EFL preservice teachers' perceptions of academic integrity in a Kazakhstani university

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The preservation of academic integrity is given utmost attention in educational institutions. Currently, universities design specific policies to address this issue, encourage the use of plagiarism-checking applications, and promote an academic integrity culture. Under these conditions, our research aims to identify the students' awareness of academic integrity by exploring its most common violations, their perceived severity, and students' self-reported engagement. The sample comprised 187 students majoring in EFL at one private university in the southeast of Kazakhstan. The research employed a quantitative non-experimental design, and an adapted version of M-AIS was used as a data collection tool. The results were calculated in the SPSS program to obtain mean, standard deviation, and Spearman's rank correlation. On the whole, it became evident that academic integrity was a familiar notion for many students, and they viewed it positively. However, students still engaged frequently in academic dishonesty by plagiarising assignments, obtaining unauthorised help, and misrepresenting sources. Moreover, it was determined that the year of study, GPA, and perceived severity correlated with the instances of self-reported engagement in academic dishonesty.

Introduction

Currently, adherence to academic integrity is a top priority in higher education institutions, as it helps ensure a fair assessment of students' knowledge. The ICAI defined academic integrity as the application of qualities such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility, even under pressure in education (International Centre for Academic Integrity, 2021). As a result, academic communities should strive to uphold these values so that their graduates meet the expected outcomes of the chosen programs. However, despite their efforts to uphold academic integrity, the idea is frequently challenged by the ongoing globalisation processes, the development of cutting-edge technologies, and ambiguous institutional policies. All these reasons lead to the increased number of cases of academic dishonesty, which is further classified into plagiarism, cheating on exams, falsification, unauthorised assistance, collusion, and others. Another significant challenge has been posed by the advent of artificial intelligence, which is used across many spheres. All these instances refer to academic dishonesty, which Chow et al. (2021) defined as "any deceitful or unfair act intended to produce a more desirable outcome on an exam, paper, homework assignment, or other assessment of learning" (p. 17).

Any instances of academic dishonesty undermine the credibility and fairness in education. Moreover, it is evident that academic integrity should not be limited only to the educational sphere; rather, its underlying values are directly related to the decision-making processes (Carpenter, 2004; Guerrero-Dib et al., 2023). Carpenter (2004) found that students who violated academic integrity at universities were more likely to be dishonest in their workplaces. Similarly, Guerrero-Dib et al. (2023) argued for the positive correlation

between adherence to academic integrity and ethical decision-making in job settings. Therefore, ethical behaviour should be cultivated from the very beginning.

According to McCabe (2004), although educational institutions strive to uphold academic integrity, statistics show that on average 60% of students violate its rules at least once during their studies. At that time, the most common type of violation was cheating behaviour. During the Covid-19 outbreak, the situation deteriorated due to limited control by universities, and students had "an unprecedented and extremely tempting choice to cheat" (Khan et al., 2021, p. 5). In the post-pandemic period, the findings indicate a growing trend, and currently, almost all students violate academic integrity by plagiarising content, getting unauthorised help from outside sources, providing inaccurate citations, and cheating (Anitha & Sundaram, 2021). The main motives for academic dishonesty are the fear of failure, challenging questions, and the desire to attain higher results (Bylieva et al., 2020). In addition, students are increasingly tempted to use artificial intelligence for its efficient asynchronous communication, detailed feedback, and cost-effectiveness (Kala & Smith, 2023). As a result, maintaining academic integrity should take the lead.

Statement of the problem

In the Kazakhstani context, promoting academic integrity is seen as a key objective for ensuring high-quality education. To achieve this, in 2018, the Academic Integrity League was established to uphold its ten fundamental principles in all higher education institutions (Academic Integrity League, 2025). Currently, 36 universities have already joined this association, and they submit annual reports to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs and ensure their alignment with the demands of the labour market. As upholding academic integrity is also seen as the instructors' responsibility, starting from 2019, all assignments are required to be uploaded to similarity detection software (i.e, *Turnitin, Antiplagiat*, or *StrikePlagiarism*) to ensure that the submitted work is truly the students' intellectual property. However, despite all these efforts, the majority of students lack understanding of what academic integrity is, and mostly narrow it to cheating on exams (Bazylkanova & Dalelkanova, 2022). That is why it is necessary to identify the level of students' awareness of academic integrity.

The scope of our study is limited to students majoring in "English as a Foreign Language", a program that prepares future teachers of the English language. In the case of teaching specialties, academic integrity should be prioritised, and this focus is consistent with the previous research in the Kazakhstani teacher education context. It emphasises that pre-service teachers should be prepared not only professionally, but morally as well, through the development of core values such as tolerance, honesty, respect for diversity, whereas academic integrity is also viewed as an essential component of their professional and moral development (Sengerbekova et al., 2024).

Based on the abovementioned reasons, this study aims to identify the undergraduate students' awareness of the need to maintain academic integrity. To achieve this aim, the following objectives and research questions have been put forward:

Objectives

- determine students' overall perceptions of academic integrity;
- investigate the perceived severity of engaging in academic dishonesty;
- identify the most common forms of academic dishonesty and reasons for violations;
- identify possible correlations between contributing factors, such as the year of study and GPA.

Research questions

RQ 1. To what extent are undergraduate students aware of academic integrity in higher education?

RQ 2. What factors influence students' perceptions of academic integrity?

Literature review

A wide range of academic dishonesty exists, among which the most frequent are plagiarism, cheating on exams, data fabrication and falsification, sabotage, and seeking outside help (Chow et al., 2021). Based on the findings presented by Munir et al. (2021), bachelor and masters degree science students mostly engaged in academic dishonesty by obtaining outside help, electronic cheating, and sabotage. Alleyne and Phillips (2011) determined that in Barbados, the most frequent types of academic dishonesty were lying and copying behaviours, while data invention or cheat sheets were less widespread. During the pandemic period, the situation changed as plagiarism and cheating became the most frequent unethical behaviours (Anitha & Sundaram, 2021). Their study identified that "invisible" behaviours, such as plagiarism, are seen as trivial or insignificant forms of academic dishonesty, while cheating on exams was treated very negatively due to its visibility. Landa-Blanco et al. (2021) added that students became more inclined to help each other commit academic dishonesty. Furthermore, they did not see this as a wrongful act from the moral point and frequently found justifications for their actions. The authors also found that cheating was a common issue in schools and that students transfer this behaviour to university settings.

In the era of artificial intelligence, a new form of academic dishonesty, the so-called "AI-giarism" has emerged. According to Adzima (2025), students consider it as a less severe violation of academic integrity and frequently utilise different AI tools for completing homework and passing examinations. One of the most popular chatbots is ChatGPT with its "greatly enhanced reasoning ability, understanding of complex issues, and code writing capability" (Yu, 2023, p.8). Its widespread use began in November 2022, and since then, this chatbot has more than 180 million active users, among whom 43% are students (Nerdynav, 2024).

Also, students have acknowledged the advantages of using Chat GPT in education and taken advantage of them. For example, ChatGPT can complete tests with great accuracy (Shalevska, 2023). The author used this chatbot to pass a context-specific state exam designed for high school Macedonian graduates and achieved an 80% accuracy in multiple-choice questions and an essay that met all the assessment criteria. Another challenge that ChatGPT poses to academic integrity is the difficulty of identifying AI-

generated content. Even though plagiarism checking applications are widely used, they do not always capture AI-writing. Human evaluators also make mistakes in differentiating between AI and real human content, especially if it contains complex grammar and vocabulary (Webber-Wulff et al., 2023). In addition, students have become more knowledgeable about using technology and avoid taking all content without paraphrasing.

Based on the previous studies (Elzubeir & Rizk, 2003; Stone, 2023; Woith et al., 2012), it is evident that students' majors are related to the differences in attitudes towards academic integrity. Medical students usually have salient associations because this notion represents honesty, ethics, and trustworthiness for them. According to Elzubeir and Rizk (2003), medical students were more inclined to uphold academic integrity than their peers in other specialties, and most of them reported having never violated any rules. A later study, conducted by Woith et al. (2012), clarified that medical students related academic integrity to achieving the outcomes of education by encompassing "professionalism, success, and expertise" (p. 257). On the contrary, business students treated academic integrity with caution and viewed it negatively because of fearing institutional punishments (Stone, 2023). Their unintentional violations were caused by limited awareness of academic integrity policies, used to justify academic dishonesty.

Students of teaching majors hold mixed opinions. Despite being aware of the importance of academic integrity, pre-service teachers frequently violated it, primarily by cheating, providing faulty citations, or sharing homework answers among their groupmates (DiPaulo, 2022). The students were heavily affected by their peers' behaviour and the faculty's negligence. In the same vein, Turkish students used unpermitted Internet sources, sought outside help, and self-plagiarised to improve the quality of their work before submitting it (Eret & Ok, 2014). It was also determined that there was a correlation between the year of study and students' gender with the likelihood of cheating. As such, senior male students showed more violations. Contrasting, the students who were actively involved in research activities exhibited fewer violations (Espinosa & Toquero, 2022). Other students mostly considered it as an established necessity and complained about limited knowledge, insufficient control, and unclear policies (Calovic Nenezic, 2023). Recent findings provided by Khasawneh (2024) highlighted that in the case of teaching specialties, students' knowledge about academic integrity determines the frequency of violations, particularly related to the use of AI. His sample included EFL preservice teachers and those who showed higher awareness of academic integrity, were less likely to use it as they primarily considered the ethical implications of their actions. More importantly, in comparison with other majors, future EFL teachers possess a higher confidence in their own abilities, and they try to avoid unethical AI practices (Darmayasa et al., 2025).

External and internal factors play a significant role in developing students' attitudes towards academic integrity. Based on Thakkar and Weisfeld-Spolter (2012), the level of students' awareness is the key determinant of their behaviour. Therefore, they should be informed about the consequences of violating academic integrity. Additionally, the culture of academic integrity should be raised, in which not only instructors but also students take action to promote academic honesty.

The mode of delivery, which is an external factor, also influences students' adherence to academic integrity. These days, classes are conducted in online, offline, or blended formats. However, in the online environment, students have more opportunities to cheat as they are not strictly controlled by their educational institutions (Lanier, 2006). Moreover, the number of instances of academic honesty increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Ivic and Sostaric (2022), the lack of control led to a considerable improvement in students' grades. This conclusion was drawn after comparing the same population's grades before, during, and after the pandemic, and pre-pandemic and post-pandemic grades were moderately lower. After surveying 1608 German students, Janke et al. (2021) reached the same conclusion regarding the grades improvement due to the insufficient control provided by online proctoring applications. Consequently, students could exchange answers and use unpermitted materials to aid them during exams. However, other forms of academic dishonesty experienced only minor changes.

The instructors' attitudes towards their roles in promoting academic integrity also refer to external factors. Peters et al. (2019) provided a classification of roles based on the level of responsibility that instructors show in this process. Overall, there are seven roles, namely ambassador, collaborator, cooperator, casual, referrer, delegator, and detached. The authors explained that ambassadors and collaborators are the role models for students who shape their behaviour and teach them about academic integrity while referrers and detached step back and emphasise students' responsibility. In a later study, Chirikov et al. (2020) determined that students, whose instructors explicitly taught academic integrity, showed far fewer cases of academic dishonesty. In the same direction, Adillón et al. (2024) explained that role modeling on behalf of instructors is crucial for shaping future teachers' ethical behaviour. Without it, students may be unable to develop ethical skills and will struggle in the future. However, some instructors lack knowledge about the existing academic integrity policies in their institutions, resulting in their inability to communicate them to students (MacLeod, 2020). In addition, they are affected by excessive overwork which leads to deterioration of academic integrity. Overall, these are some of the main external and internal factors that shape students' attitudes.

The violations of academic integrity occur for a lot of reasons. One of the most important ones is students' limited knowledge as they narrow academic dishonesty only to cheating. Students fail to understand the severity of self-reported engagement in academic dishonesty due to their lack of awareness (Zangla, 2023). In addition, cheating on exams is related to the desire to have higher grades, fear of getting irrelevant exam questions, and having insufficient time for completion (Bachore, 2016). As regards plagiarism, it mostly takes the form of contract cheating and overreliance on published sources. Anitha and Sundaram (2021) determined that their research participants engaged in academic dishonesty to meet their parents' expectations. Moreover, they were heavily influenced by their peers' unethical behaviour and started behaving similarly. In addition, according to Rangkuti et al. (2022), students are unwilling to report their peers' violations in exams due to the lack of ethical awareness. Cultural background also affects the formation of students' mindsets (Kennet & Shkodkina, 2018). Their comparative study revealed that Ukrainian students breached the rules of academic integrity on average two times more

than their American counterparts. Finally, these authors also categorised the reasons into internal and external, with a desire for higher grades and limited awareness in the former category, and peer behaviour and lack of control in the latter.

This literature review aimed to provide an overview of students' attitudes towards academic integrity. However, the reviewed literature mainly focused on the experience of universities in other countries as there was a lack of studies related to the Kazakhstani context.

Materials and methods

This section provides a description of the research design, data collection tools, the steps involved in conducting the study, and the rationale for analysing the results.

The quantitative non-experimental research design was chosen to achieve the aim of this study which was to determine the students' awareness of academic integrity. A descriptive design was seen as the most appropriate since it helps to identify recurring patterns and common trends that are peculiar to the chosen population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To increase the generalisability of findings, a representative sample of 187 undergraduate students was selected to fulfill the aim.

The research was conducted in one private university located in Almaty, in the south-eastern part of Kazakhstan. The respondents were recruited by using non-probability convenience sampling techniques due to their "proximity, availability at a given time, or willingness to participate in the research" (Nikolopoulou, 2022, p. 20). The students could take part in the survey provided that they had already turned 18 years and were representatives of the specialty "English as a Foreign Language". Senior students were not invited since they did not have any lessons in their last semester; therefore, this could have impacted the reliability and validity of this research. The researchers aimed to attract both local and international students, freshmen and juniors, as well as low and high achievers.

There were several steps involved in the data collection process. As the research was conducted among students, first, the proposal, containing the questionnaire, consent letter, and detailed description of all procedures, was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee in our university. The adapted version of McCabe's Academic Integrity Survey (M-AIS 2010) was used to design the questionnaire with the addition of several open-ended questions. The publicly available version of M-AIS (2010) was retrieved from DuPree & Sattler (2010). The survey questions were written in English as this language is the medium of instruction in the chosen university, and students are required to demonstrate at least a B2 level of English proficiency upon admission. As a result, most of them have a good command of this language, and survey questions were not translated into their L1s, to avoid any possible misinterpretation. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.94 which shows its high internal consistency reliability. The survey consisted of five main sections. Section 1 had questions about background information (respondents' age, gender, and year of study). Section 2 contained Likert-scale and open-ended questions on the effectiveness of the existing policies and their main disseminators. Sections 3 and 4

comprised the same set of Likert-scale questions, but the former aimed to identify the perceived severity of academic dishonesty while the latter focused on the self-reported engagement in academic dishonesty. The scales for these sections are also different: the perceived severity was assessed on a 4-point scale (1=not cheating, 2=trivial or insignificant cheating, 3=moderate cheating, and 4=serious cheating) and self-reported engagement on a 3-point scale (1=never, 2=once, 3=more than once). Section 5 had open-ended questions that probed to determine students' current and future actions in cases of academic dishonesty.

Having obtained the permission from the Research Ethics Committee, a pilot-study phase was initiated during which the questions were shared with 20 students. After receiving feedback, some open-ended questions were refined in terms of their wording. Next, the invitation to participate in an online survey was distributed among 500 students of the chosen major. 269 showed interest in participating by replying to the invitation. Finally, 187 completed Google Forms questionnaires were received between February and March 2025. It took approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey, consisting of 42 questions. All participants had to indicate their agreement to voluntarily participate in this research in the attached consent form.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. As the sample size covered one university, this limited the possibility to generalise findings to the whole Kazakhstani population; therefore, descriptive statistics were the most appropriate for this case (Bhandari, 2023). The collected data were analysed with the help of a 4-step model developed by Amit (2023). It involved preparing data (cleansing and reorganising), preparing descriptive analysis (calculating the means of central tendency), conducting inferential analysis, and presenting the results. The mean and standard deviation were used to summarise the results in numerical form. In addition, the correlations between the following variables were identified by using the Spearman rank correlation: year of study and perceived severity, year of study and self-reported engagement, GPA and perceived severity, GPA and self-reported engagement, and perceived severity and self-reported engagement. The results were further described based on the interpretation of scores according to Cohen (1988).

Results and findings

187 TFL students took part in the survey, among whom 40% (75 students) were freshmen, 30% (56 students) - sophomores, and 30% (56 students) - juniors. Most of them were aged between 18 and 20, while a small proportion was 21-23 years. The sample was mostly represented by females (84.5%) whereas males accounted for 12.8%. As for the grade point average (GPA), students predominantly had 2.67-3.66 which is classified as "good" according to the university's grades interpretation.

The students' definitions of academic integrity were analysed using Hatch's (2002) typological analysis. Based on the responses, the following typologies emerged: honesty (code H), cheating issues (code CI), producing original work (code POW), and other definitions (code OD).

Table 1: Demographic information (N=187)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-20	175	93.6
	21-23	12	6.4
Year of study	1	75	40.1
	2	56	29.9
	3	56	29.9
Gender	Male	24	12.8
	Female	158	84.5
	Prefer not to say	2	1.1
GPA	3.67-4.0	36	19.3
	2.67-3.66	164	87.9
	1.67-2.66	16	8.6

Honesty (code H)

42 students defined academic integrity as showing honesty in completing assignments and taking exams. It was seen as a conscious approach to studying, as students take full responsibility for ensuring the intended outcomes of the chosen subjects. This is reflected in the following responses:

> Academic integrity is all about showing honesty with myself and others as I am the only person who is fully responsible for my education. So, it is always me who chooses to follow the rules or disobey them (Respondent 7).

> Honesty is the cornerstone of academic integrity, and I try to adhere to it wherever possible (Respondent 100).

Cheating issues (code CI)

39 students believed that academic integrity relates to the avoidance of cheating, particularly during final examinations. They perceived cheating as one of the most severe violations because it is the most evident, unlike other forms. Therefore, it was mentioned that academic integrity refers to following "unwritten and unspoken rules that ought to be followed by all test-takers". The following responses depict two students' opinions on academic integrity as the avoidance of cheating:

> In my opinion, academic integrity implies avoiding cheating everywhere, but in particular, under exam conditions. If a person cheats, they are in better conditions, as opposed to other students who use their own knowledge to answer the questions (Respondent 90).

> I relate academic integrity to avoiding cheating as it is the most unfair thing to do (Respondent 100).

Producing original work (code POW)

35 students believed that the originality of work should receive utmost importance in the era of AI. Although many of them are tempted to use AI as a content generator, they started acknowledging that it undermines academic integrity. Furthermore, the unpermitted use of AI may negatively impact their academic reputation.

> Initially, I felt motivated to use AI for writing essays. However, then I started being more concerned about the originality of my work and concluded that it is not always necessary to rely on AI. Actually, my own work will help me develop better reasoning skills (Respondent 3).

Other definitions (code OD)
Typologies that received under 10 mentions were classified as other definitions, and they included building trusting and respectful relationships, continuous self-development, showing commitment to learning, and following the university's rules and regulations.

Students were also asked to express their attitudes towards upholding academic integrity. 80% of respondents viewed it positively as it is one of the main requirements of their university. Other respondents' opinions were vague and did not provide any insights.

As evident from Table 2, academic integrity is not only promoted in universities but also at schools, since 69% of the respondents were familiar with this notion prior to coming to university. Interestingly, while conducting a separate analysis, it was revealed that in 2024-2025, 75% of freshmen were aware of academic integrity, while in 2023-2024 and 2022-2023, 66% claimed to have known about it before entering university. After being enrolled, almost all respondents (91%) agreed with knowing about the existing academic integrity policies. In their opinion, faculty members and the first-year orientation program played the most significant role in informing them about academic integrity. On the contrary, the university's student handbook had limited information; therefore, it was seen as the least informative source.

Table 2: Awareness of academic integrity policies (N=187)

Question	Response option	Frequency (n)	%
Academic integrity policy at school	Yes	129	69
	No	58	31
Informed about university academic integrity policies	Yes	167	89.3
	No	20	10.7
Sources of information	First-year orientation program	94	50.3
	Campus website	43	23
	Student handbook	19	10.2
	Academic advisor	52	27.8
	Other students	51	27.3
	Faculty members	109	58.3

Since almost all students were aware of the academic integrity policies, they were asked to express opinions on their effectiveness (Table 3). In general, the results showed that both the instructors' and students' understanding was ranked high with the mean scores of 4.14 and 4.05, which implied having a solid knowledge of the main regulations. In addition, SD was 0.96 and 0.92, respectively, depicting internal consistency. On the contrary, the severity of penalties and the effectiveness of policies were perceived as moderate (means 3.78 and 3.76), and SDs 1.1 and 1.03 respectively, signifying the diversity of opinions. The year breakdown shows that Year 3 students mostly expressed stronger agreement with all these items.

Table 3: Assessment of policies

Item	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Years 1-3	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
The severity of penalties at university	3.79	1.11	3.68	1.06	3.88	1.13	3.78	1.1
Your own understanding of these policies	3.93	0.9	4.09	0.92	4.16	0.95	4.05	0.92
The faculty's understanding of these policies	4.12	1.02	4.21	0.87	4.11	0.97	4.14	0.96
The effectiveness of these policies	3.79	0.98	3.73	0.98	3.73	1.15	3.76	1.03

Although the importance of policies cannot be underestimated, the instructors also play a crucial role in communicating them to students. Table 4 summarises different topics of academic integrity which instructors discussed. The most discussed aspect in all years was plagiarism with mean 4.12 and SD 1.04. Also, due to the high number of students in one group, teachers frequently assigned collaborative tasks and constantly emphasised the guidelines on group work and collaboration (mean 3.91, SD 0.99). However, Year 1 and Year 2 students did not have any subjects related to academic writing or research; as a result, for them, proper citation and referencing, as well as falsifying/ fabricating research data aspects were not relevant; therefore, the mean values between 3.53 and 3.86 and 3.12 and 3.46 show that instructors sometimes discussed them. Overall, the year breakdown indicated that the frequency of discussing each of these aspects grew with the year of study.

Table 4: Frequency of instruction on academic integrity topics

Item: In the past, how often did your instructors discuss:	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Years 1-3	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Plagiarism	3.83	1.06	4.29	1.02	4.39	0.95	4.13	1.04
Guidelines on group work and collaboration	3.71	1.03	3.91	0.94	4.18	0.92	3.91	0.99
Proper citation and referencing of sources	3.53	0.97	3.86	0.99	4.09	1.07	3.79	1.04
Falsifying/ fabricating research data	3.12	1.17	3.46	1.24	3.66	1.3	3.38	1.24

Apart from instructing students on academic integrity topics, the respondents mentioned several other strategies their teachers used to preserve academic integrity.

The use of Turnitin (code UT)

Based on typological analysis, the use of Turnitin was the most widespread strategy (mentioned in 47 responses). The students perceived it as a deterrent to plagiarism and the use of AI as they uploaded the majority of their assignments to this application.

> Our instructors regularly use Turnitin as a preventive measure. We need to submit all our assignments to Turnitin, and they tell us about the allowed percentage of plagiarism and AI (Respondent 57).

Exam proctoring (code EP)
35 students stated that their instructors carefully proctored all types of summative assessments, even minor ones, such as quizzes that minimally contributed to their overall course grades. In their opinion, the chances of cheating were small, and they were challenged to rely on their own knowledge.

> I have never noticed anyone cheating during exams as there are usually several invigilators who roam around the classroom (Respondent 10).

Teaching referencing and citation skills (code TRCT)
In addition, 20 respondents mentioned having difficulties with citing and referencing sources properly. In their opinion, the inclusion of these topics in writing courses was beneficial and helped to avoid plagiarism.

> Before Academic Writing, I faced problems with plagiarism as I didn't know how to cite sources. However, there were extra lessons for this which I really appreciated (Respondent 111).

Finally, a small proportion of respondents wrote that the syllabus of some subjects contained information about academic integrity. Also, some believed that creative assignments could help to reduce instances of academic dishonesty.

Perceived seriousness and self-reported engagement in academic dishonesty

Based on the responses, students were quite familiar with academic integrity. Thus, this sub-chapter will describe the perceived seriousness of academic dishonesty and self-reported engagement in it (Table 5). For convenience purposes, the items are divided into three broad categories: cheating on exams, group work, and research. Overall, behaviours related to cheating on exams were regarded as moderate or serious cheating. Students believed that exam cheaters were given an unfair advantage, especially in cases when they were not penalised for this. Therefore, the use of "digital technology to get unpermitted help during the test" (mean 3.61, SD 0.68), "copying from another student during a test without his knowledge" (mean 3.52, SD 0.88), and "copying from another student during a test with his knowledge" (mean 3.35, SD 0.86) were the top-three behaviours students considered the most serious forms of academic dishonesty. The SD values also indicate internal consistency in students' opinions. On the contrary, the item "getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken the test" was related to trivial cheating (mean 2.81, SD 1). A further analysis revealed that the reason was that this type of academic dishonesty usually goes unnoticed.

The violations in the categories of group work and research activities were regarded as trivial or insignificant cheating. For example, the mean values for "fabricating or falsifying research data" and "fabricating or falsifying bibliography" were 3.1 and 2.96, showing that

students did not consider them to be serious violations. In addition, "inappropriately sharing work in group assignments" with a mean score of 2.9 indicated that students believed it was a trivial form of academic dishonesty. Finally, "working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work" was not perceived to be a serious violation of academic integrity.

Self-reported engagement was another category investigated under this research. Although the mean values were between 1.17 and 1.95 showing that students violated academic integrity either never or once, there is an evident trend. The less serious these behaviours were perceived; the more was the likelihood of these behaviours. As a result, "getting answers from someone who already took the test" behaviour was the most frequent (mean 1.95, SD 0.76). Similarly, inappropriate paraphrasing and copying without citing were treated as trivial cheating, and it was the second most widespread violation (mean 1.94, SD 0.8). Cheating on exams was attributed to serious violations; therefore, copying from someone with/without their consent was less frequent, with means of 1.44 and 1.3, respectively. Finally, as students agreed that purchasing papers or delaying the exam are violations, their involvement in these behaviours was the least common at 1.17 and 1.21 respectively.

Table 5: Perceived seriousness of academic dishonesty and self-reported engagement in it

Item	Perceived seriousness of academic dishonesty (4-point scale)		Self-reported engagement in academic dishonesty (3-point scale)	
	mean	SD	mean	SD
1. Fabricating or falsifying bibliography	2.96	1.02	1.26	0.53
2. Fabricating or falsifying research data	3.1	0.95	1.37	0.62
3. Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work	2.54	0.97	1.66	0.76
4. Inappropriately sharing work in group assignments	2.9	0.96	1.48	0.7
5. Copying another student's homework	3.37	0.86	1.59	0.79
6. Submitting the same paper in more than one course without specific permission	3.16	0.97	1.26	0.57
7. Purchasing papers	3.28	0.93	1.17	0.49
8. Paraphrasing or copying a few sentences from any source without citing it in a paper you submitted	2.77	0.95	1.94	0.8
9. Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken a test	2.81	1	1.95	0.76

10. Helping someone else cheat on a test	3.24	0.91	1.63	0.77
11. Copying from another student during a test with their knowledge	3.35	0.86	1.44	0.7
12. Copying from another student during a test without their knowledge	3.52	0.88	1.3	0.61
13. Using digital technology to get unpermitted help during a test	3.61	0.68	1.45	0.69
14. Using crib notes to cheat on an exam	3.23	0.96	1.32	0.63
15. Using a false or forged excuse to obtain an extension on a due date or delay taking an exam	3.22	0.93	1.21	0.53

There were several reasons why students engaged in academic dishonesty. Approximately half of the respondents reported the need to save scholarship and limited subject knowledge as the key reasons. Also, many students (41.2%) prioritised other assignments which led them to violate the rules. In addition, procrastination (27.3%) and irrelevance of assignments (20.3%) influenced their behaviour. A relatively small proportion engaged in academic dishonesty to conform with their parents' expectations or peer behaviour, at 14.4% and 7.5% respectively.

Table 6: Reasons for academic dishonesty

Item	Frequency (n)	%
Saving scholarship	99	52.9%
Lack of knowledge of the subject matter	95	50.8%
Being burdened with other assignments	77	41.2%
Procrastination	51	27.3%
Irrelevance of assignments	38	20.3%
Desire to impress parents or friends	27	14.4%
Peer behaviour	14	7.5%

The respondents also indicated some justifications for their unethical behaviour. While 33% believed in unjustifiability of academic dishonesty, 27.8% of the respondents claimed that reasons, such as health issues, excessive pressure, lack of knowledge, and the need to save scholarship, could justify violations.

A separate analysis was conducted to compare the respondents' actions to academic dishonesty as students and when they start their teaching careers. The results showed that now only 35% of students would take action by notifying their instructor or the dean's office, having a private conversation with a student, or collecting evidence of unethical behaviour. The rest of the students either struggled with this question or did not feel responsible for ensuring academic integrity from their side. In the future, 85% of respondents claimed that they would ensure academic integrity by using plagiarism-

checkers, conducting authentic assessments, and teaching how to cite or reference sources.

Correlation analysis of key variables

As students' perceived severity and self-reported engagement could be potentially influenced by their year of study and GPA, Spearman's rank correlation was used to determine the relationship between these variables, which were further interpreted based on Cohen (1988) (Table 7). A weak positive correlation was observed between the student's year of study and perceived severity of violations. $\varrho = 0.123$ showed that the students tended to relate to academic dishonesty more seriously as they moved to higher years of study. P-value = 0.09 indicated statistical insignificance of results. However, for these items, SD was generally higher than 1, depicting the diversity of respondents' opinions. Secondly, no correlation was found between the year of study and self-reported engagement at $\varrho = 0.0056$ and p-value = 0.9395. On the contrary, the students' GPAs were positively correlated with perceived seriousness and showed statistical significance. It meant that students with higher GPAs were less tolerant of academic dishonesty ($\varrho = 0.499$ and p-value < 0). Moreover, $\varrho = -0.103$ and p-value = 0.171 for GPA and engagement in academic dishonesty showed a negative correlation, based on which cheating decreases while GPA increases. The correlation between perceived seriousness and engagement was significantly negative ($\varrho = -0.277$ and p-value < 0.001), highlighting the previous assumption that they correlated with each other.

Table 7: Spearman's rank correlations between variables

Variables	ϱ	p-value
Year and perceived severity	0.123	0.09
Year and self-reported engagement	0.0056	0.9395
GPA and perceived severity	0.499	<0.001
GPA and self-reported engagement	-0.103	0.171
Perceived severity and self-reported engagement	-0.277	<0.001

Discussion

This section provides a comparative analysis with the previous studies. It was revealed that the respondents showed familiarity with the notion of academic integrity. Based on their answers, academic integrity is not limited only to the avoidance of plagiarism, as in previous studies conducted in the same settings (Bazylkanova & Dalelkanova, 2022). Students mentioned cheating issues on exams, being respectful towards each other during lessons, and equally distributing roles and responsibilities in group assignments. The findings are also consistent in the sense that students hold positive attitudes towards maintaining the standards of academic integrity (DiPaulo, 2022; Woith et al., 2012). Apart from that, students were more informed about academic integrity in their school years, and there was a tendency for the growth of their awareness as more and more students mentioned they had known about academic integrity before coming to university. Also,

they reported being introduced to policies by faculty staff and orientation programs in their freshman year and perceived them as rather effective. On the contrary, Zangla (2023) claimed that students violated academic integrity because of a lack of awareness.

Students believed in the importance of their instructors' role, in particular, they appreciated being taught how to cite and reference sources. In addition, the use of Turnitin and authentic assessment tasks prevented them from cheating and helped to develop creativity and critical thinking which is in line with other studies on this topic (Ismail & Jabri, 2023; Sotiriadou, 2019).

In terms of students' attitudes towards the perceived severity of academic dishonesty, the most serious violations were seen in cheating on exams. Violations of academic integrity in doing research and competing group assignments were considered to be trivial cheating as they were not evidently apparent. Another aim of the study was to determine students' self-reported engagement in academic dishonesty, where a reverse trend was observed. Since violations of academic integrity in conducting research and doing homework were less serious, more self-reported violations were recorded. For example, copying sentences without citing and unpermitted help from peers were more prevalent among students, while cheating issues were less frequently reported. Therefore, the study shows partial agreement with the earlier ones. It agrees with seeking outside help and plagiarism as frequently reported violations, while sabotage was unreported (Munir et. al., 2011). In addition, the study confirms the findings of Anitha and Sundaram (2021) and Landa-Blanco (2021) in that cheating on exams was the most dishonest behaviour.

As for the reasons for academic dishonesty, most of the reasons were similar to previous studies. Firstly, challenging and unrelated to the course content questions and desire to save scholarship were the main reasons, which coincides with Bachore (2016). Also, being burdened with other assignments was another reason for violations, as in Anitha and Sundaram (2016). Finally, many respondents tried to find justifications for their dishonest behaviour which is also described by Landa Blanco et al. (2021).

The study also focused on students' further actions when they noticed any violations. Currently, half of them expressed willingness to report academic dishonesty to the course instructor or administration; others believed it was not their responsibility. Similarly, Thakkar and Weisfeld-Spolter (2012) mentioned that although not all students are willing to promote academic integrity, some can become partners in helping preserve it. Furthermore, almost all students wanted to take action to maintain academic integrity in the future by using plagiarism checkers and assigning authentic tasks.

Conclusion

Academic integrity plays a vitally important role in education, and all higher education institutions take steps to curb the instances of academic dishonesty. The Kazakhstani Ministry of Education has designed specific policies to uphold academic integrity, introduced the use of plagiarism-checking applications, and established the Academic

Integrity League. Given the significance of these measures, it was necessary to investigate the students' level of awareness of academic integrity.

Based on the results obtained through an adapted version of M-AIS, it was found that students were well-informed about academic integrity and viewed it positively. Despite this, self-reported engagement in particular types (doing homework and conducting research) was recorded. The students also found reasons and justifications for their dishonesty by mostly pointing to some outside factors, such as scholarship or parental expectations. In addition, the results showed that there was a correlation between the year of study, GPA, self-reported engagement, and perceived severity of academic dishonesty. In all cases, with the increase of the year of study and GPA, perceived severity increased while self-reported engagement decreased.

To conclude, although students' awareness is comparably high, academic dishonesty is a widespread problem. Therefore, instructors should raise the culture of academic integrity from the first year of study.

In terms of theoretical implications, this research helped to determine students' perceptions and self-reported engagement in academic dishonesty that provide an understanding of the reasons for these behaviours. As for practical implications, several effective strategies were revealed which can be used further to strengthen academic integrity in higher education. These findings are useful for instructors and policy makers in designing preventive measures, adjusting assessment practices, and refining institutional policies to uphold the culture of academic integrity.

The limitations of this research include a small sample size, as it was limited to one teaching specialty in one higher education institution. In the future, it is recommended to conduct wider-scale research with the involvement of different teaching specialties to determine possible differences between science and humanities teaching majors.

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