

Maintaining Academic Integrity among Doctoral Students in Algeria: Challenges and Support

*Belmekki Asma**

*Department of English, Faculty of
Letters, Languages,
Abbes Abbes Laghrour University of
Khenchela, (Algeria)*

belmekki.asma@univ-khenchela.dz

*Ouchene Nourelhouda**

*Department of English, Faculty of
Letters, Languages,
Abbes Abbes Laghrour University of
Khenchela, (Algeria)*

ouchene.nour@univ-khenchela.dz

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Abstract

Maintaining academic integrity has become increasingly difficult, especially for doctoral students preparing dissertations and articles. This study investigates PhD students' perspectives and behaviour for maintaining academic honesty across multiple departments at Khenchela University in Algeria, with an emphasis on the diverse problems they confront. In addition to recognizing these issues, this study proposes strategies to help PhD students effectively maintain academic integrity. A descriptive research method is employed, with a web-based questionnaire that includes both open-ended and closed-ended questions, to collect data from a sample of twenty (20) doctoral candidates from several faculties. The data show that many students face restricted access to resources and inadequate training.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, Doctoral Students, Algerian Higher Education, Perceptions, Challenges

* Belmekki Asma

1. Introduction

Research is the basis of university education, boosting development and influencing the academic experience. It is guided by precise rules and guidelines, all of which are totally tied to maintaining authenticity, which is becoming increasingly important today (Cutri et al., 2021). All researchers, from lecturers to master's and PhD students, are expected to write academic papers. In doing so, students frequently confront obstacles relating to academic integrity, particularly PhD candidates who must combine the demands of completing dissertations and publishing articles under tight deadlines.

As PhD students required to complete their research, they rely extensively on materials like books and papers. However, if access to these materials is limited, individuals may feel compelled to compromise their academic integrity in order to achieve their objectives. This is where the supervisor plays an important role. While some claim that integrity is largely the responsibility of researchers, others believe it is the commitment of all academic stakeholders (Bretag, 2018).

The difficulty of sustaining academic integrity has grown in complexity as technology has advanced and AI technologies have emerged. The quantity of digital resources, along with the increased availability of AI-generated content, has made it more difficult for researchers to confirm the validity of their work. While these technologies have advantages, they also present new obstacles in maintaining academic integrity, affecting the research process for everyone involved (Ghounane, 2021).

In Algeria, as in many other countries, students overuse digital tools, which could lead to dishonest behaviour. Most of the time, students use technology tools without really knowing how to use them properly. This case shows how important it is for institutions to have stricter rules and more mentorship to create an honest and responsible academic culture, not just in schoolwork but also in important research projects.

Algerian PhD students need extra help to keep up with their work because they cannot easily get reliable software that checks for copying, as universities usually do not provide plagiarism software to students until after they have finished their dissertations. This means that many students have to use free plagiarism checkers that are not reliable. This often leads to plagiarism that is not caught, putting students at risk of turning in work that does not follow the code of ethics. Discovering these issues late in the academic process might have a negative influence on their academic and professional reputations, making them difficult to resolve. Thus, the purpose of this study is to evaluate and discuss PhD students' perspectives on these concerns at Khenchela University, as well as to identify typical challenges they face when

maintaining research integrity. Most importantly, we want to understand the underlying causes of academic dishonesty among these students so that we can provide real remedies that will assist future researchers in maintaining academic honesty. To meet the research objectives, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do doctoral students at Khenchela University perceive the importance of academic integrity in their research and dissertation writing?
2. What challenges do doctoral students face in maintaining academic integrity across different disciplines at Khenchela University?
3. What types of support and resources do doctoral students at Khenchela University find most effective in helping them adhere to academic integrity standards?

1. Literature Review

Numerous studies have been conducted worldwide to investigate the importance of academic integrity in higher education, with a particular emphasis on supervisors, students, and institutional rules that support ethical research procedures. These studies addressed obstacles and options for improving academic honesty among postgraduate students.

A study by Mwamwenda (2012) investigated academic dishonesty among East African university students and discovered that plagiarism was common across institutions, emphasizing the need for better institutional rules to avoid academic misconduct. Similarly, Mahmud and Bretag (2013) found that many postgraduate students at Australian universities were unaware of their institution's academic integrity regulations. They emphasized that there has to be more instruction on ethical research methods and greater support for HDR students to maintain academic integrity, which highlights the critical requirement of colleges supporting student training to ensure they can uphold academic integrity. Gray and Jordan(2012) indicated that supervisors can significantly influence students in regard to academic integrity, although they are usually very busy; however, they still serve as ethical mentors and role models for their supervisees. Their study claimed that academic integrity can be fostered through good modeling, which underlies the significance of the role of supervisors.

Similarly, Löfström and Pyhältö (2017) reported that PhD students often sought guidance from supervisors on ethical matters. Students, however, acted in a way that jeopardized their credibility as they had not received sufficient training regarding academic integrity and the imposter problem.

According to Kier and Ives (2022), policy, compliance, and resources are related in various ways, and institutions should foster coordination and support for both staff and students.

In the Algerian context, a few studies discussed the issue of academic misconduct among PhD students.

A study by Ghounane (2021) found easy access to internet resources to be the major contributor to this unethical behavior. The study suggested strict rules and sanctions, highlighting parents and teachers for their very important role in modeling ethical behavior. In a similar vein, Hedjaz and Baraka (2023) affirmed that there is no magic formula to prevent academic dishonesty. It should be a collaborative process that includes children, teachers, and local organizations to help in minimizing the risks.

Bencheikh (2023) linked dishonesty to the struggles Algerian doctoral students encounter when writing their dissertations. He further explained that the reasons behind such behavior lie in the fact that students are not getting proper mentorship, and they have limited knowledge and understanding of research ethics. The author highlighted the need for strengthening courses related to academic integrity and research ethics.

Benettayeb, however, has a different point of view, claiming that even though students are fully aware of the research ethics and the consequences of not adhering to them, they felt they had no option but to plagiarize in order to satisfy the academic requirements. The study, meanwhile, urged the necessity for more institutional support to encourage higher levels of engagement in research.

Lastly, Chiheb 2024 explored the interaction that takes place between student researchers and their supervisors in Algeria, emphasizing the use of guidance, encouragement, and open discussion.

This paper insists on strict adherence to ethical values with respect to the maintenance of the highest levels of academic integrity and, consequently, ethics in decision-making. Although there have been a few studies on academic honesty in Algeria, most of them focused on general issues like plagiarism and institutional regulations. These studies explored the effects of having access to the Internet, the role of supervisors, and the need for institutional regulations. Nevertheless, detailed research revealing the actual causes of such behavior is still required. It is in this regard that the present study tries to elaborate on these reasons with the aim of understanding the real difficulties that PhD students face at Khenchela University. Therefore, this research aims to highlight these reasons and understand the real obstacles that PhD candidates encounter. In addition, the study offers tailored solutions to meet the student's academic needs.

2. Method and Material

This study used a descriptive method to investigate the issues of sustaining academic integrity among PhD students at Khenchela University. The study was primarily designed to explore the differences in beliefs and practices of academic integrity throughout the university's departments and disciplines, which included Physics, English, Chemistry, Biology, and Law. To meet the study's aims, a web-based questionnaire was distributed to twenty (20) doctorate students from several faculties and departments. The questionnaire was designed to collect information about the student's experiences, the obstacles they have in adhering to academic standards, and the forms of assistance they find useful in retaining integrity during the dissertation and article writing process.

2.1.Sampling and Tools

Participants were selected using a random sampling method to ensure a broad and representative sample of EFL PhD students from several Faculties and departments in Khenchela. Data were gathered using a web-based questionnaire that included both closed-ended questions for quantitative data and open-ended questions for in-depth qualitative data collection, allowing doctoral students to express their thoughts, challenges, and suggestions in their own words.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first section looks into students' beliefs and attitudes about academic integrity, while the second focuses on their challenges.

4. Results and Discussion

A- Students' views and awareness concerning Academic Integrity

Table 1. PhD Students' views on Academic Integrity

The questionnaire responses in Table 1 provide a mixed picture of how PhD students at Khenchela University perceive and deal with academic integrity. Most

No.	Question	% Yes	% No
1	Do you believe that academic integrity is crucial for maintaining the quality of research?	80%(16)	20%(4)
2	Are you aware of your institution's specific guidelines on academic integrity?	80%(16)	20%(4)
3	Have you ever received formal training or education on academic integrity?	30%(6)	70%(14)
4	Do you think that there is sufficient support available at your university to help you maintain academic integrity?	35%(7)	65%(13)
5	Have you ever witnessed acts of academic dishonesty in your department?	50%(10)	50%(10)
6	Do you feel that pressures within the academic environment could lead to breaches of academic integrity?	90%(18)	10%(2)
7	Is maintaining academic integrity more challenging in your discipline compared to others you are aware of?	60%(12)	40%(8)
8	Do you believe that violations of academic integrity are adequately addressed by your faculty?	75%(15)	25%(5)
9	Are you confident in your ability to uphold academic integrity in your research and writing?	75%(15)	25%(5)
10	Have you ever felt unsure about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity in your work?	40%(8)	60%(12)

students (80%) believe academic honesty is critical to the quality of their study. They are aware of the university's policies on this topic, indicating that these rules are likely well-communicated. However, simply knowing the rules does not guarantee a thorough comprehension of them.

Surprisingly, 70% of students stated that they had never received official academic integrity instruction in the Physics, Chemistry, Biology, or Law departments. This lack of instruction may contribute to their need for additional guidance on the expectations of academic integrity.

Approximately 65% believe that their departments should provide greater assistance to help them adhere to academic integrity guidelines. This lack of assistance may make students feel alone and under pressure, leading them to make poor decisions. A considerable majority (50%) have witnessed dishonest behaviour in their

departments. This alarming situation shows that cheating may be occurring more frequently than it should. The pressure is real as 90% of students believe that the severe pressure they endure may lead them or others to compromise their integrity. The majority of students (75%) feel confident in their abilities to respect academic integrity regulations. However, 60% of respondents admitted to being uncertain about what constitutes a violation. This demonstrates the difference between feeling secure and actually knowing the rules properly.

These findings demonstrate that the students hold strong moral values. They recognize that being honest and preserving integrity is critical to the credibility and success of their academic and professional endeavours.

B- PhD Students' Challenges in Maintaining Academic Integrity

As shown in *figure1*, several factors influence the difficulty of maintaining academic honesty. Approximately 70% of participants identified a lack of accessible materials as a significant barrier. Furthermore, around 65% of the students stated that the high expense of reputable materials such as books, and even some articles prompted them to rely on less reliable sources. Another major concern noted was a lack of advice from supervisors, with 60% of students feeling insufficiently supported in performing ethical research. Approximately 55% of respondents said that the lack of adequate tools to check their work for originality is a serious difficulty. This lack of resources, including easily available plagiarism detection software, not only impedes their capacity to follow ethical standards but also increases their fear and uncertainty about committing plagiarism. Additionally, 50% of doctorate students said they required more help with academic writing techniques, including summarizing and paraphrasing. This resulted in uncertainty and a lack of information about techniques for avoiding high plagiarism rates.

Many students believe that plagiarism is solely about stealing someone else's work. They cannot discern between outright copying someone else's ideas and correctly citing sources. Some people feel that plagiarism technologies simply detect stolen work. They are unaware that even well-cited sources can appear to be plagiarized if not properly paraphrased. This misconception causes an excessive use of direct quotes, which can be problematic.

In addition to these issues, a new problem has developed with the Algerian scientific journal platform's plagiarism detector software. The program recognizes common elements such as terms in titles, references, and dates. It incorrectly marks these as instances of plagiarism, frequently leading to higher percentages and the rejection of articles for review.

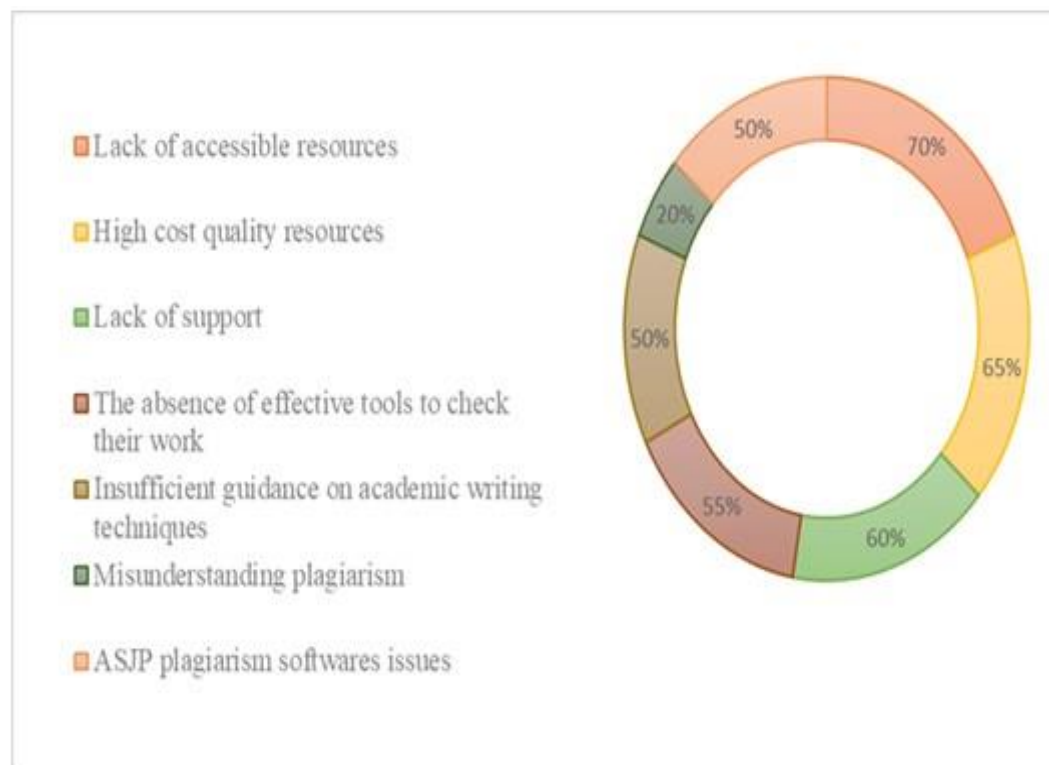


Figure1. Students' Challenges

5. Conclusion

The research provided a thorough analysis of the perceptions of Ph.D. students regarding the challenges of maintaining honesty in research at Khenchela University. The results showed that the majority of students struggle to find accessible resources and they need training and support from their supervisors and institutions, which usually often resulted in reliance on less trustworthy sources and the occurrence of unnecessary incidents of dishonest acts in their research. The students also highlighted the need for reinforced courses on the methodology of research and research ethics as they help students become more aware of the process and the outcomes. Other issues were largely brought about by a lack of plagiarism detection software and scholarly literature, in addition to poor support and communication on the university regulations governing academic integrity at certain departments at Khenchela University.

To address these challenges and prevent dishonesty, universities may consider the following :

1. Universities should provide free plagiarism detection software, such as Turnitin, to all students and staff, as is common practice in many institutions worldwide. This would allow doctoral candidates to assess the originality of their work before submitting it, which promotes self-evaluation and boosts accountability.
2. It is the responsibility of universities to bridge the resource gap for students. This can be achieved by providing more access to academic databases and investing in materials that would otherwise be unaffordable, thereby supporting students in their studies and promoting proper citation of original works.
3. Supervisors should guide and promote ethical research and academic writing.
4. To combat plagiarism, universities and institutions should prioritize academic writing classes that teach proper citation, paraphrasing, and summarizing procedures, including APA, MLA, and Chicago styles.
5. Regular workshops on academic integrity regulations are a necessity. These workshops are crucial in ensuring that students are aware of what is expected of them and the repercussions of not adhering to the rules.
6. Supervisors should urge students to use paraphrases rather than direct quotes. Students should also learn about the subtleties of plagiarism detection and how these tools assess cited content.
7. The Algerian scientific journal platform should improve its plagiarism detection technologies to ensure accurate evaluation of academic work.

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