Impact of academic integrity on workplace ethical behavior

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Declarations

We state that this work has been submitted to the International Journal for Educational Integrity (IJEI) and it is currently under consideration for publication.

Corruption is a serious problem in Mexico and the available information regarding the levels of academic dishonesty in Mexico is not very encouraging. The country runs last among the member countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) according to the corruption perception index in International Transparency (2018) and its perception is worsening every year. Regarding academic misconduct, 84% of tudents in a Mexican university have witnessed a dishonest action during their education (UDEM, 2018), and 6 out of 10 at another university have engaged in some kind of copying (UNAM, 2013).

Academic integrity is essential in any teaching-learning process focused on achieving the highest standards of excellence and learning. Promoting and experiencing academic integrity within the university context has a twofold purpose: to achieve the necessary learnings and skills to appropriately perform a specific profession and to develop an ethical perspective which leads to correct decision making.

In addition to the work carried out by the basic educational system, the university must fully form and develop the moral vision and purpose of its students, since it is not possible to consider professional education separate from ethical formation. Being a professional must include not only mastery of technical, practical and/or theoretical competencies, but also personal integrity and ethical professional behaviour that helps to give an ethical meaning to all university endeavours (Bolívar, 2005). In so doing, academic integrity is necessary to learn and an essential requirement of academic quality.

The objective of this study is to explore the relationship between academic integrity and ethical behaviour, particularly workplace behaviour.

The study adopts a quantitative, hypothetical and deductive approach. A questionnaire was designed, based on questions used on similar previous research studies (Blankenship & Whitley, 2000; Harding et al., 2004; Lawson, 2004; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2009; McCabe,

2016; Nonis & Swift, 2001; Sims,1993), to gather information regarding the frequency in which they undertake acts of dishonesty in different environments and in regards to the severity they assign to each type of infraction.

The survey was applied to 1,203 undergraduate and graduate students from a private university in northern Mexico who chose to respond to their professors' invitations to answer the survey as part of a diagnostic exercise that the university carries out periodically to learn about the students' perceptions regarding the degree of academic integrity culture on their campus. The statistical analysis was made using factorial analysis to define indexes related to academic fraud and ethical behavior followed by a linear regression technique.

The results reflect that students who report committing acts against academic integrity also report being involved in dishonest activities in other contexts, and that students who consider academic breaches less serious, report being engaged in academic misconduct more frequently in different contexts.

Based on these results, it is unavoidable to reflect on the role that educational institutions and businesses can adopt in the development of programmes to promote a culture of academic integrity which: design educational experiences to foster learning, better prepare students to fully meet their academic obligations, highlight the benefits of doing so, create an environment where cheating or deceptions are very difficult to practice, prevent the severity and consequences of dishonest actions, discourage cheating and establish clear and efficient processes to sanction those students who are found responsible for academic breaches. This will strengthen a positive behavioural pattern in different contexts of their lives, and encourage them to become ethical professionals, business people, and citizens.

The results also suggest that it is not enough to teach academic integrity in a theoretical or conceptual way, but that it is learned and acquired through real contexts and practices, where the prevention or discouragement of gaining benefits through misconduct contributes to student learning and development. This learning goes beyond the classroom and the university context and becomes an ethical behavioural pattern in the work and personal environments. Likewise, organizations should have ethical codes and other elements of a business ethics and compliance programme to foster a culture of integrity and continue the formative process started within educational institutions.

It is essential for higher education institutions to demonstrate a commitment to building a culture of academic integrity, both in terms of their awareness and their practice, since through them the ethical behaviour of students and future graduates is strengthened and forged. In this respect, the university campus is featured as a favourable environment to train individuals and promote ethical behaviour within and outside the university, meeting its commitment to the community and the world to develop more ethical and engaged citizens who do things well in all aspects of their lives.

There has been little research published regarding the influence of student behaviour on academic integrity in schoolwork, and on professional performance. This study, like the ones identified previously, points out a relationship that can and should be explored in greater depth. Academic integrity - concept, benefits, strategies - and its counterpart, academic dishonesty - frequency causes, consequences, management - have not received, in México and Latin America, the attention they have earned in other countries and regions.

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