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CHRISTIAN FACULTY PERSPECTIVES ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN AN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Introduction

•While the online learning modality has made education accessible to students and faculty, its mainstream delivery has reportedly increased the challenges to academic integrity. Forms of academic integrity breaches such as cheating, plagiarism, and forms of “academic services” to mention a few, have occupied the interests of quite a several scientific investigations. A wide array of research materials took interest in academic integrity from the points of view of students from secular schools and a few in the context of religious institutions of learning. This study turns the perspective of the faculty participants on the same interest, in the context of a Christian school.

Objectives

This study aimed to describe the perspectives of faculty from a Christian private institution of higher learning.

In particular, the study examined the faculty participants' definition of academic integrity, the implications of an online learning modality to academic integrity, and the strategies the participants used to manage academic integrity.

Methodology

- The study used the qualitative descriptive phenomenological research design to vividly describe the faculty perspectives of academic integrity in an online learning platform.
- The study was conducted in a Christian College in 2021 marking its second year of transition to online education modality. Seven faculty members were the participants.
- Using Colaizzi's seven steps of phenomenological analysis, the field texts were read and re-read. Significant statements reflective of the participants' perspectives were explicated and themes were developed. The findings were presented to the participants in the process of member checking.

Findings & Discussion

1. Academic Integrity: A Definition

Academic integrity is a faculty mandate.

- i. Participating faculty in this study, believed that academic integrity is incumbent on them as teaching professionals and that it is synonymous with the teaching profession.
- ii. It is being honest with the teaching mandate that is outlined in the course syllabus. Honesty, the participants emphasized, refers to the performance of all teaching activities, with or without anyone checking or supervising them.
- iii. It requires the preparation of the tasks and delivering them within the students' level of understanding.

Findings & Discussion

1. Academic Integrity: A Definition

Academic integrity is the institution's moral code.

- i. It is described to be the moral code of the institution which delineates the members' interactions and behavior as well as governs its choices and decisions.
- ii. It is crucial, therefore, the participants elaborated, to integrate academic integrity into the institution's core values. This, the participants noted, seeks to influence their sense of responsibility and engender accountability.
- iii. Christian academic institutions which include the locale of this study, hold Biblical values as the foundation of all the policies of the institution. Having been integrated into the normative structure of the learning institution, these values form the faculty's commitment to the performance of their functions.

Findings & Discussion

1. Academic Integrity: A Definition

Academic integrity is spiritual integrity.

The research locale, a Christian higher learning institution, immerses all the school constituents in the Biblical principles and values of life, work, and relationships and expects the translation of all these into a way of life. Considered from this perspective, faculty participants pointed to both the faculty and students' modeling of the spiritual training that they receive and thus related this to academic integrity.

Holder's (2011) definition of spirituality supports this view of the faculty participants and stated that "Christian spirituality is the lived experience of Christian faith and discipleship" (p.5).

Findings & Discussion

2. Academic Integrity in an Online Platform

While acts of dishonesty were considered commonplace among students in traditional classrooms on ground, cases were reported to have increased when online learning has gone mainstream (Ravasco, 2012). Christian academic institutions are not spared from the challenges of academic integrity.

a. An Online Class Attendance

With the student's camera off during online class, his display name may appear for the entire virtual class period but his actual presence off-camera has to be ascertained. Hence, faculty participants expressed reservations about student engagement, student inattention, and distractions considering the limited teacher supervision because of the digital divide.

Findings & Discussion

2. Academic Integrity in an Online Platform

b. Cheating in Examinations

- i. The participants recognized they experienced more difficulty in monitoring student cheating during online examinations than when cheating takes place in a traditional classroom.
- ii. The participants disclosed they could only refer to the students' eye and head movements as these are the only ones that are immediately noticeable on screen.

Findings & Discussion

2. Academic Integrity in an Online Platform

c. The Authenticity of Outputs

i. Academic Paper

Knowledge of a student's academic performance provides the faculty participants with an assessment of the quality of student outputs. Hence, they can tell the student's writing ability, creativity, and the very essence of the paper outputs.

Findings & Discussion

2. Academic Integrity in an Online Platform

c. The Authenticity of Outputs

ii. Video recorded student performance

The participants confided that the inconsistencies they found in the pre-recorded video material made them believe that some students committed acts of dishonesty in the process of preparing the taped performance. The faculty went on to identify some of these, namely: downloading the required piece of music and pretending to play the piano; lip-syncing, or autotuning the piece that was earlier recorded.

Findings & Discussion

3. Managing Academic Integrity in an Online Learning Platform

a. Authentic Assessment

i. Simulation as a Teaching Approach

In simulating real-life contexts, students are left on their own to perform as taught, guided by faculty instructions through an evaluation tool that delineates how they should perform.

ii. Classroom Projects

Students copying one another's work stands a slim chance since the project presentation requires critical thinking and creativity, thus an extended time and effort is essential.

Findings & Discussion

3. Managing Academic Integrity in an Online Learning Platform

a. Authentic Assessment

iii. Time-pressured or time-sensitive written tests

To prevent situations of cheating, time-pressured assessment tests are scheduled. A time-pressured test is bound by a limited amount of time within which the student should complete writing the responses to the test questions.

Findings & Discussion

3. Managing Academic Integrity in an Online Learning Platform

b. Online Class Monitoring Strategy

i. Question-and-answer

method

With student cameras off during online class, student class attention is ascertained as faculty participants employ a quick but frequent check through the question-and-answer evaluation of student participation.

ii. Articulated

feedback

The faculty participants explained that they take all the initiative to reach out to their students out of concern for their welfare and to boost their confidence and develop pride and appreciation for the student outputs.

Findings & Discussion

3. Managing Academic Integrity in an Online Learning Platform

C. Course syllabus as a communication tool for classroom policies

The faculty narrated that as early as the beginning of the school term, they have used the course syllabus in an effort to emphasize academic integrity with their students.

d. Student accountability program

- i. To establish accountability among students, the Intentional Student Mentoring Program (ISMP) is institutionalized. The goal is to check on each student's behavior by making them accountable to the members of the particular group
- ii. The participants believed that they could count on the student's integrity because they are molded in the training for Christian spirituality. Hence, left on their own, the students can judge the right things to do and measure up to the standards of Bible ethics and sound convictions.

Conclusions & Recommendations

- As the faculty have noted the importance of promoting academic integrity via the normative structure of the institution, a revisit of the school's core values to emphasize academic integrity is suggested.
- In addition, faculty course syllabi, student handbooks, as well as student activities may also stipulate policies and programs for the promotion of academic integrity.
- Moreover, an official document similar to an honor code reviewed in this study may likewise be adapted to bind the students to a commitment to uphold integrity and honesty.
- Measures may be taken in consideration of the digital divide that situates both faculty and students. Future research may be undertaken to investigate the effect of a camera-on or camera-off norm in an online class.

Conclusions & Recommendations

- While time-pressured written examinations may lessen the chances of student cheating, it will provide a more scientific basis to institutionalize it as an instructional approach. Other variables that relate to time-sensitive tests may be considered for future studies. These variables may include student performance on time-pressured examinations, student anxiety when taking time-pressured tests, and criteria to consider in constructing time-pressured written tests in an online learning modality.
- The study revealed the varied pedagogies the faculty have adopted to ascertain the authenticity of the student outputs. It is suggested therefore that the institutional training programs for faculty development consider software applications and appropriate technological approaches to help faculty enhance the delivery of instruction and determine the genuineness and originality of student outputs.