It critically analyzes strategy on academic integrity by categorizing cultural and economic swings, faculty, and student engagement by averting academic transgression for fostering academic integrity. According to Piascik and Brazeau (2010), students should collaborate not just to get the work and projects completed, but to learn in the process and enhance their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It is expected that students will be allowed to adopt the notions and beliefs of moral conduct in the classroom, campus, society, and in their professional and personal life. Consequently, they will develop ethnic structure and build their morals for professional pursuits, which some of them have developed accordingly and a few they lack.

Academic integrity is essential to develop honest and ethically accountable citizens. Therefore, the discussion of academic integrity is critical in educational institutions, research and development offices, the court of law, and other institutions as well. According to Drach and Slobodianiuk (2020), academic integrity in teaching, learning, and research needs to be shifted from the penalty for a violation to planning and implementing explanatory and educational activities. Therefore, this research has been taken due to the significance of academic honesty in academic institutions and its avalanche effect due to its absence.

Integrity shall form the building block and as fundamental ethics for any institution and invited several researchers to study and research the subject matter. It impacted the entire academic community including but not limited to faculties, supervisors, external and internal stakeholders, authorities, parents, caretakers, and business houses, and concern for all the institutions in every country from top leadership to down-the-line the students. According to Guerrero et al. (2020), academic integrity is to discourage cheating and establish clear and efficient processes for fixing responsibility for academic breaches. The academic treachery related to students' behaviors in academics is deemed to be unacceptable, such as plagiarism, copying, appropriately paraphrasing, or even supporting in-class assignments.

To overcome such issues, it is essential to cultivate an overall culture of honesty by setting and raising the bar at different time intervals. According to Naylor (2018), as educators, we too will have to model vulnerability, and cultural humility, abandon the need for authority, as non-conformity in the manner that will lead to a "secure and livable world," cannot be harnessed by the reigns of the same restraints it seeks to abandon. Well, academic integrity shall be an integral part and parcel of cultural integrity, because it will not work out a long-lasting solution. The academician can find out or create some loopholes and continue to violate academic dishonesty unless honesty is engraved and formed part and parcel of culture itself. At this point, it appears neither the institution has solutions, nor anyone can assure that academic integrity can be practiced as ethics. Hence, it is paramount to consider academic integrity as an essential ingredient of institutions for maintaining respect and creditability. The entire academic community of philosophers, scholars, and learners must rise to the occasion for maintaining academic integrity. Thus, the following sections discuss research challenges related to the literature review.

Literature Review

According to Morris (2018), there are five areas of consideration offered for higher education institutions that relate to determining academic integrity strategy; reviewing institutional policy; understanding students; revisiting assessment practices, and implications for staff professional development. The academic transgression that comprises numerous forms of misbehavior such plagiarism, duplicity, paraphrasing, proxy in class attendance, writing examination on impersonation, fake degree, souvenirs, gifts, inflation of grades, privileged treatment to a select few, false research, disclosure of question papers before scheduled examination and so on. As highlighted by Sarlauskienea and Stabingisa (2014), the understanding of plagiarism among participating students' is unambiguous. At times, the government department also plays role in violating academic integrity such as through political corruption in education through political falsification of institutional affairs. At times, the ruling party repeatedly interferes in the institutional administrative setup for enhancing party affiliation and influence. Since the academic institution becomes their recruitment center for their future leaders that come through various political affiliations, friends and families, or cronies. It is becoming a global challenge and growing menace and ramifications in culture and society.

Institutions are facing distinctive academic integrity challenges arising quite dramatically due to the pandemic, and therefore, institutions, administrations, and community organizations must play vital roles, particularly at a leadership level. Academic corruption can also be formed as nepotism and discrimination, particularly in government-controlled institutions, where educational expenses are sponsored by the estate. There is substantial research that was accomplished on academic integrity. Latest researchers such as Akbar and Picard (2020); Naylor (2020); Morris (2018); Sarlauskienea and Stabingisa (2014); Cutri et al. (2021); Piotrowski and King (2020); Luniachek et al. (2020); Abdullah and Karim (2019); Tauginienė et al. (2019); Schmidt (2017) have explored and discussed the relational of academic integrity in HEIs. Based on the latest research the following areas are worth discussing in this context. Academic integrity was highlighted by hundreds of researchers and through doctoral theses, which validated the sources and concerns of dishonesty. Much research has examined academic corruption from an individual point of view, circumstantial considerations, and sentimental, and intellectual reasons. According to Luniachek et al. (2020), a very low level of understanding of the problem and the essence of the categorical framework has influenced academic dishonesty. It may be because personal attributes of an individual might have played such as family upbringing, social interaction, or the institution itself. Once institutions take serious steps on it, that can frighten the students from such behaviors. According to Newman (2019), universities can make more use of preventative strategies by emphasizing prevention rather than punishment.

Academic integrity challenges have widened, predominantly due to the pandemic that fosters online and blended learning, such as the use of multiple windows, disabling of webcams, hiding of screen activities, deactivating full-screen mode, and so on. Therefore, the challenge of maintaining academic integrity is growing day by day. On the other hand, in offline examination format, students might use hand signals for Multiple Choice Questions, or in academic research, authors can manipulate questionnaire responses by extrapolating the questionnaire for increasing the number count. Therefore, educational institutions that ignore these critical challenges may risk becoming irrelevant in the uncertain future of higher education (Piotrowski & King, 2020).

Various studies examined specific considerations coupled with academic untruthfulness. The most recent research suggests that academic integrity does not need to be adversarial or geared towards merely surveillance and punishment, rather, an educative approach that can help to create

a culture of academic integrity in the doctoral education setting (Cutri et al.,2021). The personal commitment to creating original work for assignments, projects, and theses, with zero plagiarism without any fabrication could be the right step toward achieving academic honesty. Similar research was accomplished by Thompson et al. (2017), pleading prevention of paraphrasing, which was deemed to be perpetrating plagiarism. Throughout the literature review, it has been observed that academic dishonesty in most cases is related to, unprincipled deeds of proxy examination such as appearing examination for others, use of unfair means during the examination, deception in the assignment as being original work, plagiarism, paraphrasing, etc. According to Guerrero et al. (2020), discouraging cheating and establishing clear and efficient processes are essential for academic breaches. Some other common violations of academic dishonesty such as copying homework, and resubmission of assignments to other sections or in other cohorts. Luniachek et al. (2020), indicated that the quality of higher education may be threatened and undermined by academic dishonesty practiced by students in the execution of their written assignments and by violating intellectual property rights.

There is numerous research that investigated how students use various tools and techniques to accomplish their tasks through academic dishonesty. The different cultures have distinct ways of practicing or violating academic integrity that may depend upon the level of manipulation or misconduct. According to (Akbar et al., 2020), mapping challenges related to culture can serve as a reference point for the prevention and curbing of academic dishonesty by considering cultural challenges. The great support, check, and balance for academic dishonesty is the wide availability of fast internet service. It collaborates with the associated high-tech tools in identifying academic dishonesty in online and offline learning environments.

To some extent, the plagiarism or similarity check can be done with the help of google, yahoo, which are freely available and accessible. Abdullah and Karim (2019), emphasized that academic integrity can be assessed with web citations and can be used as a useful tool to measure the impact of research. In addition, there are some free plagiarism detection tools with limited access, such as Dupli-checker, Copy-leaks, Paper-Rater, Plagiarism, Plagium, Plag-Tracker, and so on. However, licensed-based plagiarism tools such as i-Thenticate or Turnitin can use this resource to match student work with published or unpublished materials.

The identification and penalty for academic dishonesty are critical, and in their absence, it is not viable to make checks and balances. Hence, disciplinary actions are essential for enforcing and implementing academic integrity. The tools and techniques that can be used for documentation of violation, students counseling, assessment, benchmarking, debarring or sanction on examination, development of appropriate culture, promotion of institutional policy, and so on. Newman (2019), concluded that universities can make more use of preventative strategies and emphasis should be placed on prevention and less on punishment. In the current online educational system, the use of multiple webcams, and biometrics, with online proctoring could be the right choice for identifying and discouraging dishonesty.

In addition to the above measures, the class size, examination seating arrangement, distance between the students, and sandwiching the students with multiple courses could be some alternatives for checking dishonesty. According to Luniachek et al. (2020), the teaching staff's inability or unwillingness to detect violations leaves most of the cases unpunished which extends the scope of academic dishonesty.

Methodology

Data Collection
The study was conducted through questionnaires by distributing the survey link to all the HEIs in the Sultanate of Oman. Based on the nature of the study, it was decided to use

online surveys to receive the responses as the primary source of data collection to achieve the objectives of the study. A structured questionnaire was designed in line with the research objectives, with the survey questionnaire divided into 3 sections containing a total of 38 questions. Each section has questions that are included which are related to the specific details that are intended to be collected from the institutions. Different types of questions are included in the questionnaire to provide a comprehensive response and maximum participation from the institutions, comprising of a combination of open-ended, closed-end, nominal, Likert scale (5 points), and yes/no type questions are used in the questionnaire.

Data Management And Analysis

The questionnaire responses received from the participant institutions are analyzed and further unattempt and incomplete responses are streamed out from consideration for the study. While details that are pertinent to the study are only considered, all the questions are made mandatory in the questionnaire to be attempted by each respondent, hence no question can be left unanswered or skipped to move to the next stage. Subsequently, the results are presented after evaluating the responses received from the participant HEIs and are described using descriptive statistical information, in graphical form and certain responses are collated in tabular form.

Results

Demographic Information

From the survey, we have received responses from 25 higher education institutions with an average of two to four individuals who have participated in the study from each institution. The study sample represents 40.32% of institutions from the total 62 HEIs operating in Oman. The higher education sector in Oman has nine private universities, 19 private colleges, and the rest 34 are government institutes. However, the participation of HEIs is not uniform across the survey questions, with the least number of institutions that have responded being 15 and a maximum of 25 depending on the nature of the questions and the willingness of the respondent to the survey. Of the total institutions that responded, 88% of them are from private sector institutions constituting 22 institutions, and 3 are from government institutions. Of the total institutions that participated in the survey, 24 institutions are from the capital region and 1 is from the non-capital region. In this composition, most of the institutions were found to be established between 1990 to 2000 having more than two decades of educational presence in the country.

Educational Institutions Profile

Of the institutions that participated in the survey, almost 96% of HEIs are known to have affiliations with other organizations, of which 13 institutions possess international affiliations (52%) and 12 institutions have a national affiliation (48%) respectively. Further, the analysis shows that all the institutions are offering multiple academic programs in the combination of bachelor's, master's, diploma, short courses, professional degrees, and vocational, but bachelor's programs are commonly offered by all the participant institutions.

Indicators For Strengthening Academic Integrity In HEIs

Maintaining an enhanced culture of academic integrity are critical factors for every academic institution to meet global quality standards, likewise, a majority (92% & 96%) of the HEIs examined in the survey have established policies, procedures, and guidelines for dealing with academic dishonesty and academic integrity respectively. Moreover, the guidelines and policies are executed differently for teaching faculty and students in 80% of the institutions (20) while some

proportions of the policies and guidelines are commonly applied for teaching faculty and students in some institutions. The extent to which the policies, guidelines, and procedures apply to the participant institutions includes teaching, learning, research, assignments, examination, and grievances, however the policies related to academic dishonesty and integrity are predominantly followed in teaching by a majority of the institutions (23), research and examinations (22) each followed by learning (20). Moreover, the majority of the institutions constituting 88% have established bodies in-house to monitor the instances of academic dishonesty under the domain of quality assurance framework. Though academic integrity is exercised by different functionaries in HEIs, sometimes it becomes necessary to constitute independent committees for each of the operational areas in the institution to ensure efficient academic standards are maintained. In this view, around 18 HEIs representing 72% of the total participating institutions have independent committees for teaching, learning, research, assessments, examinations, and grievances while the rest 24% of the HEIs have no such arrangements existing.

Another key area for enhancing academic integrity is to provide fair judgment for academic offenses, as 58% of the institutions have declared that academic dishonesty practices are treated impartially. At the same time, proper feedback and timely appropriate guidance are very much necessary to be given to students after any observation of academic offense to ensure they are not repeated, from the study analysis it was noted that most of the institutions (22) have mechanisms to disseminate the feedback and provide guidance to students. Such feedback and guidance in the majority of the cases are given by the concerned instructor, followed by concerned the committee, student advisor, or sometimes the head of the department.

Institutional Support In The Execution Of Academic Integrity

To address the issue of academic dishonesty and maintain high standards of academic integrity, institutional support is very much important at every stage, the study reports that there are policies, and standard procedures established in all the studied institutions. Not only that in around 62% of the institutions the importance of maintaining academic integrity is also imbibed in the mission statements, while in some institutions they are placed in the college values. On the other hand, institutions also feel that academic integrity values and virtues should be effectively and consistently communicated to all, to achieve those, institutions are disseminating academic integrity policies and standard procedures to students and teaching faculty at different stages. (Table 1). Albeit according to the analysis 40% of the institutions are neutral on the claim that maintaining a strong culture of academic integrity is mainly the responsibility of the institution (mean = 3.0) (Figure 4).

Table 1. *Different ways institutions are following to communicate values, virtues of academic integrity*

Communication stage	Priority level	Student	Faculty
Admission and enrolment	Medium	✓	--
Induction	High	✓	✓
Workshops/seminars		✓	✓
Peer evaluation and communication	Low	--	✓
Advising and counseling	Medium	✓	--
Course/program syllabi	Low	✓	--

In the study, 75% of the institutions did have some sort of support to discourage academic dishonesty, while around 12% feel no proper arrangements are offered at the institutional level. Some of the ways institutions are rendering support to arrest instances of academic dishonesty include conducting workshops/seminars on policies and procedures, student inductions, incorporating academic integrity rules, procedures in staff and student handbooks, institutional manuals, etc., peer review, use of IT such as Turnitin, blackboard

orientation to staff and students, periodical review from quality assurance department, faculty guidance and monitoring on students' performance, etc. figure 1.
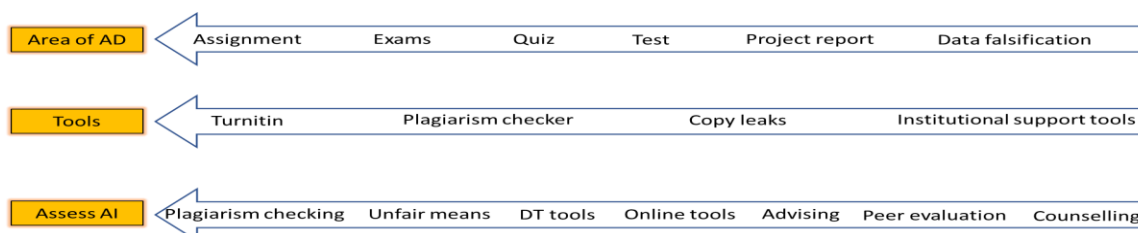

| Area of AD | Assignment | Exams | Quiz | Test | Project report | Data falsification |

| Tools | Turnitin | Plagiarism checker | Copy leaks | Institutional support tools |

| Assess AI | Plagiarism checking | Unfair means | DT tools | Online tools | Advising | Peer evaluation | Counselling |

Figure 1. *Types of assessments, tools used, and the approaches adopted to maintain academic integrity in the sample institutions.*

On the other hand, the participant institutions have deployed many diversified ways to assess the academic integrity maintained by putting into practice a combination of measures such as plagiarism checking adopted in all institutions followed by using digital technology tools to detect academic dishonesty, academic advising, peer review, and evaluation, counseling and mentoring, committees to adjudicate unfair means for enhancing performance, etc. For this purpose, digital application tools or digital technology tools are known to take a lead in assisting HEIs to evaluate academic dishonesty practices, therefore the majority of the institutions (24) are using Turnitin software as the predominant tool, followed by a plagiarism checker, institutionally supported tools, and copy leaks to a limited extent. In addition, to maintain a good culture of academic integrity all the institutions have initiated practices or measures to ensure faculty and staff perform to high-quality standards. Those include periodic revision of courses/programs, framing assessments orienting towards independent work, strictly adhering to policies and procedures for conducting examinations, administering case and scenario-based assessments, conducting physically monitored exams, submission of academic work through plagiarism detection tools, reviewing assessment practices periodically, organizing workshops and seminars on enhancing academic integrity, etc.

Academic Dishonesty Indulgences In HEIs

The survey categorically shows that instances of academic dishonesty are more prevalent among the student community than the teaching faculty, however some institutions feel that the extent depends on the nature of academic work or task. While the experience of faculty from the participant institutions shows that students are more habituated to indulging in academic dishonesty mainly by outsourcing their academic work which constitutes around 80% of the academic offenses, next to cheating and copying in examinations (60%), followed by seeking help from peers (44%) and copy material (16%). Further such ways of practicing academic dishonesty among student communities are observed to be applied in their different academic work as stated in figure 2.
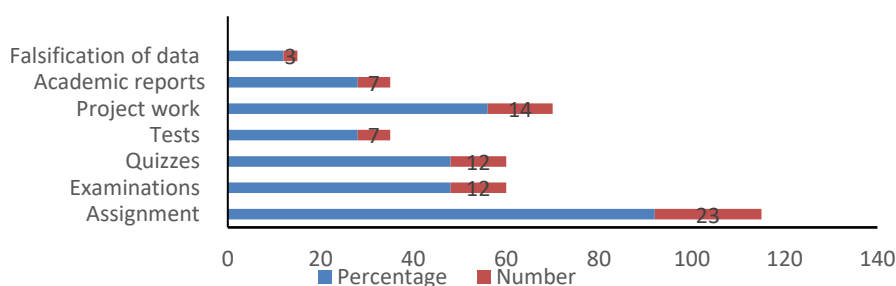

Figure 2. *Percent showing the extent of various academic offenses in practice as observed by participant institutions in the survey.*

Teaching faculty have observed that students are more likely to indulge in cheating (mean = 4.15), plagiarism (mean = 5.56), and copying material (mean = 5.72) which are the most preferable form of offense and such instances for each offense were observed to be committed few times too many times in an academic year. Among them, the probability of indulging in cheating was expected to be 35% and 36% for plagiarism and copying academic work over other forms of academic offense (figure 3).
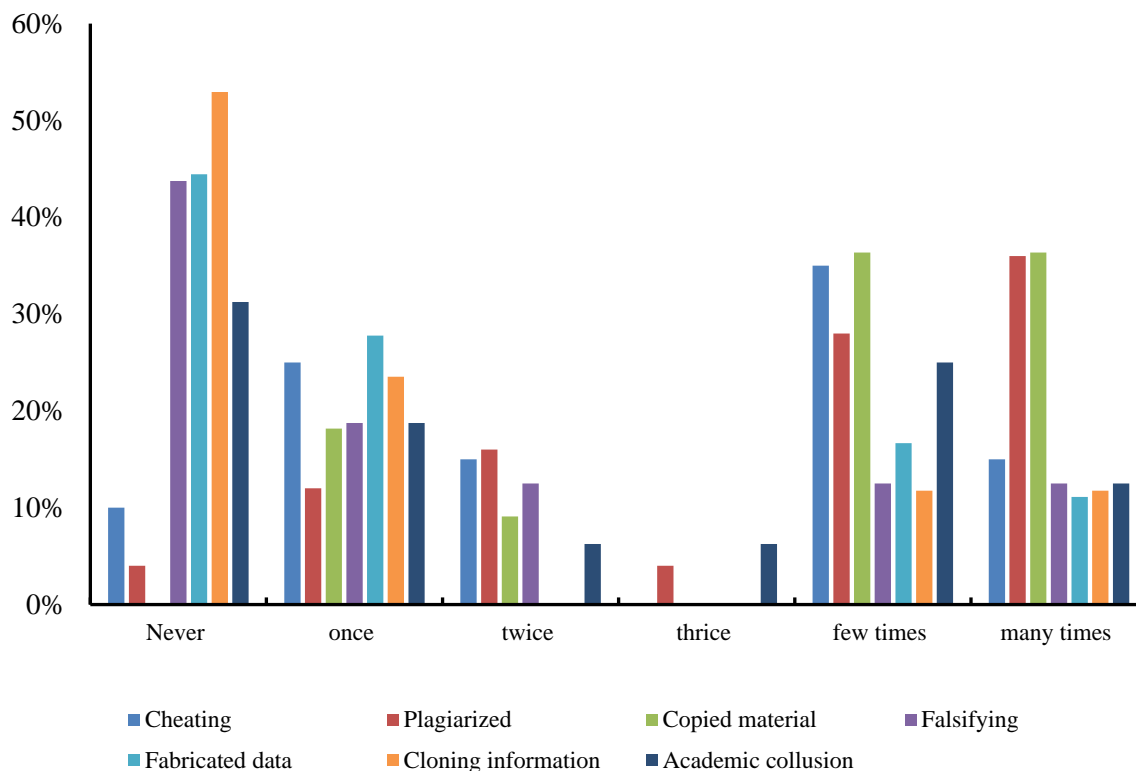

Figure 3. *Type of academic offense and frequency of occurrence of each type of academic offense reported by participant institutions*

Besides, the reasons for having such a high indulgence of academic offense by students in the order of importance are the inability of students to manage their academic demands of education (76%), performance anxiety (64%), lack of understanding about of the consequences (48%), excuse-making (40%), self-assumptions, peer pressure, unfamiliarity toward academic dishonesty and situations encouraging to adopt dishonesty practices. On the contrary, there are consequences for breach of academic integrity for both teaching faculty and students in the majority of the institutions (58%) but sometimes the outcomes depend on the nature of the offense committed. As a result, around 70% of the institutions have constituted procedures and guidelines for levying penalties for committing academic dishonesty, and in 20% of institutions, the decision for levying penalties is decided by the concerned committee. In such a manner, teaching faculty should also be committed to maintaining a high level of academic integrity in writing research articles, research work, teaching, and communicating research outputs to the community. As a result, 50% of the institutions feel that there are high expectations of maintaining academic integrity among the teaching faculty, however, in 12% of the institutions, there is still scope for improvement to meet the expectations. Though this depends on the level of knowledge and understanding a faculty already has on the topic of academic integrity, more than 65% constituting 16 institutions indicate having a high level of knowledge and understanding, while 16% feel faculty are mostly aware of the topic of academic integrity.

Fundamental Entities for Enhancing Academic Integrity Culture In HEIs.

The analysis of responses from the participant institutions shows that around 52% of the institutions have benchmarked their course or programs with other institutions, whereas in 8% of the institutions the benchmarking was done in a few courses. Besides these, there are various actions institutions have reported that can further enhance the culture of academic integrity, along with actions that should be necessarily taken to discourage academic dishonesty among faculty and students. Correspondingly, benchmarking of academic programs between institutions can enrich academic integrity in an institution as agreed by 45% of the participant institutions (mean = 3.72) (Figure 4). To achieve that, institutions need support from all fronts internally and externally to bring an enhanced culture of academic integrity and excellence. The opinions and proposed suggestions disclosed by the participant HEIs in the study are displayed in table 2.

Table 2. *Measures and suggestions to enhance academic integrity and actions to restrain practicing academic offenses in institutions[1]*

Actions for improving the culture of academic integrity (AI)	Proposed suggestions on support to improve academic integrity	Actions to discourage academic dishonesty (AD)
Continuous education on creating awareness of academic integrity	Promoting self-integrity	Defaulters should be dealt with as per the policy
Information dissemination and proper communication	Practicing high standards of academic culture	Building greater awareness through workshops/seminars
Leadership commitment	Building positive awareness	Levying penalties
Seminars/workshops	Intake quality or proficient students	Strict enforcement of AD policies, rules, procedures
Instilling accountability for offenses	Periodical workshops/seminars mandatorily for all	Adopt multiple platforms to create awareness of AD
Reviewing policies and procedures on AI	Information dissemination and proper communication	Organize capacity-building sessions
Consistent levying of penalties	Policies, and guidelines to strictly adhere	Improvise detection of offenses by using IT tools
Provision of adequate academic resources and information	Management support and commitment	Offer clear guidance and communication on the nature of AD and the type of offense
Adopt an efficient academic offense monitoring system	Timely faculty interaction on sharing best practices for assessing student performance	Consistently implement existing policies on AD
Using improved- digital detection tools	Circulating material related to AI to all	Expulsion on repeated reports of offense
Offering appropriate and timely guidance on AI	Use of academic offense detection tools	Adopt proper channels for communication between AD and offenses
Mandate policies, procedures, and guidelines succinctly to the institution's mission		

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[1] Data represented from reproducing the responses from participant institutes

Significance of Academic Integrity and Dishonesty Practices on Institutional Quality in HIEs

Globally there is great importance is laid on maintaining educational quality and standards in educational institutions, one obvious subject of concern is to consistently maintain academic integrity and discourage the practice of indulging in academic offenses. As a consequence, the HEIs participated in the study revealed that around 45% of the institutions agree that academic dishonesty affects the learning environment at the institution (mean = 4.15), while 42% of the institutions do also agree that academic offenses will impact the teaching quality and learning support that is provided in institutions (mean = 4.15).

Similarly, it is also observed that 48% of the institutions strongly agree that maintaining a good academic culture will try to uplift students' academic performance (mean = 4.13). Conversely, more than 44% of the institutions agree that academic integrity has a substantial role in fulfilling an institution's mission and vision (mean = 4.0), and maintaining consistent academic integrity is considered a key performance factor for achieving institutional excellence (mean = 3.90). But at the same time, failure to inculcate a strong culture of academic integrity will impact on accreditation status of institutions (mean = 3.92) which 40% of the institutions agree with the statement (Figure 4).
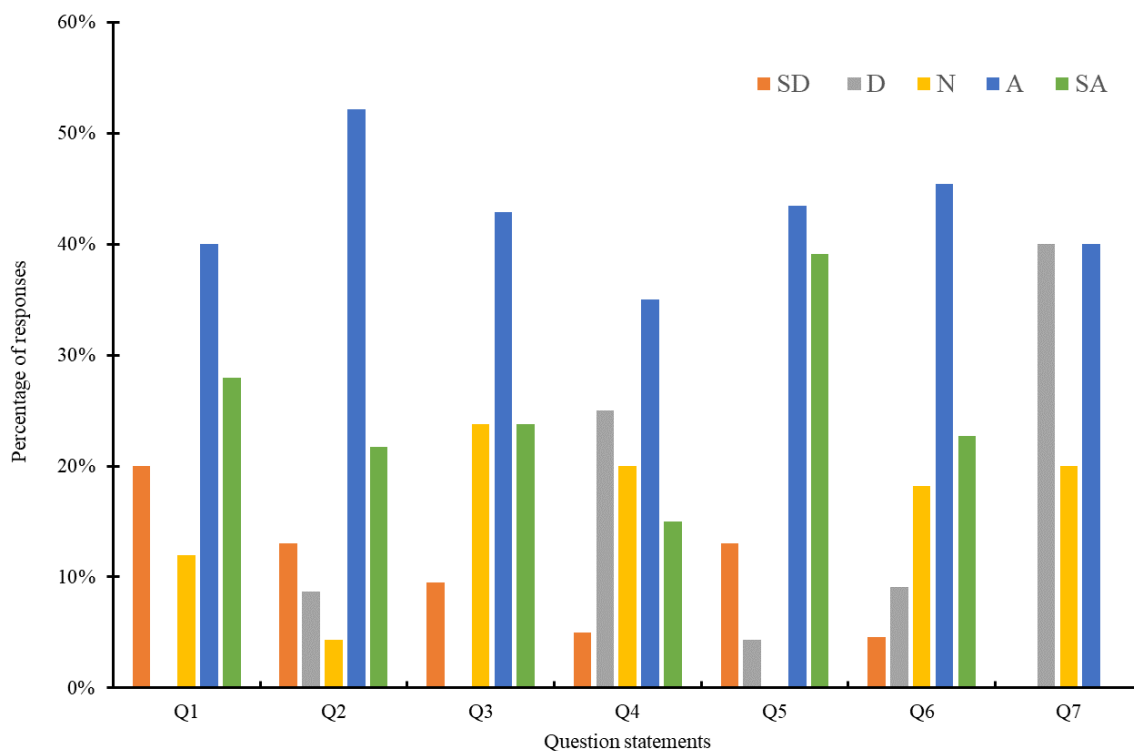

Figure 4. *Responses to the statements by participant institutions on the impact of academic dishonesty on institutional excellence.*

In general, the survey also says that around 52% of the institutions agree that the pandemic has caused difficult challenges in maintaining academic integrity (mean = 3.60) and has often had to be compromised in most situations owing to the shift in the education system (mean = 3.56). Understandably, 43% of the institutions agreed, reporting that preserving academic integrity has been more difficult with online educational systems than traditional face-to-face classroom teaching (mean = 3.71). Most importantly, discouraging and assessing the level of academic dishonesty are two fundamental actions that institutions have to take seriously considerations to promote a good culture of academic integrity, the survey shows that

35% of the institutions either agree or disagree that the application of digital technology tools can easily assess academic dishonesty (mean = 3.30), then again importance should be laid at the same time to discourage academic dishonesty to a greater extent since 43% of the institutions agree that such actions can assist in building a strong culture of academic integrity in institutions (mean = 3.91) (Figure 5).
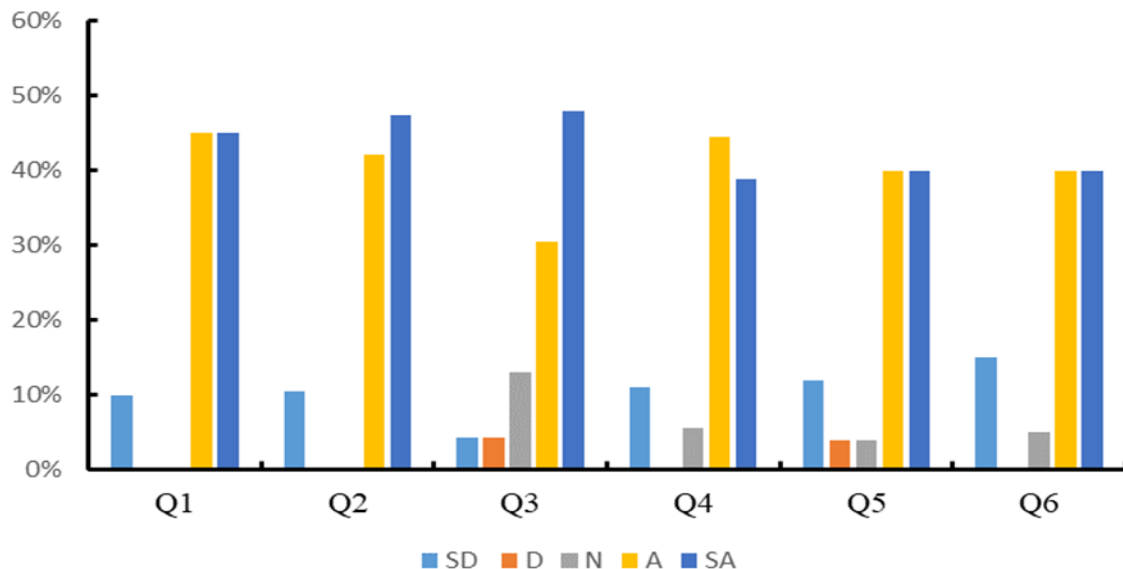

Figure 5. *Responses to the statements from the participant institutions on the prominence of academic integrity*

Discussion

Academic integrity takes a very significant role in every academic institution, and addressing the issue of academic dishonesty practices either by faculty or students indicates a progressive state of an institution. Albeit the degree to which the instances of academic dishonesty are considered to be affecting an institutional reputation and quality standards are very critical factors for the growth of every institution, they seem to be very much influenced by certain indicators such as the age of the institution, academic maturity and experience of teaching faculty and quality standards that are established in the institution, affiliation, and accreditation with international or national governing bodies, etc. which are stated considerations for maintaining academic integrity deliberated by (Morris, 2018). Undoubtedly most institutions claim to have policies, procedures, and guidelines for maintaining academic integrity, the effectiveness with which institutions can deal with academic dishonesty does depend on many factors, and those parameters influence an institution for achieving academic excellence. The study also reveals that the view of academic integrity got impacted due to the recent COVID pandemic which has caused all academic institutions to shift from face-to-face to online modes of teaching and learning, in such a sudden transition of teaching mode coupled with other significant factors, has challenged institutions in always maintaining quality standards. Contrary to this fact, literature studies show that there were fewer instances of academic misconduct during online teaching than face-to-face teaching (Eaton, 2020). On the other hand, building a strong culture of academic integrity is a pivotal task especially to drive the institutions to achieve their institution's mission and vision, but to achieve the goals collective and collaborative efforts are very much required from fronts. Subsequently, the analysis of the study helped us to find out that four significant areas could act as foundations for every institution's framework to achieve an enhanced culture of academic integrity.

Framework Structure to Achieve An Enriched Culture Of Academic Integrity

Based on the analysis of responses received from the institutions, every HEIs should formulate a structural approach for building a strong academic culture. Assuming the fact that there is a greater role of educators in promoting academic integrity, mainly in identifying academic offenses at the classroom level, there are other contributing aspects at different levels that also play a vital role in maintaining or enhancing the culture Hulsart & McCarthy, 2009). Subsequently from critically analyzing the different responses from the institutions, the authors have arrived at identifying four main elements that act as a foundation for building an enriched culture of academic integrity. Together with the main elements, there are contributing aspects acting as pillars under each element (internal and external) that would pave the way for achieving academic excellence in HEIs (Figure 6).
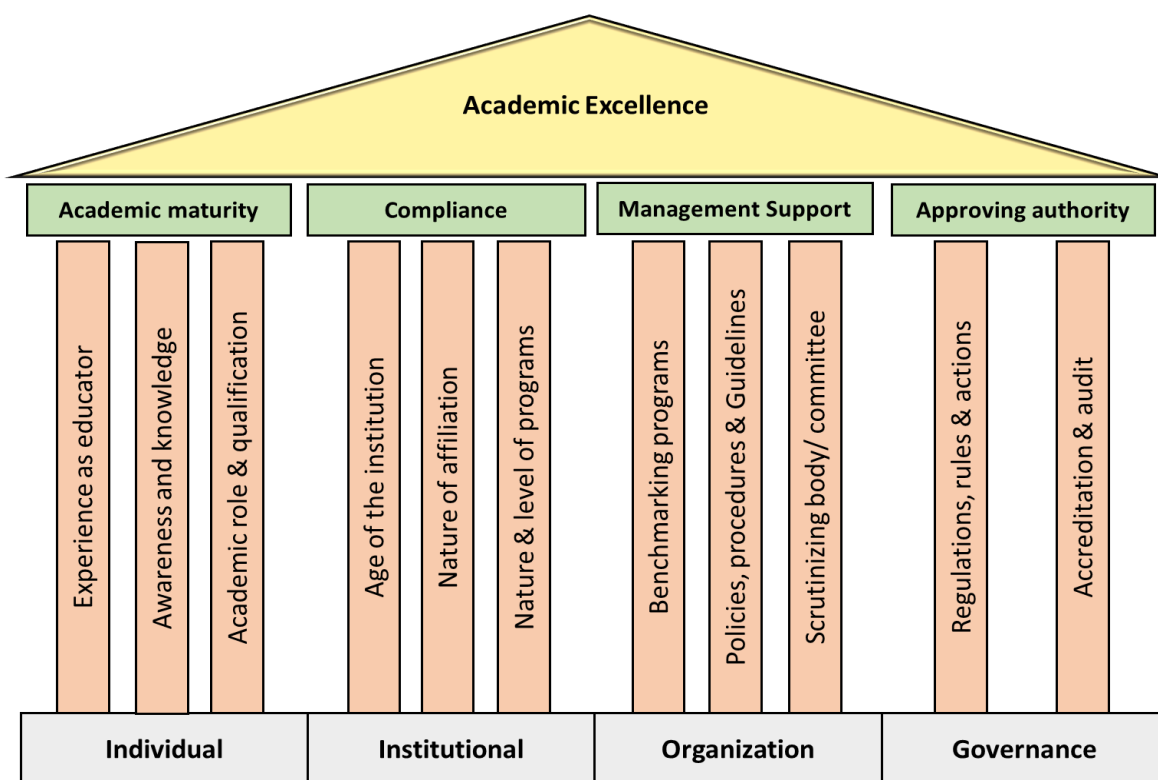

Figure 6. *Structural framework outlining the elements for building and enhancing a culture of academic integrity in HEIs.*

The structural framework signifies the importance of four definite elements for any organization to build a strong work culture, and such frameworks are more popularly followed in process safety applications in diversified industrial sectors and as part of evaluating the role of human factors in organizational excellence. Hence this structural framework even gains more prominence in academic/educational institutions as the factors that are likely to contribute towards academic excellence have a close resemblance to corporate and industrial organizational culture. Though it should be noted, every academic institution should evaluate the factors within their organizational structure that potentially contribute to strong academic integrity.

Conclusion

Academic integrity is a fundamental aspect of teaching, learning, and research in every academic institution. Also, a very crucial aspect to maintain a strong culture is to provide

quality education, services, and standards to the learning community. In this view, the study attempts to focus on how HEIs in the region are viewing the concept of academic integrity and taking different approaches to address the issue of academic dishonesty. It appears that all the institutions have policies, guidelines, and procedures existing to address and tackle academic offenses. Further, institutions are also taking proactive measures using digital technology and tools for assistance in dealing with academic dishonesty. However, the efficiency and effectiveness have affected the institution's credibility in dealing with academic offenses due to online teaching during the COVID pandemic. It also appears from the survey that there are various indicators which are both internal and external that contribute to enriching a good culture of academic integrity, though the findings clearly state that management support and level of academic maturity are key central elements to achieving the goal. At the same time, there are many reasons drawn from the study, as to why academic offenses are committed and are quite a normal practice among student communities to occasionally indulge in academics. Most of the institutions have established some sort of penalties for defaulters, it is also important to understand that such penalties or taking strict action on the defaulter would often not discourage them from committing an offense, but the causes or reasons compelling to commit an academic offense must be addressed more critically. To accomplish this, these ethical approaches that are fair should be followed as a result the study outlines the necessity to adopt a structural framework for every institution to achieve academic excellence.

In conclusion, the main principal pillars that promote a strong culture of academic integrity should be identified based on the integrity level at which every institution is positioned, and to reach a stage of academic excellence, a collective collaborative effort is very much required as described in the framework structure.

Research Implications To HEIs And Society

Academic integrity is one of the fundamental objectives of teaching and learning and every educational institution in pursuit of excellence must encourage teachers and students to be fair, honest, and sincere in fulfilling their academic responsibilities. Practicing a good culture of academic integrity at all levels of teaching and learning will add to the academic performance of the institution ultimately driving the institution in improving the quality of education and standards. Nonetheless, as every higher education institution practices maintaining integrity in teaching and learning to some level of excellence, owing to the changing methods and development of new approaches to learning, there is every necessity to review the initiatives institutions have taken and thereby promote a robust culture of academic integrity. Therefore, in this perspective, the present research reveals the importance of understanding the indicators and factors that are important to consider in enhancing and building a strong culture of academic integrity in academic institutions at different spheres of academic work. Also emphasizes the impact of failing academic integrity in institutions and finding out how it would impact research, teaching, and quality of education in HEIs in the region. The outcomes of the research study will prove useful to HEIs in the region to help plan strategies and take effective measures to enhance the culture of academic integrity, whilst the findings of the proposed research would facilitate enforcing authorities to mobilize the academic institutions.

Research Limitations

The research study was time bound focusing principally on higher education institutions in the Muscat region and is not an extensive study across the whole of Oman. Within the proposed time frame to undertake the study, relevant data and information gathered will be used to analyze the findings and offer conclusions and recommendations of the study

representing the observations gathered from the capital region. However, there are some restraints in getting realistic data, the number of responses from the participant institutions, incomplete entries, or response to some questions tends to impact the overall outcomes and conclusions of the study. Inclusively, we felt that the institutions were concerned about the data security and confidentiality of disclosed information which impacted the willingness to participate and respond to the study.

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