

# ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR IN HEIS. AN EXPLORATORY STUDY FROM STUDENTS PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** Issues specific to ethics and academic integrity cover a wide range of fields and can take the form of professional ethics, the ethics of scientific research, the ethics of relationships between students and between students and teachers, and the ethics of classroom activities. Violation of academic integrity is also known as “academic misconduct” or “academic dishonesty”. There are different ways of committing acts of violation of academic integrity, but it is important to keep in mind that committing any of them has consequences that will be reflected in both academic and professional life. Therefore, it is important to be known, recognized, and avoided. The main aim of our research is to explore the student’s perception about the ethical norms and academic integrity during the didactical and research activity at their university. Our findings show that students have knowledge about the academic integrity norms and can respect them, but, sometimes, if it is easy to obtain the same result, they decide to use the unethical practices (copy-paste, wrong citation, plagiarism). Results, implications, and future directions of research are presented.

**Keywords:** ethics, integrity, plagiarism, educational policies

**JEL Classification:** I20, I21, I23

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of integrity can be presented as the integral work of a student, completed by himself, rendered, and assumed individually, from accurately cited sources. The university has policies, procedures, and guidelines on academic integrity, and all staff members as well as students are required to comply with them. The accuracy of the studies is only relevant when it does not contain errors and, based on honesty, one behaves in a sincere way while presenting ideas, methods, and results, properly citing sources that are used in the development of research.

Academic integrity implies a commitment to the fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. In the literature, studies have addressed students' awareness of university policy regarding ethics and academic integrity (Andreescu, 2013). They considered the extent to which students are aware of the concept of academic integrity or whether students perceive academic integrity as an essential issue both in the academic community and in their lives.

What happens in reference to academic integrity, either positive or negative, is of great importance when it comes to the values to which the main actors of the university environment, teachers, and students, adhere. The central activity of the university is cultivating knowledge in training, creation, and development, so academic dishonesty threatens the most important thing that is pursued. Collaboration is needed at the level of the entire higher education system to generate policy proposals for academic integrity that provide fundamental support for the training of students.

Correctness is expressed by not attempting to gain an advantage by using unfair means: for example, by presenting the work of others as one's own work, the ideas of others as your own. As for responsibility, taking an active role in their own learning and evolution, is also defined by respect for colleagues, tutors, and their work, recognizing the role they have played in building knowledge and personal understanding.

Integrity is a fundamental principle in all academic activities. Every member of the university community, not only students, must pass on and acquire knowledge honestly and with integrity.

Any deviation from the rules of academic integrity is considered academic fraud. Academic fraud is defined as any act of a student that can lead to falsification of his academic assessment or that of another student, to lack of fairness in the academic space, with the aim of getting a passing grade or a higher grade.

The following are examples of academic fraud (Kirsty, 2018):

- Plagiarism, copying, or cheating in any way;
- Presentation of a work whose author is not the same person as the one who conceived it, in whole or in part, except for the citations and references indicated;
- Presentation of research data that is falsified or fabricated in any way;
- Falsifying a statement or reference by attributing it to an invented source;
- The presentation, without the prior written authorization of the professors concerned or the faculties concerned, of the same paper or a substantial part of the same work paper in several courses, or a thesis or other paper already presented elsewhere (Work Paper/ Paper means a written paper, dissertation, test, exam, research report or thesis, whether such paper is presented in writing, orally or in any other form);
- Falsifying or altering an academic assessment, using, or facilitating the use of a falsified or falsified supporting document from an archive;
- Taking any other action for the purpose of falsifying an academic assessment.

It takes time to develop the judgment and habits necessary to display uncompromising integrity, but this skill will follow the person throughout his or her career.

Higher education and society benefit when universities have integrity standards that provide the basis for a vibrant academic life, scientific promotion, progress, and prepare students for responsible citizenship. Many explain academic integrity only by listing behaviours that are prohibited, rather than by identifying values and behaviours that need to be promoted. There are sanctions for academic misconduct: if you do not demonstrate academic integrity, as required by the university, you will be accused of academic misconduct. Vigorous academic integrity policies and procedures, with the support of teachers and students, promote the learning process together with promoting the truth. This also helps to create a stronger civic culture for society.

In recent years, the national and international activity in the field of academic integrity has focused on examining this issue, including examining the nature of violations, estimating the prevalence of the problem, discovering contributing factors or reasons why a student may transfer work or mission to a third party, and exploring how the institutions of higher education can respond effectively by improving both academic integrity policy and educational approaches (Socaciu et al., 2018).

An academic community of integrity promotes the respect and transposition of truth and knowledge through intellectual necessity and personal honesty in learning, teaching, and assessment. Such a strategy should have a strong educational focus, fostering the development of students' academic skills, ensuring the professional development of staff in the following areas: education for academic integrity, policy implementation, and curriculum improvement, aligning them with institutional behaviour management policies for academic students, based on recommendations or evidence.

It is important to discuss academic integrity with students and to help them understand everything about it. Topics such as plagiarism, exam copying, and incorrect collaboration should be discussed and cleared. Promoting academic integrity reflects the responsibility of the entire academic environment to continually demonstrate it to develop an ethical institutional culture.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

An essential element of promoting academic integrity is the transmission of good scientific practices to students right from the beginning of their university studies. This helps to acquire an attitude and skills that are essential for a research career. Ethical behaviour is learned by developing integrity and character.

What can the faculty do to encourage academic integrity? The faculty plays a critical role in creating a climate of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility (Speller, 2022; Werner, 2022). Students generally rely on the faculty to set clear expectations for learning and assessment, to promote an atmosphere in which learning with integrity is encouraged, and to properly deal with situations of academic dishonesty. A teacher should be an example to follow, encouraging students to be proactive in seeking and asking for help, which is a sign of maturity, commitment, and responsibility. By asking students to share ideas on how to build a stronger culture of academic integrity, it would prevent violations of ethical norms and other academic deviations. This approach helps students become partners for academic integrity and not into adversaries.

Ethical and qualitative standards apply in all professional fields and, therefore, honesty, accuracy, and the ability to engage in ethical reflection should be an objective of all study programs.

St. Francis of Assisi, in "To His Disciples" in 1210 draws attention to the fact that assuming integrity is done consciously: "For a start, we will do the easy things. Little by little, we will approach the big ones. And when the great things are done, we will do the impossible things. Start by doing what is necessary, then do what is possible and you will achieve the impossible without realizing it ..." (Hesse, 2015).

Eckhart Tolle (1997) is on the same line, arguing for integrity by finding similarities in plants and animals: "Watch any plant or animal and let it teach you acceptance of what is, surrender to the Now. Let it teach you Being. Let it teach you integrity - which means to be one, to be yourself, to be real." The specialised literature provides multiple definitions of the concept of academic integrity through the values it promotes, through the principles established at the level of universities (Stephen, 2021; Oprea, 2018).

Integrity is built over time; it starts from within and is based on assumed decisions that represent the personal values of everyone. "If you live according to the philosophy fake it till you make it, then you prepare yourself for long-term failure. If your actions embarrass you or make you feel ashamed if ever found out, then you are not honest with yourself and with your values." (Maxwell, 2022).

In Romania, various aspects of academic integrity have been regulated by normative acts, implemented in all universities, based on the National Education Law no. 1/2011 which includes regulations on ethics and integrity and which provides for the establishment of the Council of Ethics and University Management (CEMU) as an advisory body of the Ministry of National Education (currently the Ministry of Education), without legal personality, and whose mission is to develop a culture of ethics and integrity in the Romanian universities.

Government Ordinance no. 57/2002 on scientific research and technological development provides the framework for organizing research and development activities, namely scientific research (which includes fundamental research and applied research), experimental development and innovation based on scientific research and experimental development.

The establishment of the National Council for Ethics of Scientific Research, Technological Development, and Innovation (CNECSDTI) as an advisory body is provided in Law no. 206/2004 on good conduct in scientific research, technological development, and innovation defines deviations such as plagiarism and self-plagiarism, making, and falsifying data.

Ensuring the quality of education, according to the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005, which provides for the establishment of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), an agency that formulates and periodically reviews national reference standards and performance indicators for quality assessment and assurance in higher education that were previously provided by the National Council of Academic Assessment and Accreditation.

The most relevant could be the Ministerial Order no. 3131/2018 which provides for the inclusion in the curricula, for all university study programs organized in higher education institutions in the national education system, of ethics and academic integrity courses, provides for the obligation of participation of master's and doctoral

students in ethics and academic integrity courses with a minimum duration of 14 hours, starting with the academic year 2018-2019; courses are optional for the license level.

### 3. STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE EFFICIENCY AND USEFULNESS OF ETHICS AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY NORMS

In the university environment, ethics is highlighted on the one hand by the teachers' moral obligations, to follow all social norms, internal regulations of the institution in which they operate, as well as the pedagogical requirements in the deontological education. On the other hand, there is the moral duty of the students to study the disciplines in which they enrolled, to respect the internal regulations and the social norms, and to attend classes according to the teacher's expectations.

For most students, the university is the institution in which they learn to evolve toward maturity, independence, and commitment. Growing up, as a university experience, is intellectual, professional, and also moral. Teachers and students enjoy recognition and respect, as well as the benefits of exercising their rights and responsibilities.

Students naturally perceive the requirements of ethics and morality. Sometimes it seems very important from an ethical point of view to have firm principles and to apply them consistently, other times it seems more important to generate as much good as they can to those around them, and other times to develop their character as balanced moral persons or to increase their capacity to have moral feelings, empathy, or compassion. The set of all these everyday elements is called by some authors common morality (Gert, 2004).

In terms of ethics and academic integrity, good practices and customs are preferred to be written and/or legal norms. What may be considered acceptable or not in terms of ethics and academic integrity makes it necessary to set a benchmark for human conduct by establishing rules, implicitly sanctions, which are valid in any field, regardless of those involved.

### 4. METHODOLOGY

#### Research question

What is the students' perception of ethical practices and academic integrity in university education?

#### General objective

The research aims to investigate students' perceptions of ethical practices and integrity in university education.

#### Specific objectives

- O1. Investigating the factors that influence academic behaviour;
- O2. Detecting students' problems while respecting academic integrity.

#### Research hypotheses

- H1. Students know and respect the norms of ethics and academic integrity;
- H2. Students are familiar with good academic integrity practices.

#### Method of research

The aim of the research is to explore students' perceptions of ethics and academic integrity in the context of teaching and research activities at the university where they study.

This questionnaire-based research was conducted by interviewing two groups of respondents: students in the final year of the bachelor's degree (43 students) and second-year master's students (21 master's students), a total of 64 students. The questionnaire is probably the most used method, an investigation tool consisting of a set of dichotomous, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions, as follows: whether they agree or disagree with certain statements, giving answers as various points of view, aiming, above all, at the subject's consciousness level.

**5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Aspects regarding the norms of academic integrity were introduced in the questionnaire but from different points of view, directly and indirectly. Directly refers to the violation of the rules during the studies, and indirectly refers to being aware of the violation of the rules.

Ethics questions show that the university should expand the variety of mechanisms used to support academic integrity in the university community and pay attention to students at all levels, bachelor's, master's, doctoral, post-doctoral.

The questionnaire, as it is structured (Tables no. 1 and 2), provides a descriptive statistic on students' perception of different types of breaches of academic integrity, the results being represented graphically in Figures 1 and 2. 47% represents taking a text from the Internet without indicating the source, followed by 42.1%, copying in exams. Regarding the percentage allowed for taking over from other publications, the students did not answer correctly, only 15.6% considering the 5% percentage to be true.

Elaborating a scientific paper together with another colleague led in 76% of cases to the use of fragments, separately, by each of the two colleagues, most considering this as an aid, not as a violation of the rules of ethics and academic integrity, and 52% of the respondents facilitating peers 'fraud. Taking a translated text without using the quotation marks and providing fictitious data in projects represent 26.3% and 28.9%, respectively, and point to the level of tolerance for breaching of academic integrity.

**Table 1. Students' perceptions about ethical integrity norms**

No.	From your point of view, the following statements are:	false	more false	more true	true	total
R 1	The author of the publication took whole paragraphs from another author not citing sources properly, but this is not a case of plagiarism because the texts with a deficient quotation do not contain important ideas.	39	19	3	3	64
R 2	The graduation thesis is not plagiarized because only 5% of the words were taken incorrectly from other publications.	19	20	15	10	64
R 3	A graduation thesis published in 2000 has several pages taken in full, without indicating the source, but in 2000 there were not the same rules as today, so it cannot be considered plagiarism.	30	20	7	7	64
R 4	The publication has many paragraphs taken incorrectly from other publications, but also has original contributions, so it cannot be considered plagiarism.	25	24	10	5	64
R 5	You can copy and paste text from the Internet without quotation marks and without indicating the source.	44	8	6	6	64

Source: own data

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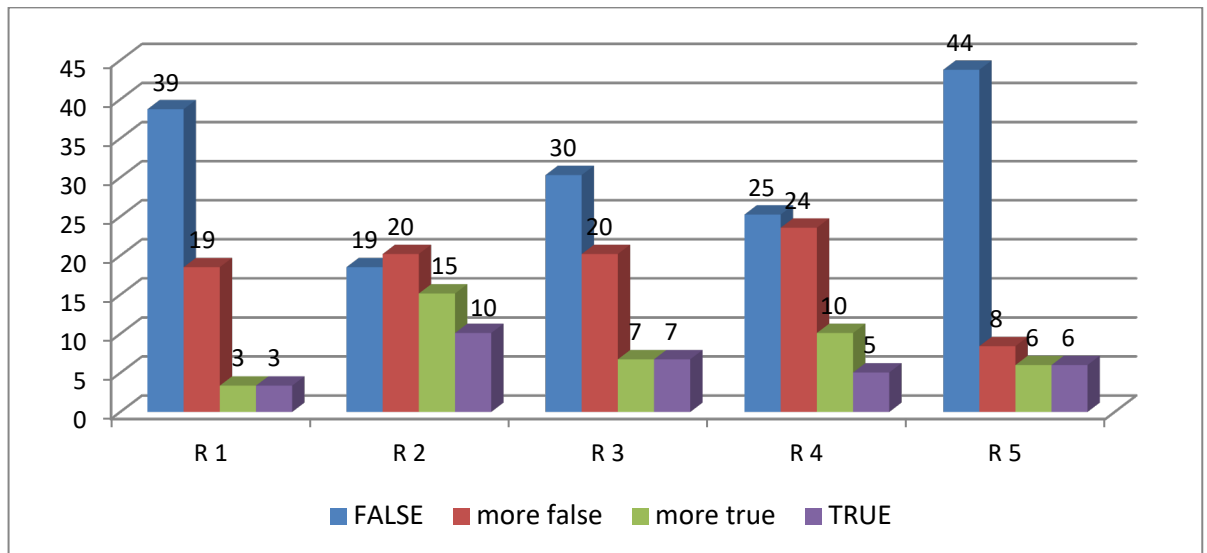


Fig. 1. Students' knowledge about forms of plagiarism

Source: own data

Table 2. Students' perceptions about ethical integrity norms

No.	From your point of view, the following statements violate the rules of ethics and integrity:	yes	no	partial	total
R 1	I and my colleague elaborated the dissertation papers and agreed on using passages from each work without indicating the source.	49	5	10	64
R 2	Your own text, previously published, can be taken over, with or without modifications, for publication under your own signature without indicating the source.	37	18	9	64
R 3	I can take in another publication, without indicating the source, parts from a manuscript where I am co-author.	31	21	12	64

Source: own data

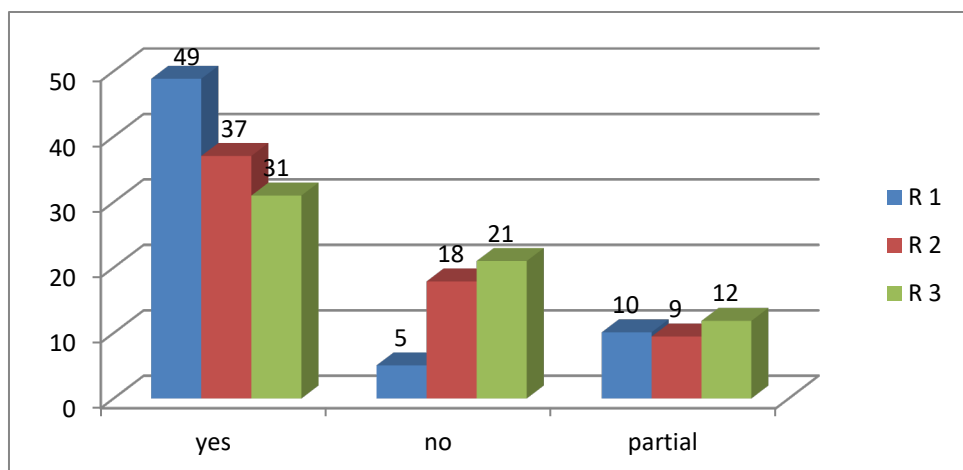


Fig. 2. Students' perception regarding the indication of the source in the papers

Source: own data

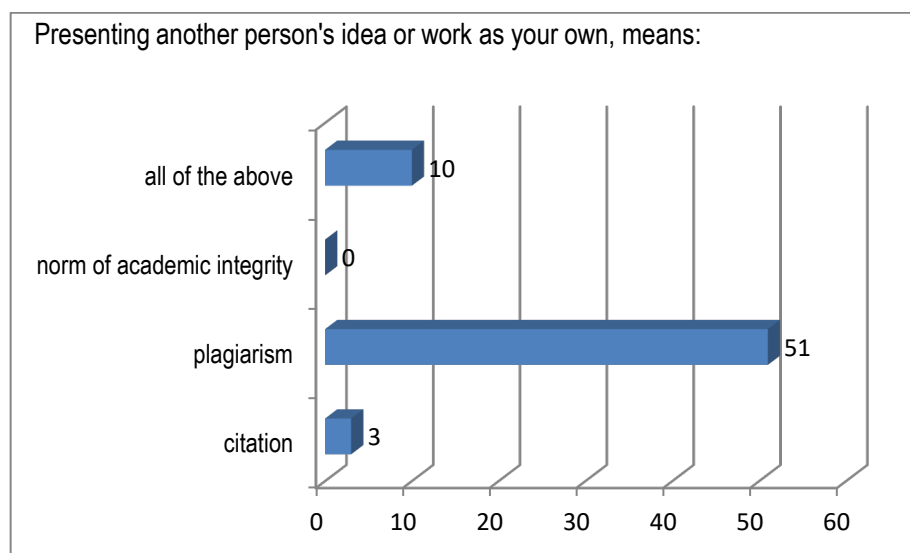
Careful discipline is needed. In all cases, the author must strictly follow the same procedure for submitting references throughout the document. The collection of quotations ensures, in two ways, a strong enrichment of the discourse. On the one hand, the noted passages strengthen the author in his conviction; on the other hand, they are an opportunity to develop thinking in unforeseen directions from the point of view of another author, but not always in the same direction.

The number of students prepared for documentary research work is growing, but it has only a small impact on the proportion of “copy-paste” followers. Thus, 42.1% of the students who answered, according to table no.3, would not mind if a document on the originality of the projects was introduced, while 23.7% would prefer not to introduce such a document, the conclusion being that they do not care about the ethical implications. A percent of 15.8% fully agree with the attestation of the originality of their work by signing a document or declaration, thus getting used to respecting the rules of ethics and integrity, certifying, and signing the papers. Students will get used to set certain alert thresholds even during their studies, before they elaborate their final thesis.

**Table 3. Distribution of respondents**

No.	Presenting another person's idea or work as your own, means:	percentage of students %	number of students
1.	citation	5,3	3
2.	plagiarism	78,9	50
3.	norm of academic integrity	0	0
4.	all of the above	15,8	10
total		100	64

Source: own data



**Fig. 3. Students' perception regarding the presentation of an idea / work as belonging to them**

Source: own data

This question aimed at the level of knowledge of what it means to take over an idea or work of another person and present it in one's own name. With no answer to identifying the integrity norm, it can be concluded that the students do not know the rules and regulations that must be followed in terms of integrity. However, 94.7% detected plagiarism, but without relating it to the norm of academic integrity. The similarity was mistaken for citation in three students, proving that they do not know the rules to follow.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents' responses

No.	From your point of view, how often do you think the following actions occur in college?	not at all	rare	sometimes	frequent	very often	don't know
1.	Copying in exams.	2	3	17	25	13	3
2.	Downloading from the internet without indicating the source.	3	0	17	30	12	2
3.	Tolerating various forms of fraud during exams.	2	13	12	17	12	8
4.	Copying texts from a source without including the source.	3	7	20	24	7	3
5.	Presenting and assuming someone else's work as your own.	3	19	17	17	7	2
6.	Citing the source without using the quotation marks if the original quote is too long.	2	8	17	19	10	8
7.	Copying translated texts without using quotation marks.	2	7	13	17	19	7
8.	Providing fictitious data in projects or articles.	7	13	15	12	5	12
9.	Using the same project in several study subjects.	10	12	10	13	8	10

Source: own data

The answers to the item "During your studies, you have...", compared to the answers to the item "From your point of view, how often do you think the following actions occur in college" have a rather subjective character, as it gets the person to admit facts related to university fraud. In table no. 5, the criterion "I don't know" does not make sense because it is about acts committed by oneself and not by other people, so one must know about it. In general, the choice of the "I don't know" option belongs to the people who were not seriously involved in the elaboration of the answers. The 3.5 percent for the frequency criterion belongs to the objective respondents who anonymously assume having committed fraud.

Table 5. Distribution of respondents' responses

No.	During your studies, you:	not at all	rare	sometimes	frequent	very often	don't answer
1.	Facilitated fraud for colleagues.	34	13	12	2	0	3
2.	Copied in exams.	20	24	12	3	2	3
3.	Copied information from the internet without including the source.	22	19	13	5	3	2
4.	Copied paragraphs from works that do not belong to you, without including the source.	25	17	13	3	3	2



No.	During your studies, you:	not at all	rare	sometimes	frequent	very often	don't answer
5.	Presented someone else's project as your own.	44	12	3	3	0	2
6.	Cited the source without the quotation marks if the original fragment was long.	34	15	8	3	2	2
7.	Copied translated texts without using quotation marks.	25	15	12	8	2	2
8.	Used fictitious data in projects or articles.	45	8	5	3	0	2
9.	Used the same project in several study subjects.	32	20	3	7	0	2

Source: own responses

The lack of academic integrity has become a social phenomenon that must be approached from different angles. Thus, we collected the same answers to a question about knowledge and a question about personal activity, highlighting the values of the respondents and their opinions about the norms of academic integrity.

The interpretation answers of the applied questionnaire show that a majority of students use data from various external sources (copying, papers published on the Internet), finding "copying" much easier in order to obtain an expected result (evaluation during, bachelor's degree, dissertation, exam grade, etc.)

When a majority group accepts tolerating frauds in exams, there is an obvious general tendency of students to use digital technologies not only to access information but also to create a false impression regarding the expected knowledge for (post) university studies.

Downloading and using data largely from external sources (internet, especially) without giving a personal interpretation, can highlight the fact that many students do not have the necessary skills to write a graduation thesis. They also lack critical thinking, analysis, and synthesizing skills, and are unable to show their individual knowledge regarding a studied subject.

To decrease this tendency, it is not enough just to identify and prove copying or plagiarism in the university environment, given that the origins of such habits are also found in the pre-university education system. As an argument, we can consider the following fact that has been happening for at least 15 years (given the evolution of personal computers and the Internet): both in school and high school, teachers constantly ask for reports, so students enter specialized sites, print the papers, hand them over, and easily get high marks, the practice being an accepted one, well tolerated, and rewarded. Taking all this into consideration, we can conclude that many students plagiarize, copy, "xerox" the information, because they got used to it in school and high school. They may even believe that copying from the Internet is a legitimate, natural practise, largely used by most of them. Students must be taught early to commit themselves to pursuing the truth for progress, for freedom of thought and expression. The responsibility to share personal knowledge must be based on an accurate analysis of the evidence, on the use of solid arguments to conclude.

We believe that we are more ethical than we really are, and we find rational reasons for our unethical behaviours, we see ourselves as good people, a fact that leads us to make ethical decisions quickly, linking rationalization and bias. We are more likely to make unethical decisions if we can justify them by saying "everybody does it", hiding behind the so-called compliance. Unethical behaviours are more likely to occur when someone is pressed for time, when fatigue occurs, or when we know that no one is watching us. The collaborative team environment, the need to collect information, sometimes lead to making decisions against the rules of ethics and integrity, which makes innovation, creativity, and development stagnate.

Analysing the answers to the question represented in Table no.3 compared to the results from the question in Table 4, we can see the huge difference between the perception of the general situation in university education,

compared to the perception of oneself and how a healthy education system should work. It is obvious that there is plagiarism, intellectual theft, copying, but it is equally obvious that a large part of the study group would agree to step up measures against these negative habits and reduce them as much as possible.

It is a need identified even among students, possibly because there is a decrease in the number of graduates for whom there is a real correlation between the level of professional knowledge and the results obtained in exams, tests, diplomas, and certificates.

A positive thing is knowing the concept of fraud and admitting the occurrence of such illicit behaviours. It is important to notice that frauds are known and recognized in the university environment, but they belong to other people and are not assumed by respondents, except for a very small number. It can be said that frauds are present in the university environment at quite high levels, which makes it necessary to combat or mitigate them, given that such an environment vitiates the formation of a responsible professional personality.

The next two questions in the questionnaire are open-ended and we analysed the students' misconducts and the factors that are causing them, their prevalence and severity, and opinion questions trying to capture the respondent's position in relation to real or hypothetical implications for academic behaviour. The question "What factors influence behaviour in the academic environment?" is one of the open-ended questions that explores students' personal opinions. People in general, students in this case, rarely intend to make mistakes. Justifying unethical behaviour does not make that behaviour acceptable, but the ability to identify the factors that cause people to act contrary to their most rational ethical judgment is an important step in gaining trust in demonstrating integrity.

If goals can be set, how to achieve them and by what means is generally delegated to the actors directly involved in the educational process. A superficial knowledge of the rules of citing sources and elaborating a paper, the perception that what is on the Internet belongs to everyone and can be reused without permission, difficulty in writing, poor expression skills, pressure to get good results, not feeling capable of doing an assignment on their own, or the lack of interest in the work to be done are some of the "justifications" promoted by the literature (Ioan, 2018).

The students who answered the questionnaire also added as a common reason the distribution tax and budget, which can come either from their own beliefs or from principles taken from the family environment. The high taxes make them aspire to high grades, even if it means copying in the exams, the subject matter being not enough studied, the discipline being rather low due to the insufficient quality of the materials made available to the students.

Another important factor is pre-university education. The student will repeat in college what he saw in the school environment. It is not easy to correct bad attitudes later in life. "Bad habits hardly disappear", especially if the students do not understand the rules of ethics and integrity as a form of respect for one's work and for the peers. The lack of mutual respect among students and the deficient relationship between students and teachers add to the problem. If students come with a lack of ethical education in high school and the models offered by academics are not convincing, they will continue or insist in the belief that violating the rules of integrity is normal and not very serious.

"What do you think are the biggest problems for students in respecting academic integrity?" is a question that offers the possibility to express in writing certain expectations coming from the students.

Students were asked about how, in their opinion, processed their sense of academic integrity and the role they played in this educational activity - two-thirds indicating that they had received no pre-university education with ethical dimension. Several directions were mentioned, such as: the model played by some seniors, not necessarily teachers; the fact that they are not familiar with what the code of ethics is or how important the financial part is; too much stress and concern for grades instead of knowledge, good marks bringing fulfilment although they are not earned by personal effort.

"In some subjects, the didactic material is recommended to be learnt word by word, in details, which is very difficult and puts pressure on the students, who end up turning to various methods to get a better grade or to pass the exam." (in accordance with the respondents' answer) which makes the examinations subjective. Another issue mentioned in the questionnaire is the influence of the colleagues from higher grades, the

perpetuation of habits regarding the attitude and requirements of some teachers, as well as outdated, insufficient, or expensive teaching materials.

The lack of interest in students for in-depth study and their limitation to what the teacher offers, the lack of information on the completion of works and lack of necessary knowledge influences their attitude, urging them to violate the rules of ethics and academic integrity. Half of the students who answered the questionnaire emphasised the role played by their parents and teachers during high school years. But, above all, the vast majority insisted on the importance of personal values acquired in childhood, later being more difficult to assimilate. Certain rules imposed by ethics and integrity are assimilated later in life and with some difficulty, considering them important in their professional development, but not very important in terms of morality.

Students doubt their abilities and underestimate themselves, because they do not know how to express their own ideas or due to a too high degree of difficulty of the courses, which they do not have the courage to admit by asking for help from their tutors. Individual study is perceived as an effort of memorization, not as a formation of one's own independent and logical thinking.

Arguing the information obtained from the documentation, paying more attention to the relationship between the documentation and the personal contribution are known to the students, but they say that for a better result they are ready to neglect these issues. "We owe all our originality to the ideas of others!" (in accordance with the respondents' answer). "From your point of view, the most common violations of academic integrity relate to ..." is an evaluation scale question, students having to choose between several options of their own, according to personal beliefs and knowledge. The answers provide not only information about what is important, but also information about how important some predilections are compared to others, expressing what is important, strictly for the students who participated in the questionnaire.

The inclination to convenience provides only a weak argument to explain the violation of the rules of ethics and integrity. 98% of the respondents put first, as the most common bad practice, the elaboration of a paper together with a colleague or a group of colleagues and then the use of all the information separately, 64% appreciating this as something normal, without acknowledging, by doing so, the facilitation of peer fraud, a problem of ethics and integrity in academia, as shown in Figure 4. Cheating seems to them to be a form of solidarity and mutual help.

Prohibition of fraud has been done for a long time, apparently, without much efficiency. Also, for a long time, as soon as there is a ban, fraud occurs. With the development of all current technologies, information and documentation are accessible from all sides, and for some time, education no longer defines the one who knows everything, but the one who knows where the information is and can find it quickly.

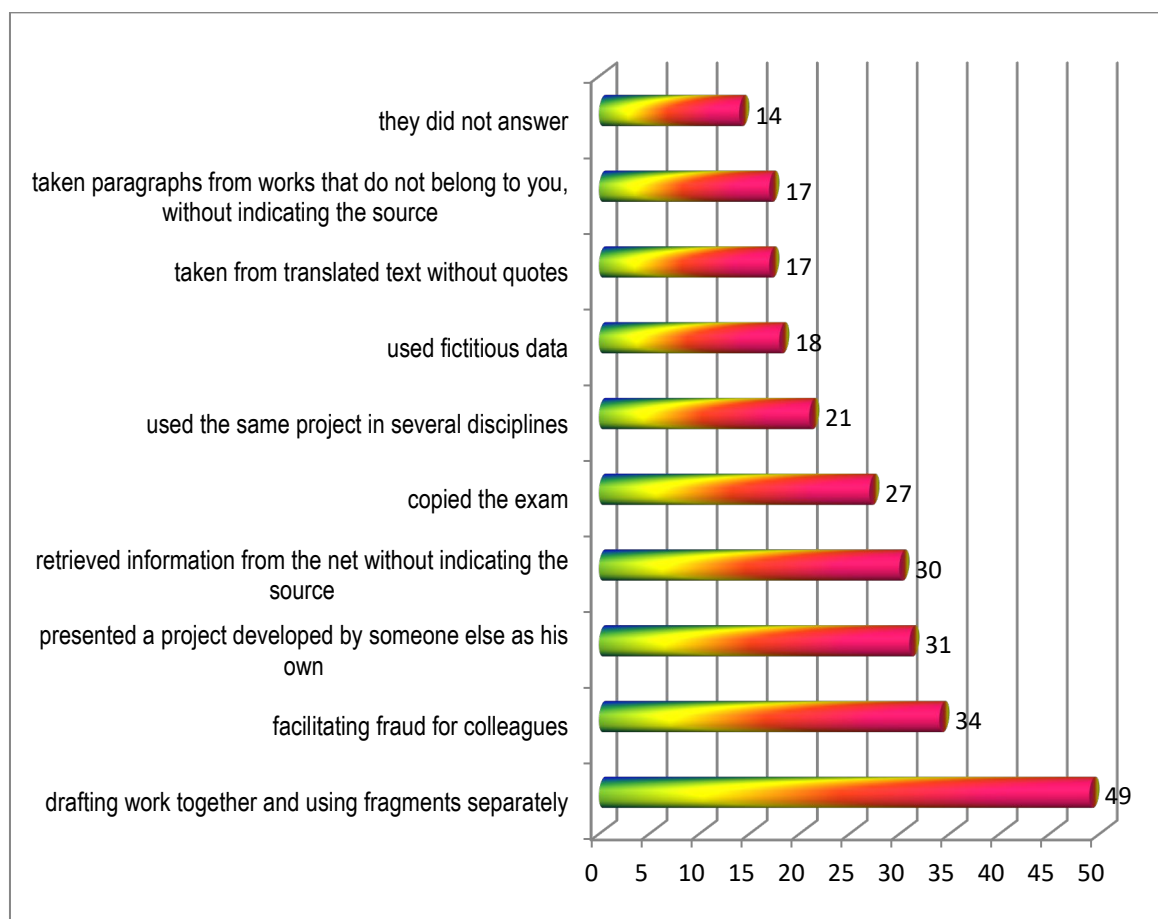
If we want a student to progress and succeed in his studies as well as in his professional life, he must read to get an appropriate academic language, and he must also recognize the intellectual work of others.

The Internet does not have to become a textbook, useless most of the times, demotivating when compared to traditional books. Still, it is richer, more complete, and easier to access than most documentary works. In real life, we learn.

Although there is a high risk, copying in exams is mentioned by 54% of those who answered. It is not necessarily the result of poor preparation or lack of trust, but rather of a high grade. There are students who no longer have the desire to learn thoroughly, but want to get the exam grades as easy as possible.

Copying texts from other papers or from online sources, without including the source, is also a common practice in editing final papers, but also in the assessments required during the study years, is a trick in itself. The students who downloaded from the net, 60% of the participants in the questionnaire had various motivations, the most notable of which seems to be the statement that "The Internet is not a person, the data is free for everyone and is not covered by licenses of intellectual property". In contrast, only 34% consider the text in a book, quoted without specifying the source, to be a problem (in accordance with the respondents' answer).

The use of fictitious data is a concern for 36%, due to the lack of time and difficult access to databases necessary for the preparation of studies, when, most of the time, it is about an inefficient time management along with the lack of credit for the truth. This form of fraud leads to distorted results. The same as falsifying data in order to get a certain result, it is equally irresponsible.



**Fig. 4. Incidence of bad practices among final year students**

Source: own data

Given the opportunity, most of the respondents chose to remain anonymous and several respondents did not provide information. Therefore, the above figures are indicative and not accurate.

The research results show that hypothesis 1 is invalid, students do not know or largely do not respect the rules of ethics and academic integrity. Free answers validate hypothesis 2, the respondents being familiar, but, in many cases, do not apply good practices.

### CONCLUSION

The topics of plagiarism prevention, copying, scientific ethics, and quoting without quotation marks, are known by students, are frequently observed, but also violated quite often.

The findings emphasize the importance of strengthening the role of the university in promoting academic honesty among students, in addition to the education they receive in high school. To transmit to the students a valid universal set of ethical principles and practices that do not depend only on home or belief systems, urban-rural differences must be eliminated from education, so high school graduates will be more likely to be successful students, and university institutions will more than likely have chances of evolution.

The level of interest in respecting the rules of ethics and academic integrity is often reduced by financial interests. The number of students prepared for documentary research work is increasing and has little impact on the proportion of "copy-paste" followers. Attesting the originality of the work can be done by signing a document or statement, having the habit of respecting the rules of ethics and integrity, and certifying the accuracy of the written information. Students will get used to observing certain alert thresholds during their studies before they get to elaborate a graduation thesis. It is obvious that many students use data from various external sources, finding the "copying" method much easier in getting the expected result.

Regarding the investigation of the factors that influence the academic behaviour, a specific objective of this research, the free answers of the students varied; superficial knowledge of the norms of ethics and academic integrity; the feeling of distrust in one's own ability to write a paper; the influence of the family environment on the financial part of the studies; pre-university education; the relationship between colleagues; low level of familiarization with the code of ethics; subjective examination, request for memorization; underestimation of one's own abilities; convenience both in documentation and writing. The limits of our research are the limited number of the respondents from one university. The future directions of research can be oriented to identify the perception of students at the regional and national level for a clear perspective on the ethics and integrity at university level.

Academic integrity remains an important element of higher education. The core values that constitute academic integrity not only support the reputation of a university, the value, and significance of the diplomas it confers, but also create a common framework for professional activity that extends beyond academia.

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