



The Implementation of Ethical Code in Scientific Writing

Maintaining Students' Academic Credibility in the Digital Era

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Abstract

Integrity of academic work is a fundamental aspect of higher education, especially in the digital era where information is easily accessible. This study explores the implementation of the ethical code in scientific writing and its role in maintaining students' academic credibility. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis involving undergraduate students and lecturers. The findings reveal varying levels of understanding and application of ethical principles among students, with challenges including easy access to information, reliance on digital tools, and limited practical ethics training. The study highlights the crucial role of institutions and educators in fostering ethical awareness through continuous and contextually relevant education. This research contributes to the discourse on academic integrity by emphasizing the need for an integrative approach to ethics education that adapts to the complexities of the digital age.

Keywords: Academic Credibility, Academic Integrity, Ethical Code, Higher Education, Plagiarism Ethic Education, Scientific Writing.

Introduction

In the academic environment, scientific work is not merely the end result of the learning process, but also a representation of the integrity and credibility of a student as a future scientist. One of the fundamental aspects of maintaining academic credibility is compliance with the code of ethics for scientific writing, which includes intellectual honesty, acknowledgment of sources, and originality of writing. This code of ethics is the main basis for preventing unethical practices such as plagiarism, data fabrication, and citation manipulation [1].

In today's digital age, easy access to information via the internet has become a double-edged sword. On the one hand, digitization makes it easier for students to obtain references and compile scientific papers. However, on the other hand, this convenience also has the potential to reduce ethical awareness due to the emergence of copy-paste practices, the use of sources without citations, and even the use of AI tools to produce writing without in-depth understanding. This phenomenon raises concerns about the decline in academic credibility among students. Although various universities have formulated and disseminated codes of ethics for scientific writing, research examining the extent to which these codes of ethics are understood and applied by students in practice is still very limited. This is especially true in today's digital age, where academic ethical challenges are no longer conventional but have shifted towards more complex and technology-driven issues.



The state of the art shows that most previous studies have focused more on plagiarism detection and the use of anti-plagiarism software (Turnitin, Grammarly, etc.), rather than on students' conceptual understanding and ethical attitudes towards the writing code of ethics itself. In fact, understanding academic ethics should be part of intellectual awareness, not just compliance out of fear of punishment.

Based on preliminary studies conducted through interviews with 10 students from various departments at a state university, it was found that only 3 people could correctly explain the main principles of scientific writing ethics. In fact, most students did not understand the difference between legitimate paraphrasing and hidden plagiarism (patchwriting). This shows a gap between institutional policy and students' actual understanding and application.

The novelty of this study lies in its approach, which views ethical violations not only as technical errors, but also as issues of academic culture and student moral awareness in the digital age. This study also emphasizes the importance of explicitly integrating academic ethical values into the learning process, rather than relying solely on administrative sanctions. The main contribution of this study is to present a comprehensive overview of the practices and challenges of implementing a scientific writing code of ethics among students, as well as to formulate preventive strategies based on ethical education that are contextual to the digital age.

With reference to moral development theory [2] and the academic integrity framework theory [3], this study poses the following main questions: How do students understand and apply the code of ethics for scientific writing in maintaining their academic credibility in the digital age, and what factors influence such ethical compliance?

Literature Review

A. Code of Ethics for Scientific Writing

The code of ethics for scientific writing is a set of principles that govern academic behavior in writing activities, including honesty, objectivity, accountability, and respect for the work of others [4]. These principles function as a moral and professional foundation that ensures the credibility and reliability of scholarly communication. Honesty requires authors to present information truthfully without manipulation, while objectivity ensures that arguments are based on evidence rather than personal bias. Accountability emphasizes the responsibility of authors for the accuracy and integrity of their work, and respect for others is demonstrated through proper acknowledgment of sources.

In practice, these principles are implemented through correct citation, ethical paraphrasing, and transparent reporting of data and methods. Writers are expected to avoid plagiarism, fabrication, and falsification, which are considered serious violations of academic integrity. Plagiarism involves using others' ideas without proper credit, fabrication refers to inventing data, and falsification involves altering data to fit desired outcomes. By adhering to ethical standards, authors contribute to the integrity of scientific knowledge and foster trust within the academic community. Ultimately, the code of ethics is not merely a formal guideline but a critical framework that supports responsible scholarship and sustainable academic development [4].

B. Academic Credibility

Academic credibility refers to the perception of a person's integrity, honesty, and intellectual competence within an academic environment [3]. It reflects how individuals are viewed by peers, educators, and the broader scholarly community based on their academic behavior and contributions. Students who maintain academic credibility do not merely avoid dishonest practices such as cheating or plagiarism; they actively demonstrate originality, critical thinking, and responsibility in their work. This credibility becomes an essential asset that influences academic success and professional opportunities.

Building academic credibility involves consistent adherence to ethical standards in writing and research. This includes producing original work, accurately citing sources, and presenting arguments supported by valid and reliable evidence. Transparency in methodology and openness about limitations further strengthen one's credibility. Additionally, participation in collaborative academic activities requires fairness and proper acknowledgment of contributions from others. Academic credibility is therefore closely linked to personal integrity and reflects a commitment to ethical scholarship.

Over time, individuals who maintain strong academic credibility are more likely to gain trust, recognition, and opportunities for collaboration and publication. Conversely, violations of academic integrity can damage reputations and have long-term consequences. Therefore, fostering academic credibility should be a key objective in education, encouraging students to value honesty and accountability as core academic principles [3].

C. Ethical Challenges in the Digital Age

The digital age has significantly increased access to information, providing students and researchers with vast academic resources. However, this ease of access also presents new ethical challenges in maintaining academic integrity. One major issue is the tendency for students to copy and paste information without deep understanding, which can lead to unintentional plagiarism. This behavior undermines the learning process and weakens critical thinking skills, as students may rely on readily available content instead of developing their own ideas [4].

Furthermore, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and automated writing systems has introduced complex ethical dilemmas. These technologies can generate high-quality text quickly, raising concerns about authorship, originality, and intellectual ownership. Current academic policies often lag behind technological developments, resulting in unclear guidelines regarding the acceptable use of such tools [5]. As a result, students and educators face uncertainty in distinguishing between legitimate assistance and academic misconduct.

In addition, the digital environment often prioritizes speed and efficiency over reflection and originality, which may further challenge ethical practices. Addressing these issues requires updated institutional policies, increased digital literacy, and a stronger emphasis on ethical awareness. By fostering critical engagement with digital tools, academic institutions can help students navigate these challenges responsibly while maintaining the integrity of scholarly work [4][5].

D. Academic Ethics Education

The instillation of academic ethics cannot rely solely on administrative sanctions or punitive measures. Academic ethics education must be transformative and integrated into the learning

curriculum to effectively shape students' values and behaviors [6]. This approach involves not only introducing the code of ethics but also fostering a deep understanding of its importance in academic and professional contexts. Students need to recognize that ethical behavior is essential for maintaining trust and credibility in scholarly work.

Effective academic ethics education includes the use of case studies, discussions of ethical dilemmas, and practical exercises in academic writing. By analyzing real-world examples of ethical violations, students can better understand the consequences of misconduct and the importance of integrity. Additionally, training in proper citation, paraphrasing, and research practices equips students with the necessary skills to produce ethical academic work. This experiential approach helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Educators play a crucial role in modeling ethical behavior and reinforcing academic values. Continuous exposure to ethical principles across different courses ensures that students internalize these values as part of their academic identity. Ultimately, academic ethics education aims to develop individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also responsible and ethical scholars. Integrity should be seen not as a formal obligation but as a fundamental aspect of lifelong learning and professional conduct [6].

Material and Methods

A. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how university students understand and apply the code of ethics in scientific writing and how this affects their academic credibility in the digital era. The qualitative approach is appropriate to capture in-depth insights into students' perceptions, experiences, and behaviors related to ethical writing practices.

B. Research Setting and Participants

This research was conducted at a state university in Indonesia that integrates academic writing courses into its curriculum. The research setting was selected because it represents a higher education institution that actively promotes scientific writing as part of students' academic development. The participants in this study consisted of undergraduate students and lecturers who were directly involved in academic writing activities. A total of twenty undergraduate students from various faculties who had completed or were currently enrolled in academic writing courses participated in the study. In addition, three lecturers who teach academic writing and supervise student research projects were involved to provide institutional and pedagogical perspectives. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in academic disciplines and levels of exposure to ethics-related training, thereby enabling a comprehensive exploration of ethical practices in scientific writing [7].

C. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study was conducted using multiple qualitative techniques to obtain comprehensive and in-depth information related to the implementation of the code of ethics in scientific writing. In-depth interviews were carried out using a semi-structured format with both students and lecturers to explore their understanding, attitudes, and experiences regarding ethical practices in

academic writing. In addition, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with student participants to facilitate the exchange of perspectives and collective reflections on ethical challenges in scientific writing within the digital era. Furthermore, document analysis was employed by reviewing selected student assignments, particularly drafts of scientific writing, to assess adherence to ethical standards such as proper citation practices and originality[8].

D. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and meanings related to students' understanding and implementation of the code of ethics in scientific writing. The analysis process began with a familiarization stage, in which interview and focus group discussion transcripts were carefully transcribed and repeatedly read, along with a thorough review of relevant documents, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research context. The next stage involved coding, where meaningful units of data related to perceptions, experiences, and practices of ethical writing were identified and categorized[9][10].

These initial codes were then organized into broader themes, such as students' understanding of academic ethics, challenges in the digital environment, and institutional support for ethical compliance. Finally, the interpretation stage was conducted by relating the identified themes to the theoretical frameworks employed in this study, including Kohlberg's theory of moral development and the Academic Integrity Framework, to provide a deeper explanation of the findings[11].

E. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, several strategies were employed throughout the research process. Data triangulation was applied by combining multiple data sources, including interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, to enhance the credibility and consistency of the findings. In addition, member checking was conducted by inviting participants to review and confirm the preliminary results, ensuring that the interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives and experiences. Peer debriefing was also carried out through discussions with fellow researchers or colleagues to minimize researcher bias and strengthen the analytical rigor and interpretation of the data [12][13].

F. Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted following ethical research guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. Data were anonymized to protect participant identities

Results

Table 1 presents a synthesized overview of the main findings regarding students' academic ethics in scientific writing. The table highlights four key dimensions: students' understanding of ethical principles, challenges in the digital era, the role of institutions and lecturers, and students' perceptions of academic credibility. Overall, the findings indicate that while students possess a foundational awareness of academic ethics, significant gaps remain in the consistent application of more complex ethical practices, particularly in paraphrasing and maintaining originality.

The table also demonstrates that digital environments intensify ethical challenges, as easy access to information and the use of AI-based tools may encourage superficial learning practices and overreliance on technology [13]–[17]. Furthermore, the role of institutions and lecturers emerges as critical, as existing policies require more effective implementation through interactive and continuous ethics education [18][19]. Finally, the table underscores a positive shift in students' perspectives, where ethical writing is increasingly viewed as essential to building long-term academic credibility and professional reputation.

Table 1. Summary of Key Findings on Academic Ethics in Scientific Writing

Aspect	Core Findings	Implications
Students' Understanding of Ethical Writing	Students demonstrate basic awareness of plagiarism avoidance and citation practices; however, conceptual gaps persist in advanced skills such as distinguishing paraphrasing from patchwriting. Approximately 60% report inconsistent application.	Indicates misalignment between institutional policies and students' operational understanding; highlights need for deeper cognitive and practical ethics training.
Ethical Challenges in the Digital Age	Widespread access to digital information promotes copy-paste tendencies, particularly under time pressure. Students exhibit overreliance on AI tools and plagiarism detection systems without sufficient comprehension of originality and authorship principles [13]–[17].	Suggests that technological affordances exacerbate ethical risks; underscores the urgency of strengthening digital ethics literacy and critical writing competencies.
Institutional and Lecturer Roles	Although formal ethical guidelines are established, their implementation remains limited. Lecturers emphasize continuous, integrated, and context-based ethics instruction within scientific writing courses [18][19].	Reinforces the importance of active pedagogical strategies and institutional culture in fostering sustainable academic integrity.
Student Perceptions of Academic Credibility	Students increasingly perceive ethical compliance as integral to academic and professional identity, extending beyond administrative requirements.	Demonstrates a shift toward intrinsic motivation, supporting the development of long-term academic credibility and responsible scholarship.

A. Students' Understanding of the Code of Ethics for Scientific Writing

The interview results show that most students are familiar with general writing ethics, such as the importance of avoiding plagiarism and citing sources correctly. However, there are differences in the level of understanding of more in-depth ethical concepts, such as the difference between legitimate paraphrasing and hidden plagiarism (patchwriting). As many as 60% of respondents admitted that they still had difficulty applying these principles consistently. This indicates a gap between the policies disseminated by institutions and students' practical understanding. These findings are consistent with Sutherland-Smith's study, which states that students' ethical awareness in the digital age is not yet fully developed.

B. Challenges in Implementing the Code of Ethics in the Digital Age

Based on the interview and focus group discussion results, students identified several major challenges in implementing the code of ethics in scientific writing in the digital age. One of the most prominent challenges is the ease of access to information, which often encourages copy-paste practices, particularly when students face academic pressure and limited time to complete assignments. These conditions sometimes lead students to take shortcuts without fully considering the ethical implications

of their actions. In addition, students reported difficulties related to the use of technological tools, such as plagiarism detection software and AI-based writing tools [13][14][15].

Some students tend to rely heavily on these technologies without fully understanding the fundamental principles of originality, critical revision, and ethical responsibility. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the limited availability of practical training and contextual case studies on academic ethics in digital environments contributes to students' difficulties in consistently applying ethical principles in their scientific writing. Easy access to information encourages copy-paste tendencies. Students feel that academic pressure and time constraints sometimes cause them to take shortcuts without considering the ethical consequences[16][17].

C. The Role of Institutions and Lecturers in Promoting Ethical Compliance

Data from interviews with lecturers show that institutions have provided written policies on codes of ethics, but their implementation and socialization still need to be strengthened through more interactive and contextual approaches. Lecturers argue that academic ethics learning should be an integral part of scientific writing courses and should be carried out continuously [18][19]. This is in line with the Academic Integrity Framework, which emphasizes the importance of a supportive academic culture and the active role of educators in building students' ethical awareness.

D. Student Reflections on Academic Credibility

Some students have begun to realize that the application of a code of ethics is not merely an administrative obligation, but an important aspect of building their academic and professional reputation in the future. This is reflected in the statement of one student: "I am now more careful in writing and always make sure that the sources I use are cited correctly. Credibility is important, not only for grades, but also for my future career."

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a significant gap between students' conceptual awareness of academic ethics and their practical ability to apply these principles in scientific writing. Although most students demonstrate basic familiarity with avoiding plagiarism and proper citation, difficulties in distinguishing between acceptable paraphrasing and patchwriting indicate a superficial level of understanding. This aligns with the argument that academic integrity in the digital age requires not only awareness but also higher-order cognitive and linguistic skills [1], [4]. The persistence of such misunderstandings suggests that ethical knowledge is often procedural rather than deeply internalized, which may limit its consistent application in academic tasks [12].

Furthermore, the challenges identified in the digital context reinforce previous studies highlighting how technological advancement simultaneously supports and threatens academic integrity. Easy access to online information encourages dependency on copy-paste practices, particularly under academic pressure and time constraints. This behavior reflects a pragmatic orientation among students, where efficiency is prioritized over ethical consideration [3], [11]. The emergence of AI-based writing tools further complicates this issue, as students may rely on

these technologies without fully understanding the ethical implications related to authorship and originality [14], [15]. As noted in prior research, the lack of clear institutional regulations regarding AI use contributes to ambiguity in ethical decision-making [5], [13].

The findings also emphasize that ethical challenges are not solely individual but are shaped by systemic and educational factors. Limited exposure to practical training and contextual case studies reduces students' ability to translate ethical principles into real writing practices. This supports the view that academic integrity must be taught as an applied competence rather than merely a theoretical concept [6], [17]. In addition, the normalization of unethical shortcuts in high-pressure academic environments may gradually weaken students' moral sensitivity, as suggested in studies on academic behavior in digital learning settings [10], [11].

Institutional and lecturer roles emerge as critical factors in addressing these challenges. Although formal policies on academic ethics exist, their effectiveness depends on how they are communicated and implemented. The findings suggest that passive dissemination of rules is insufficient; instead, interactive, continuous, and contextual approaches are needed. This is consistent with the Academic Integrity Framework, which emphasizes the importance of a supportive academic culture and active educator involvement [2], [18]. Lecturers, as primary facilitators of learning, play a vital role in modeling ethical behavior and integrating ethics into everyday academic practices, including feedback, assessment, and writing instruction [9], [19].

Finally, students' reflections on academic credibility indicate a positive shift toward intrinsic motivation in maintaining ethical standards. When students perceive academic integrity as part of their professional identity rather than merely a compliance requirement, they are more likely to adopt responsible writing practices. This finding supports the notion that credibility is closely linked to long-term academic and career success, reinforcing the importance of internalizing ethical values [6], [7]. Overall, the discussion highlights that strengthening academic ethics in the digital age requires a holistic approach involving cognitive development, institutional support, and the cultivation of ethical awareness as a core component of academic identity.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, this study concludes that students' understanding of the code of ethics for scientific writing remains uneven, with many still facing difficulties in consistently applying ethical principles, particularly in the context of the digital age. The findings highlight that while students are generally aware of basic ethical rules, deeper competencies. The study also identifies key challenges, including the ease of access to digital information that may encourage plagiarism, excessive reliance on technological tools without sufficient understanding, and limited opportunities for practical training and contextual ethics education. These factors collectively hinder the effective implementation of academic integrity in students' writing practices. Furthermore, the role of institutions and lecturers is crucial in strengthening ethical awareness through continuous, interactive, and context-based

learning approaches. Encouragingly, students who internalize ethical principles demonstrate greater awareness of academic credibility as a vital foundation for their future careers and scholarly reputation.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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