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Academic Honesty of Students as a Media Educational Problem of Higher Education

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Abstract

Compliance with the principles of academic honesty is a key factor in preserving the traditional values of higher education and maintaining the quality of the educational process. Large-scale introduction of digital technologies into the everyday practices of young people, easy access to neural networks create additional risks of violating the principles of academic honesty. The article presents the results of a survey of students (n=633) in order to determine changes in the academic honesty of young students. The results of the study showed that students have vague moral standards regarding the correct use of information and are frivolous about academic fraud. Almost half of the respondents answered that they resorted to cheating on the exam. A third of the respondents do not consider it necessary to memorize a large amount of information for the exam, the justification being of her the widespread availability. The study also revealed violations of the principles of academic honesty in the process of preparing final qualifying works. Students demonstrate a tolerant attitude towards incorrect borrowing of information, plagiarism, and the use of artificial intelligence in writing author's texts. The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis that the insufficient level of media competence of students distorts the perception of the principles of academic honesty, understanding the boundaries of acceptable behavior when working with media resources. The article concludes that it is necessary to develop media education in modern conditions. Media education of young people will help to form both the skills of correct use of media resources, generating author's texts based on the analysis and understanding of various sources, and ethical principles of working with information, intolerance towards academic fraud.

Keywords: academic honesty, ethics of behavior, student, higher education, media competence, academic fraud, digitalization of education.

1. Introduction

The study of academic honesty issues is one of the most relevant areas of modern scientific discourse. The semantic content of the concept of "academic honesty" is associated with the norms of ethical behavior in education, compliance with the principles of responsibility, fairness, conscientious attitude to learning, truthfulness, trust and respect. In contrast to the concept of "academic honesty", such terms as "academic negligence" and "academic fraud" are used. These destructive practices are expressed in the forms of various types of deception, plagiarism, attempts to gain an unfair advantage in the educational process (Summers et al., 2021). Academic dishonesty can be both intentional and unintentional. Intentional dishonesty is in most cases associated with the inversion of moral values and norms of behavior of students, the prevalence of justifying motives for their dishonest actions. Unintentional academic dishonesty is due to the low

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level of students' awareness of the principles of correct use of information, the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Both intentional and unintentional practices of violating academic honesty are largely initiated by the insufficient level of media education of students. The effectiveness of media education of young people ensures the formation of skills for working with information, correct consumption and production of media, principles of ethical behavior (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2021).

2. Materials and methods

The purpose of the study is to examine the transformation of students' academic honesty as a consequence of large-scale digitalization of the Russian education system. In the course of the study, academic honesty is considered as a set of principles of students' ethical behavior during knowledge testing, norms of mutual respect and responsibility of participants in the educational process for the learning outcome. This approach allowed us to formulate the research question put forward in the title of the article: are there any dysfunctions of academic honesty in students, can they be considered as a media-educational problem of higher education?

The research tasks are formulated as follows:

1. Description of key "blocks" of students' academic honesty, assessment of their level of development as part of the student's overall media competence.

2. Identification of problems and dysfunctions of transformation of students' academic honesty in the context of large-scale digitalization of education, their impact on the development of students' media skills.

The research hypotheses are presented as follows:

1. The development of digital technologies contributes to the distancing of students, reducing their involvement in the educational process. Such a perception of new digital educational realities becomes a predicate for the reduction of students' academic honesty and a barrier to the development of their media skills.

2. With reduced media skills, students develop a reduced perception of the need to maintain academic honesty in the educational process.

During the preparation of the study, a set of methods was used: analysis of secondary data, systematization, generalization, etc. The leading method of the study was a questionnaire survey of students of Russian universities. This article presents part of the collected research material devoted to the problems of violation of academic honesty of students in the media educational environment of the university.

The selection of students for the survey was carried out on a voluntary basis using the principle of personal appeal and the snowball method. The representativeness of the selection of students was carried out on the basis of "studying in a higher educational institution" at the time of the survey. Other features of representation were not introduced, the sample was not repaired according to socio-demographic characteristics. A total of 633 students were surveyed (Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of respondents (%)

<i>gender of the respondent</i>			
girls		young men	
59.4		40.6	
<i>territorial affiliation of the university</i>			
metropolitan university		regional university	
78.6		21.3	
<i>training profile</i>			
natural science	humanitarian	socio-economic	technical
32.5	17.2	26.1	24.2

The sample consists mainly of full-time students. The coverage of students by level of education is presented as widely as possible (bachelor's, master's, specialist). It is worth noting that the spontaneity of the selection of respondents can be considered as a certain limitation of the study, but the final composition of the sample fully meets the objectives of the study.

The survey results were supplemented by materials from focus groups conducted with students (2 focus groups of 10 people). Focus groups were formed according to the principle of

heterogeneity. The students of different profiles and forms of education took part, the proportions of boys/girls were equalized. Students who completed the questionnaire survey did not take part in the focus groups. The focus group guide was designed in such a way as to draw attention to the controversial aspects of the questionnaire survey results.

3. Discussion

The active introduction of digital technologies into all spheres of public life and the scaling of digitalization processes have significantly modified pedagogical practices, including the system of knowledge control and assessment. On the one hand, new opportunities are opening up for increasing the objectivity of the assessment process, and the risks of conflicts between students and teachers are reducing (Selwyn et al., 2023). On the other hand, access to digital technologies in the modern world significantly simplifies the process of illegitimate use of information for students. These negative trends call into question the validity of academic education (Singh, 2021). The spread of online learning makes it extremely difficult to track cases of violation of academic honesty (Balderas, Caballero-Hernández, 2020). The results show that the majority of students violated the principles of academic integrity in one form or another, namely, using cheat sheets, unfair borrowing from other sources, and assistance during exams from third parties (Jeergal et al., 2015; Ismail, 2018).

As noted in modern studies, digital forms of academic dishonesty have a number of differences from their traditional counterparts. In particular, they are characterized by an expanded range of tools (Parks-Leduc et al., 2022) and the justifying tone of their use among students (Frolova, Rogach, 2022). New challenges to academic integrity standards are associated with the use of artificial intelligence. ChatGPT, which allows generating new texts, creates significant problems and risks of increasing academic dishonesty practices (Nam, Bai, 2023). The growing use of artificial intelligence capabilities in preparing students' written work raises serious concerns among educators, scientists, and university administrators (Filson, Atuase, 2024).

In modern conditions, the question of how universities should respond to new challenges and what tools to use to prevent cases of academic dishonesty is becoming especially relevant. An analysis of university documents in the western provinces of Canada indicates the dominance of punitive approaches to violations of academic ethics. At the same time, the issue of constructing educational resources that support the relevant values in the academic environment has been on the periphery of the university administration. Scientists draw attention to the role of media education in the practices of forming norms and ethical principles for the use of information, as well as reflection on issues of academic honesty (Stoesz, Eaton, 2022). A similar conclusion can be traced in other studies that illustrate the low level of students' awareness of the legal and ethical norms for the use of educational and extracurricular Internet resources (Cilliers, 2017). An anonymous survey of students at Zürich University of Applied Sciences showed that, on the one hand, students highly rate their knowledge in the field of media education. In particular, students believe that they are well aware of the ethical norms for the use of information. However, on the other hand, it was found that students had difficulty identifying clear instances of misconduct (Nortes et al., 2024).

In the new conditions of digitalization, the inclusion of artificial intelligence and neural networks in the daily educational routine of students, universities should strengthen the components of educational training aimed at developing the media competence of young people. As scientists rightly note, neural networks are a type of media, which implies an analysis of the ethical problems of their use in the subject field of media education (Kozlikhin, Demidov, 2024).

Media education of students should ensure work with the values and attitudes of students regarding the correct handling of media resources, standards for the use of information taken from various sources, the acceptable boundaries of honest academic behavior (Vasileva, Miklyaeva, 2023). Similar conclusions are presented in foreign studies that link academic honesty with such values as trust, fairness, respect (Werner, 2022). In this context, the role of the teacher, who should act as an example of ethical behavior, convey the ideas of honesty, responsibility and respect (Devine, Chin, 2018), is of great importance.

4. Results

According to the data obtained, students rate their motivation for studying very highly. In particular, 79.0 % of respondents expressed the opinion that they have such motivational

attitudes. Perhaps this is due to the fact that most students find studying interest (70.5 %) and easy (60.7 %). It can be assumed that the opinion of these students reflects their distorted idea of the simplicity of obtaining an education at the university, and also demonstrates inflated estimates of their media skills.

Valentin S.: "I thought it would be more difficult to study, but no, it's fine, I work, and I find material for my reports myself when studying. They don't ask more from us."

Tatyana K.: "The point of studying is that we are constantly looking for information for reports, papers, essays, etc. Books on the subject? No, I don't read them, because I understand the topic well enough without them."

The following distribution of respondents' answers can serve as an indirect confirmation of this conclusion. Despite the fact that 83.3 % of students consider themselves to be sufficiently organized and able to independently plan their study schedule, 47.1 % of respondents are often distracted, and 48.5 % do their own thing if they need to study online (Table 2). At the same time, 41.4 % of students will not watch the videos posted on the subject. The dysfunctionality of such an approach has a direct negative impact on the quality of preparation and media competence of students due to a decrease in the demands on themselves as participants in the educational process. On the one hand, the student still expects that it is the teacher who should captivate and focus their attention on the problematic aspects of the educational material, on the other hand – an excessively inflated assessment of their abilities in terms of data analysis and processing is formed. The survey results showed that 9 out of 10 respondents believe that they can systematize their search on information platforms with a high degree of efficiency, 87.2 % of respondents believe that they have the skill of critically understanding media products, and 86.1 % – even “gain knowledge through their own inferences” (self-reflection of the information found).

Table 2. Distribution of responses to the question: “Do you agree with the following statements...?” (%)

Answer option	yes	no
I am motivated to study	79.0	21.0
I am organized and can plan my own study schedule	83.3	16.7
I often get distracted if I need to study via video link	47.1	52.9
I often do my own things if classes are held online	48.5	51.5
If there are videos for a subject, I always watch them	58.6	41.4
Live communication with the teacher during the course is important to me	72.0	28.0
I don't see the point in memorizing a large amount of information for the exam, everything can be found on the Internet anyway	34.1	65.9
I don't think it's shameful to cheat on an exam	47.9	52.1

It can be assumed that it was the transition to online and the large-scale distribution of digital technologies that served as a predicate for the decrease in students' responsibility and the growth of their self-esteem in digital skills for working with media. Indirect confirmation can be the high proportion of respondents (72.0 %) for whom the importance of personal (live) communication with the teacher during the course of study remains.

Konstantin A.: "Is live communication with the teacher important to me? Yes, of course, it is always easier to ask something about the assignment, to clarify, maybe he will tell you how to complete the task better. But do I always go to classes, no (laughs), I do not always succeed."

During the study, students were asked to evaluate their behavior when preparing for and passing the session. Thus, it was found that a third of respondents (34.1 %) do not consider it necessary to memorize a large amount of information for the exam. Students will explain their behavior by the fact that everything "can be found on the Internet." At the same time, the proportion of those, who admit to cheating on the exam is even higher (47.9 %). Almost half! The study design did not allow some students to answer this question truthfully, but during the focus group discussion, students were more open.

Dinara T.: "Of course I cheat, everyone cheats, it's normal, the main thing is to pass."
Erbolat S.: "Everyone cheats, some people aren't very good at it, but there are a lot of opportunities now. Why not? t won't be useful later anyway, why waste time on unnecessary

subjects? ... Those that are in the profile, here, of course, something may need to be learned, but if you went to classes, then know the basic part. And a good grade is needed."

In addition to traditional explanations of cheating practices, there were answer options that demonstrated the presence of a competitive effect: "whoever cheats will get a higher grade than you would have if you prepared yourself," "I prepare, but I still cheat so that my answer is no worse than others."

For our study, two aspects are of interest: whether the number of cheatings has increased (has it become the norm in the context of digitalization), and how has the decline in academic honesty affected students' media competence. Regarding the first point, it can be noted that, compared to the 2022 study, where a similar question was asked, the proportion of students who noted unethical behavior practices during the exam (cheating) was significantly lower – 27.5 % (Rogach et al., 2024). The dynamics of the growth of violations of ethical behavior were also reflected in the students' responses at the focus groups.

Matvey R.: "The transition to online made cheating easier, and although we are no longer distance learning, the habit has not changed, it will not be different."

Olga T.: "Of course, we began to cheat more, distance learning has relaxed us. Besides, it's become easier to cheat now anyway, you can find everything on the Internet, there are earphones and other gadgets... some teachers turn a blind eye to cheating, you pass and you pass."

Thus, the first hypothesis was partially confirmed. On the one hand, the development of digital technologies contributes to the distancing of students and a decrease in their involvement in the educational process. Students are more often distracted, do their own things and do not consider it necessary to watch video materials. At the same time, for some students, live communication with the teacher remains important, which calls into question the tendency towards distancing. Therefore, it can be assumed that with a decrease in student involvement, the ability to maintain interaction in the context of digitalization remains at a fairly good level. On the other hand, the perception of new digital educational realities has indeed become a predicate for a decrease in students' academic honesty. The proportion of those who demonstrate unethical behavior during the exam has increased. The situation is aggravated by the fact that students perceive this fact as a norm rather than a deviation, and the moral side of the practice of cheating is not addressed at all. The consequence of this kind of destruction is a decrease in the quality of students' media skills development. The reluctance to remember a large amount of information, overestimation of one's ability to reflect on information and the ability to critically comprehend digital communications products becomes a barrier limiting the development of media skills of a modern student.

The study paid special attention to the issues of decreasing the academic honesty of students in the context of preparing a final qualifying work. Pedagogical observation shows that the biggest problem is concentrated in plagiarism of students' diploma paper materials. However, what is the reason? Lack of knowledge and media skills in searching and working with materials? Or unwillingness to generate new knowledge when there are easier ways? Analysis of the materials of the author's study (Table 3) showed that these two aspects should be considered in a single bundle.

Table 3. Distribution of responses to the question: "How do you assess the need to comply with the requirements for maintaining the originality of the text (plagiarism) when preparing for a diploma/coursework? Do you agree with the following statements?" (%)

Answer option	yes	no
It is wrong demand originality of the text, since we cannot come up with anything new yet	57.0	43.0
I do not see the point in this requirement, since in the end we are engaged in meaningless work of paraphrasing the text	63.2	36.8
The development of artificial intelligence/neural networks makes this requirement unnecessary, it can be easily bypassed	64.5	35.5

Thus, more than half of the respondents (57.0 %) are of the opinion that they cannot yet come up with anything new – the lack of ability to critically understand the text, generate new

knowledge – and therefore the teacher should not demand originality of the diploma paper text from them. Despite the fact that 41.5 % of the respondents held a different opinion, in the next judgment they also demonstrate a negative tone. 63.2 % of respondents admit that they simply are engaged in paraphrasing the text, but do not analyze it and do not generate new ideas as a result. This means that among those who still consider the requirement to comply with the originality of the diploma paper text to be fair, there are those who do not consider it necessary to comply with it. In this case, the violation of academic honesty is more pronounced than in the case of simple disagreement with the requirement.

The scaling of digital technologies actualizes the need to intensify media education practices, allowing to focus on the ethical principles of working with information. However, as scientists rightly note, the gradual dominance of digital platforms and online services in education complicates the formation of knowledge, values and experience of “virtuous behavior” in the media environment. A comprehensive approach to media education of students is needed, allowing to integrate traditional pedagogy and the use of media resources (Shanley, 2020).

The share of those students who appreciated the potential of artificial intelligence in the practice of “bypassing” the requirements for maintaining the originality of the text when preparing for a diploma/coursework is even higher. 64.5 % of respondents agreed with the judgment that “the development of artificial intelligence/neural networks makes this requirement unnecessary, it can be easily bypassed”.

The results of the focus group study confirmed the dominance of these judgments. The students' reasoning often used formulations demonstrating the possibilities of using artificial intelligence to bypass the teacher's requirements: “*will select literature*”, “*will generate text*”, “*will process and generate, as if new ideas*”. At the same time, students also note possible disadvantages of these practices.

Victor B.: “I made a request to the neural network, and it gave me a list of links to empty pages. Or I wanted to make a picture from part of the text, but what it gives is completely off topic”.

Thus, the second hypothesis of the study was also confirmed. With reduced media skills (searching and analyzing texts, critically understanding different points of view, inability to draw conclusions and generate new knowledge), students have a reduced perception of the importance of maintaining academic honesty in the educational process. In this case, students are ready to resort to the capabilities of a neural network, rephrase the text and look for other workarounds to the requirement of originality of author's materials. It is worrying that with the development of digital technologies, the situation with academic honesty will only worsen. A promising area of research may be the digital potential of the media environment of an educational institution in the practices of monitoring students' knowledge.

5. Conclusion

The study revealed various forms violations of academic honesty from the students. Almost half of the respondents resort to cheating on exams. The justifying palette of opinions includes a number of judgments, including: maximum available information (no need to memorize it), as well as competitive risks (unwillingness to lose in comparison with others who resort to cheating). The development of artificial intelligence, the dynamics of the introduction of digital technologies in the educational process initiated the scaling of the processes of academic integrity violations. To the greatest extent, changes affected the practices of preparing final qualifying works. Students justify the practices of unfair borrowing, plagiarism, and the use of artificial intelligence in preparing their own texts. These destructive trends are the result of dysfunctions in students' media education. The low level of media competence of students is characterized by both a narrowing of practical skills in working with information (searching for information, analyzing various sources, critical thinking, generating new knowledge) and an insufficient level of development of ethical standards. The ethical component of media competence is characterized by problems in understanding the boundaries of acceptable behavior when working with media resources, and the correctness of using information. Of particular concern is the high level of tolerance among young people for violating the principles of academic honesty, and the spread of attitudes justifying academic fraud.

Media education can be considered as a key factor in the formation of ethical principles of behavior in the educational environment. Prevention of cases of academic dishonesty should be based not so much on tightening punitive sanctions, but on the development of media education,

which allows for the formation of understanding and experience of the legitimate use of information from various sources.

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