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## Writing Right: Academic Dishonesty in Pre-Service Students' English Writings

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**Abstract.** This qualitative-phenomenological study aims to explore how pre-service BSEd-English students understand academic dishonesty in English writing. It looks to their level of awareness on academic dishonesty and its forms in English writing, their perception on academic dishonesty and its forms, the factors affecting their awareness and perceptions, and the strategies to promote academic integrity and prevent academic dishonesty. A total of 21 participants participated in focus-group discussions. The findings of the study were coded, analyzed, and put into themes using Clark-Braun Thematic Analysis. It was found that pre-service BSEd-English students are aware of the existence of academic dishonesty and its forms in English writing. The common forms identified are plagiarism, improper citation, collusion, contract cheating, unsupported claims and exaggerated results, and self-paraphrasing. While there is awareness on academic dishonesty, the participants perceive it is wrong, serious, deceitful, and both half wrong and half useful. These awareness and perceptions are influenced by factors concerning pressure to succeed and to meet standards, fear of being criticized, laziness, and normalization of engaging to academic dishonesty acts. With these results, it is recommended to develop a comprehensive educational program that goes beyond simply defining academic dishonesty. Teachers must be a model of integrity, especially to their students. Also, clear and consistently enforced policies on academic dishonesty must be implemented. Finally, learning avenues and opportunities must be created to train students to write with integrity.

**Keywords:** Academic dishonesty; English writing; academic integrity; pre-service teachers

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## 1. Introduction

Academic integrity is a vital ingredient to ensure educational success. It focuses on the commitment of the students in honesty and ethics in regard to their outputs, whether written or oral. Further, it reflects the kind of mechanism that an educative institution adopts to ensure that the work submitted, or the activity performed really is the work of the learners and truly reflects their learned competencies. As students navigate the world of English writing, they are being challenged with the expectation and standards to produce authentic work requiring their diligence, critical thinking and deep understanding in academic activities. However, academic dishonesty poses significant threats and challenges in educational contexts in regard to authentic writing.

These challenges include various forms of academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism, cheating, academic fraud, and academic misconduct (Sabli et al., 2016). Plagiarism specifically occurs when a student copy-pastes text or simply substitutes some words without acknowledging the original source (Fawkner & Keremidchieva, 2004). Cheating can manifest in multiple ways, including exam fraud, minor and major plagiarism, and unacceptable assistance (Sheard & Dick, 2003). Academic fraud is characterized by an individual exploiting academic performance for personal gain (Malgwi & Rakovski, 2009a), whereas academic misconduct is an action that violates academic integrity within an educational setting. Studies have shown a notable increase in instances of plagiarism and other forms of cheating among students (McCabe et al., 2006), leading to severe consequences such as expulsion, degree revocation, and formal plagiarism cases (The Australian, 2012; Schriever, 2013; Trex, 2009).

This study aims to explore the understanding of pre-service BSEd-English students through their awareness of different forms of academic misconduct, their perceptions of its implications, and their personal strategies for maintaining ethical writing standards, which is crucial for developing targeted interventions. This research is particularly relevant given the future role these students will play as educators, emphasizing the importance of fostering ethical writing practices among future teachers. By gaining a deeper understanding of their perspectives, more effective strategies can be developed and adopted to promote academic integrity and support students in developing authentic writing skills.

The study is anchored on self-determination theory (SDT) by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan which deals with the factors influencing the motivation, placing emphasis on autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Satisfying this lead high intrinsic motivation results in improved performance, persistence, and holistic well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2017). Self-determination theory offers a valuable framework for understanding how student motivation connects with academic integrity in English writing. It identifies three key psychological needs that drive motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This study explores how these needs shape students' views on academic integrity, focusing on their sense of autonomy by examining how much they value ethical writing and feeling empowered to maintain integrity based on personal values rather than external pressures. Additionally, it assesses students' confidence in their ability to write

ethically and recognize academic dishonesty, revealing their belief in their skills and knowledge related to maintaining integrity. The study also highlights the influence of peers and faculty, demonstrating how social connections and a supportive environment can enhance motivation for engaging in ethical writing.

The findings can lead to recommendations for educational interventions that promote autonomy, such as offering choices in learning materials, building competence through training on proper citation, and foster relatedness by encouraging collaborative projects. By exploring how meeting the three needs improves students' ethical writing behaviors, the research suggests that when students feel autonomous, competent, and connected, they are more likely to embrace and practice academic integrity. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of constructive feedback from peers and teachers in motivating students to uphold academic integrity, as positive support enhances their confidence and commitment to ethical practices.

Overall, the focus on student's lived experiences aligns well with the empirical nature of SDT, which seeks to understand individuals' motivations. By framing research questions through the lens of SDT, the study aims to uncover not only what students know about academic integrity but also how their motivations and social contexts influence their writing practices. Integrating SDT enriches the scope of the study by emphasizing the essential psychological needs that drive students' engagement with academic integrity and in providing a structured approach to analyzing their motivations and behaviors regarding ethical writing.

The study aims to explore how pre-service BSEd-English students at a state university understand academic dishonesty in relation to their English writing. It looks to answer the following questions:

- a. What is the level of awareness of pre-service BSEd-English students on academic dishonesty and its forms in English writing?
- b. What is the perception of pre-service BSEd-English students on academic dishonesty and its forms in English writing?
- c. What are the factors affecting the awareness and perception of pre-service BSEd-English students on academic dishonesty in English writing?
- d. What are the strategies to promote academic integrity and prevent academic dishonesty?

## **2. Literature Review**

McCabe et al. (2006) performed a foundational study involving a large-scale survey of college students, focusing on their perceptions of academic dishonesty and the prevalence of cheating among peers. The study found that students often underestimate the extent of cheating in their institutions, indicating a gap in awareness regarding the seriousness of academic misconduct.

Further Roig's (2001) research specifically addresses plagiarism and students' understanding of what constitutes proper citation practices. It noted that many students were not adequately informed about academic integrity guidelines, which led to unintentional plagiarism. The study emphasizes the necessity for educational interventions to improve understanding of proper citation. Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz (2016) examined how reliance on digital tools affects students' understanding of academic writing and plagiarism. The authors argue that increased use of online resources can lead to both intentional and unintentional plagiarism due to a lack of understanding of appropriate citation and paraphrasing techniques.

Cotton et al. (2023) emphasized the critical role of knowledge dissemination about academic integrity and indicated that students' awareness levels vary significantly based on demographic factors, educational background, and the institution's approach to teaching academic integrity. Recommendations include enhancing training programs in universities to address these gaps. Mulenga and Shilongo's (2024) study explored the impact of peer influence and institutional policies on the awareness of academic dishonesty. It suggests that students are more likely to be aware of and adhere to academic integrity when there is a strong culture of honesty promoted within their academic environment.

Looking at students' perspectives, Seldman (2004) found that while students can identify cheating and plagiarism, they often have a lenient view of its seriousness depending on the context. This insight reveals that awareness does not necessarily correlate with a strong commitment to avoiding dishonesty. Aligned to this, Sheard and Dick (2003) found that university students often confuse different forms of academic dishonesty, not recognizing nuances between variations of cheating and plagiarism, which suggests that educational initiatives need to clarify these distinctions. Further, Fawkner and Keremidchieva (2004) researched how students perceive the act of plagiarism in a digital age and examined how this perception might affect their writing practices. They found a significant discrepancy between students' self-reported understanding of plagiarism policies versus their actual compliance.

The above cited research indicates that various factors contribute to students' engagement in academic dishonesty. A significant issue is the lack of understanding regarding proper citations and responsible use of online resources, which can inadvertently lead to plagiarism (Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz, 2016; Roig, 2001). This gap in knowledge may prevent students from distinguishing acceptable academic practices from unacceptable ones, thereby impairing their ability to maintain integrity in their writing (Cotton et al., 2023; Mulenga & Shilongo, 2024). Additionally, students often face challenges in developing authentic writing skills while adhering to academic integrity standards (Seldman, 2004). Various pressures, including the need to succeed and meet parental expectations, coupled with opportunities for misconduct and rationalizations for unethical behavior, can lead students to engage in academic dishonesty (Ramos, 2003).

The interplay of these factors highlights the significance of understanding students' awareness and perceptions of academic dishonesty to address the issue effectively (McCabe et al., 2006; Seldman, 2004). Many students struggle with the concept of plagiarism and proper citation, leading them to rely on online writing tools to complete their assignments (Lunsford & Ruskiewicz, 2016). This reliance often results in unintentional or intentional plagiarism, as students may not possess the necessary skills to cite sources accurately or paraphrase appropriately (Roig, 2001).

To mitigate these challenges, researchers such as Cotton et al. (2023) recommend developing comprehensive policies and procedures, providing training and support, and employing various methods to detect and prevent cheating. Additionally, promoting the responsible and ethical use of AI applications, as well as educating students on proper paraphrasing and summarization techniques, is essential. Mulenga and Shilongo (2024) further assert that addressing plagiarism in universities can involve information dissemination, capacity building, and implementing plagiarism detection software to foster a culture of academic integrity.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The study utilizes a qualitative phenomenological approach focusing on the lived experiences of pre-service BSEd-English students in a state university in connection to their awareness, perceptions, and factors on academic dishonesty and strategies toward academic integrity in their English writing. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology puts emphasis on bracketing and the collection of rich, descriptive data to reveal the essence of a phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2017) added that qualitative phenomenological research focuses on understanding the lived experiences of individuals in a specific phenomenon. By engaging in phenomenological research, this study seeks to uncover the significance of experiences related to academic integrity, as well as the personal meanings associated with these experiences.

To accurately gather the lived experiences of the participants, the study observed key phenomenological methodologies including bracketing and researcher reflexivity. In the bracketing, preconceptions, biases, and assumptions on academic dishonesty were identified and avoided to not influence the data collection and analysis. Prior to data collection, the researcher listed potential personal perspectives, biases, and assumptions related to the research study so that data would not be influenced or affected. Further, this was observed during the conduct of the focus group discussion as well as in data analysis to ensure a more authentic report of participants' experiences.

#### **3.2 Participants and Sampling Design**

Purposive sampling was used in choosing the participants with the following selection criteria: a. Participants must be officially enrolled as pre-service BSEd-English students in a state university; b. Participants have varied academic performance levels; c. Participants have experience in various academic writing

assignment such as essays, research papers, reports, presentations, and articles; d. Participants are willing to participate in the study and have given their informed consent; e. Participants come from different backgrounds (gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural experiences); f. Participants must be available during the focus group discussion; and g. Participants are willing to share their experiences and perceptions with honesty and without fear of prejudice.

The identified selection criteria of participants in this study emphasizes the importance of enrolled pre-service BSEd-English students to ensure they possess relevant coursework and practical experience in academic writing, which enriches their insights into academic dishonesty. Including students with varied academic performance levels captures diverse perspectives, necessary for understanding the relationship between academic success and ethical writing. Participants' experience with different writing assignments provides contextual knowledge about academic integrity, while their willingness to participate and provide informed consent ensures ethical research practices.

Additionally, diversity in backgrounds enhances the quality of qualitative data, allowing for an exploration of how factors like gender and socioeconomic status influence perceptions of academic integrity. Availability for focus group discussions supports structured dialogue, fostering richer interactions, and a safe environment encourages honest sharing of experiences, essential for obtaining authentic data reflective of students' attitudes toward academic misconduct.

### **3.3 Research Instrument**

This study employed focus group discussion (FGD) as the primary method for data collection, aimed at exploring the lived experiences of fourth-year BSEd-English students concerning academic integrity in their writing practices. FGDs are essential for enhancing the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research, particularly in studies examining students' experiences related to academic integrity in English writing. They facilitate rich, contextual data collection that captures nuanced insights, offering depth often missed in quantitative methods.

The focus group discussions were guided by a structured set of open-ended interview questions designed to facilitate in-depth discussions on academic dishonesty. These questions were developed through a review of relevant literature, which helped identify common themes that needed to be addressed. Additionally, the questions underwent expert validation by educational professionals, including the language and thesis writing instructors, to ensure clarity and relevance. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot focus group discussion was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the questions, allowing for necessary refinements in language and approach to ensure they were clear and engaging for participants.

### **3.4 Data Gathering Procedure**

The data collection procedure for this study was meticulously designed to address four distinct research questions (RQs) focusing on the awareness and perceptions of academic dishonesty among fourth-year Bachelor of Secondary Education

(BSED) English students. To address RQ1, the researcher conducted FGDs utilizing a visual prompt method. During the discussion, visual prompts containing clearly defined examples of different types of academic dishonesty (e.g., direct plagiarism, mosaic plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and collusion) were presented to the participants. After which, the researcher engaged the participants in open-ended questions after each example, such as "What do you think about this statement?" and "Can anyone identify which form of academic dishonesty this is an example of?" This encouraged reflection and discussion on students' understanding of academic dishonesty. The discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis, ensuring that participants' insights were accurately captured.

For RQ2, participants were first presented with the previously discussed examples, then guided to reflect on their severity. Questions such as, "How severe do you think each form of academic dishonesty is?" and "What implications do you believe academic dishonesty has for students and educators?" were posed to stimulate critical thinking about personal beliefs and societal impacts. Participants' responses were coded for thematic analysis to identify trends in perception.

Addressing RQ3 involved exploring various influences on students' understanding. The researcher used open-ended questions such as "What factors do you think contribute to your understanding of academic dishonesty?" which were initiated after reviewing the visual prompts. This allowed participants to reflect on influences like personal experiences and institutional practices.

To explore RQ4, participants were questions like, "What specific methods do you employ in your writing to maintain academic integrity?" encouraging them to share personal strategies and insights from their academic experiences. The findings from these discussions were analyzed to determine common strategies and gaps in awareness or implementation.

In gathering the data, a list of pre-service BSEd-English students were requested and obtained from the SIPP coordinator of the program. Initial screening was then conducted based on academic performance, identifying students with varying academic performance levels to ensure a diverse range of perspectives in the study. Potential participants were contacted via email/messenger/through the SIPP Coordinator, explaining the purpose of the focus group discussion and the selection criteria. Emphasis was placed on the importance of diversity, the need for honest and open sharing of experiences, and the participant's willingness to participate in the study. A brief questionnaire was included to gather initial information about the participants' experience with various academic writing assignments.

Based on the responses to the questionnaire, participants were selected for the focus group discussion, ensuring that the group met the criteria. A focus group discussion was scheduled at a time convenient for most of the selected participants. At the beginning of the discussion, the study's purpose and ethical

considerations were emphasized with informed consent obtained from each participant before the discussion began. This included a clear explanation of the study's goals, the participants' rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. Finally, the availability of all selected participants for the focus group discussion was confirmed. Other details pertaining to the focus group discussion and the study were provided later by the researcher.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

In analyzing the data collected, Clark-Braun's thematic analysis was utilized. The researcher familiarized herself with the data through repeated listening to the recorded focus group discussion and maintained an audit trail to document the analysis process. Initial codes were generated by the researcher with the help of an external data analyst and with a peer coder independently coding a subset of the data to ensure intercoder agreement. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved to enhance reliability.

Similar codes were subsequently grouped into possible themes which were then reviewed against the data for coherence. Peer debriefing sessions validated the emerging themes. The themes were then refined, named, and supported with representative quotations. Throughout, an audit trail was maintained and discussions with the external data analyst helped ensure credibility and dependability. These were done to ensure the trustworthiness, validity, and transparent documentation of the results.

## **4. Results and Findings**

### **4.1 Level of Awareness of Students on Academic Dishonesty and its Forms in English Writing**

The students were aware of the existence of academic dishonesty and its forms in English writing in the presented text or situation during the focus-group discussion. Participants identified specific violations, namely on plagiarism and citation, unsupported claims and fabricated results, collusion, contract cheating, and self-plagiarism. With the identified awareness, some participants shared that certain forms of dishonesty are associated with being resourceful or leading to something beneficial like self-paraphrasing or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to generate ideas, indicating a different perception of academic misconduct.

In example number 1 presented during the focus-group discussion, 14 out of 21 participants identified that there was academic dishonesty. Three participants identified that the form of academic dishonesty concerned plagiarism and lack of citations. This demonstrates a strong awareness of plagiarism related to direct copying or near-identical paraphrasing without proper attribution. Students also recognized that even minor alterations to original text needs citations.

In example number 2, 20 out of 21 participants identified that there was academic dishonesty. They also identified the form of dishonesty as lack of citations. It was mentioned during the FGD that students might not put the source in the belief that it is general knowledge (PSET18). Also, students might not to put the source so as to create an impression that it is his or her own work (PSET8). It was also

added that students felt that putting a citation was evident copying. The findings highlight a nuanced understanding on the need for citation which the students recognized. However, there was a misunderstanding on the idea of citing in connection to general knowledge or as an impression of originality.

For examples 3 and 4, 20 out of 21 participants mentioned that there was academic dishonesty. Two participants were uncertain as to their answer. It was explained during the FGD that academic dishonesty is based on the results which were not mentioned in the example (PSET18). With this awareness, students understood that claims, especially those involving data or statistics, must be supported by credible evidence. Students recognized the importance of backing up results with verifiable sources.

For the given scenario in example 5, all the 21 participants said that there was academic dishonesty. A participant mentioned that there was collusion (PSET2). Students who paraphrase the work of the other students say that they do it just to get an idea. This indicates the awareness of collusion as a form of academic misconduct where an individual's work is sacrificed for collaboration.

In example 6, all the 21 participants identified academic dishonesty which is a form of contract cheating. This means that students tend to buy ready-made materials or avail the writing services of other people to do the written work for them. This shows a clear understanding of contract cheating as a serious form of academic dishonesty. Students recognized that submitting work completed by another person is a violation of academic integrity.

For the last example, 21 of the participants identified the academic dishonesty in the form of self-paraphrasing or self-plagiarism wherein students paraphrase their previous work or written outputs for another subject or requirement. It is often associated as "self-recycling" or students being resourceful (PSET16). This shows an understanding of self-plagiarism. However, views about this were varied among participants in terms of reusing something that had been previously submitted as still a question of academic integrity.

In the study by Kim and Lee (2020), students often viewed certain forms of dishonesty as pragmatic rather than as morally wrong especially when the dishonesty acts were associated with achieving academic success. This is supported by Zembat and Gencel (2020) who found that students tend to normalize behaviors like self-plagiarism when connected to something convenient or harmless. This idea challenges the initiatives to promote academic integrity. The seriousness of academic dishonesty in English writings was found to be varied among the participants. Akcayir et al. (2019) stated that perceiving dishonesty as bad or good leads to challenging situations, which creates blurred perceptions on promoting academic integrity.

The findings show the level of awareness of academic dishonesty in English writing with the participants able to identify the situations of dishonesty as well their forms. However, the findings also show that there is a blurred line between

what is acceptable and unacceptable, especially when it concerns convenience and usefulness. This level of awareness requires not only proper regulations but also a comprehensive information dissemination in connection to ethical boundaries in academic writings in English.

#### **4.2. Perception of the Students on Academic Dishonesty and its Forms in English Writing**

The participants saw academic dishonesty in English writings as variously a serious thing, wrong but sometimes helpful, and a form of deceit. The majority of the participants saw academic dishonesty in English written outputs as a serious thing. It was something was alarming for them down to various factors such as technology, applications, and the ready availability of the materials.

It was mentioned during the FGD that, with the advancement of technology, academic dishonesty is becoming worse which leads to abusive use (PSET17). Academic dishonesty was perceived as a serious matter because it gives false feedback in connection to the writing ability of the students (PSET1). The sorry state of writing in connection to academic dishonesty was shared in that instead of showing the writing skills and writing styles of the students, it was being faked by an engagement with forms of academic dishonesty (PSET19).

*“Academic dishonesty is not a product of one’s thinking. It is an idea of others that students get.” (PSET17)*

*“Academic dishonesty is something wrong. Putting it to number is 90% wrong and 10% helpful.” (PSET1)*

*“Academic dishonesty mirrors that students are not using their own intelligence to their written outputs and depend to what is available.” (PSET19)*

*“Academic dishonesty specially in writing is the worst thing done by student and teacher. Knowing that the resources are one click away that can help you write own your own without committing plagiarism and copying.” (PSET4)*

This finding mirrors the recognition of the serious effects of dishonest academic acts and proposes that academic dishonesty is an alarming act that must dealt with properly and seriously. McCabe et al. (2019) supported the findings when they reported the awareness of the severity of academic dishonesty correlated to lower engagement such as in behaviors. Mast and Mouchant (2021) added that students’ perception of dishonesty impacts their reputation and self-confidence, which influences their decisions and actions.

Academic dishonesty is also perceived as a deceit. A participant (PSET9) stated that academic dishonesty is deceitful and fools the teachers and most especially the students as to their writing abilities.

*“It is deceitful. You are not only deceiving the teacher but most especially yourself.” (PSET9)*

Students see academic dishonesty in English writing like plagiarism and fabricating results as an act of betrayal not only to their teachers but most of all to themselves. Khan et al. (2019) discussed that students' perception of academic dishonesty as deceit influenced their moral reasoning. This suggests the idea of emphasizing integrity and self-respect can be a way to discourage dishonest actions. Additionally, Mast and Mouchant (2021) stressed the significance of moral education, which could foster the value of honesty intrinsically.

Another perception on academic dishonesty in English written outputs is that it is wrong but sometimes useful. This is connected to the blurred line identified in research question 1 regarding the confusion of the participants as to what is acceptable and not in connection to the convenience and usefulness it affords. A participant (PSET2) concretized this perception by saying that academic dishonesty is 90% wrong and 10% good for it gives a guide or pattern to the writers. A participant (PSET16) added that academic dishonesty is 50% wrong and 50% beneficial because it is still a form of copying but quite beneficial because it helps the students to have an idea about a topic they going to write about.

*"Academic dishonesty is something wrong. Putting it to number is 90% wrong and 10% helpful." (PSET2)*

*"Academic dishonesty is 50% wrong and 50% good; 50% wrong if that person intentionally did the copying. It is 50 % good for it helps a student to get idea or knowledge especially as to the topics that are challenging."  
(PSET16)*

Students recognized the ethical break involving acts of academic dishonesty in English writing. Knowing that it is wrong, they sometimes see it as beneficial in achieving their academic success especially when they face writing challenges. This contradiction reflects a practical attitude that is often seen in academic contexts. Huang et al. (2020) found the same results as students defend cheating acts when under pressure to meet academic standards. Also, Lee et al. (2019) indicated that students may view dishonesty as the fastest way to come up with a product or outcome in a limited time or challenging situations.

The perceptions of academic dishonesty as something wrong and serious, a form of deceit and half wrong and half beneficial shows the complexity with which students see academic dishonesty in English writings. While they see academic dishonesty in writing as something wrong, serious, and deceitful, students tend to justify their engagements to these academically dishonest acts to pass, meet the academic stands, as well as survive in different academic challenges. These perceptions need to be intervened in incorporation with moral education, building a culture of academic integrity, and proper and rightful ways to meet pressures and challenges.

### 4.3. Factors Affecting the Awareness and Perception of Students on Academic Dishonesty in English Writing

The participants were amenable of the notion of academic dishonesty in English writing due to several factors: pressure to succeed and meet standards, laziness, afraid to be criticized, and the normalization of engaging in academic dishonesty.

One of the major factors that affect students' awareness and perception on academic dishonesty in English writing concerns pressure to succeed and meeting different academic standards. It was elaborated that students engage in academic dishonesty acts to pass their subjects or courses (PSET19). Students tend to want to meet to the standards of the subject, teachers, and even their families. Added to those is the pressure to prove themselves. Comparing themselves to others leads to dishonest acts. It was added during the FGD that teachers' standards are an additional pressure. Students tend to plagiarize to pass and to satisfy their teachers' standards (PSET10).

*"The idea to pass the subject. Students tend to cope to the standards of the subject, teachers, and even the family. Also, the pressure to prove oneself. They way you compare yourself and the image you want other to see lead to academic dishonesty." (PSET19)*

*"Teacher's factor. There are some teachers that are difficult to satisfy. Students tend to plagiarize to pass and to satisfy teachers' standards. But we must consider that students differ in skills and interest." (PSET10)*

The findings show that high expectation from self, family, and academic sources creates pressure to "rationalize" academically dishonest behaviors in English writings. They note this as the fastest and easiest way to satisfy different demands of life. Sevansson et al. (2020) found that students under pressure are more susceptible to cheating especially when they note success as crucial for their dreams and future. With these pressures and standards, students increased their motivation to engage in forms of academic dishonesty to pass or to succeed.

Another factor leading to academic dishonesty engagement in English writing is laziness. A participant (PSET1) stated that intelligent students still plagiarize or do forms of academic dishonesty not because they are academically poor but because they are lazy. Further, students always resort to something fast or instant (PSET6).

*"Laziness/ Procrastination. I know someone who is intelligent and when there are written activities, he will resort to ChatGPT. And the student's will reason that I am lazy to think. It is easy to use ChatGPT because you will simply copy-paste." (PSET1)*

*"It is fast and readily available." (PSET6)*

The findings identify that some students justify their dishonest acts through laziness or lack of motivation. They resort to easy solutions or options to avoid exerting effort. This attitude leads to lower sense of responsibility and promotes

use of the easy or fastest options that technology and AI-generated applications offer. Chen and Huang (2021) highlight that perceptions of laziness and procrastination are significant reasons behind dishonest actions as students resort to effortless options to complete their academic writing requirements.

Fear of being criticized impacts the decision of the students to engage in academic writing dishonesty. Students nowadays are afraid to make mistakes; they are afraid to be labelled “poor” and ‘weak” (PSET1). With this fear, they then copy-paste from different artificial intelligence sources to give the impression that they are good.

*“Lack of self-confidence. Students are afraid to commit mistakes, to be labelled poor, and even rejection. That is why students tend to resort to dishonesty.” (PSET1)*

Based on the findings, out of their fear of failure or rejection, students resort to dishonesty. In addition, the findings reflect the lack of confidence that their abilities are sufficient to meet academic demands. Kumar and Singh (2020) explained that fear of something can be correlated in doing something not acceptable or right.

The final factor is the normalization of doing academically dishonest acts. Students’ engagement in academic writing dishonesty is influenced by the idea that it is commonly done (PSET8). The idea is that nothing is wrong since it is commonly done by students and even teachers. A participant (PSET19) added that they even have teachers who they find are committing plagiarism, with no citations, and even contract cheating. This gives them the impression that since it is “common thing” it is fine to do it as well.

*“It is done by all. The idea of students that it is not wrong since it is commonly used by the students and even teachers.” (PSET8)*

*“Even teachers use AI; therefore, it is conceived as okay. There are even teachers who promote to resort to the use of AI. We even have a teacher who asked us to do a lesson plan through AI.” (PSET8)*

The findings show the sad mentality of the students on academic dishonesty. From the narratives above, students perceive dishonesty as commonplace or an acceptable way of things, which influences their engagement in it. Seeing their teachers or peers demonstrate or tolerate academic dishonesty gives the students the motivation to do the same thing. The idea of “common thing” lessens the way people see and give importance to academic integrity. Graham et al. (2020) argue that when dishonesty is seen as a routine or accepted behaviour it becomes a norm. Seeing it as a norm makes it very difficult to promote integrity.

Factors influencing students’ perceptions of academic dishonesty in writing can be summarized as deriving from something personal, psychological, and even social. The pressures they must meet, the fear the students are avoiding, the

laziness within them, and the normalization of dishonesty are reasons for them seeing academic dishonesty in English writing as something acceptable.

#### **4.4. Strategies or Interventions to Promote Academic Integrity and Prevent Academic Dishonesty**

The participants identified different strategies or interventions to promote academic integrity and prevent academic dishonesty. These are practice and skill development, reflection and intervention, in-class writing activities, and clear and stricter regulations and penalties on academic dishonesty.

Practice and skills development is needed to make students confident in their English writing skills. Students must be practiced, especially in writing, to gain confidence toward the skills (PSET17). Teachers should design activities and drills for the students to be acquainted and competent with different writing approaches and tips. The use of journaling could be the best way to practice writing (PSET2).

*“Practice. Students must be practiced. Teachers have to conduct drills for the students to acquainted and competent with writing.” (PSET17)*

*“Using journaling to practice the writing skills of the students.” (PSET2)*

Consistent practice through drills or targeted exercises develops students’ English writing competencies. These strategies could make the students more confident and less likely to engage in something instant. Schunk et al. (2019) emphasized that mastery learning, and deliberate practice contribute to improved writing skills in inculcating academic integrity. Chen and Zhang (2021) added that as students become more proficient the less that they will think about engaging in cheating and plagiarism.

Another strategy is on reflection and intervention. Written outputs of the students must be a reflection of the manner by which teachers teach as well as the writing styles and abilities of the students. With this reflection, proper interventions could be made to better help the students. If academic dishonesty exists in a class, the teacher must reflect on how strategies could be adjusted to lessen or avoid it (PSET20).

*“If there is academic dishonesty, it must be a way for reflection for the teachers and students.” (PSET20)*

Doing reflection allows for processing of things and internationalization of what is happening and needs to be done. Teachers’ interventions such as one-on-one reports and reflective prompts can correct misconceptions and promote academic integrity. Reed et al. (2019) emphasized that the reflective process allows people to analyze and process things, leading to ethical awareness and reducing acts of dishonesty. Whitley and Keith-Splegel (2020) highlighted that intervention strategies that involve unethical ways positively influence students’ perceptions of academic integrity.

In-class writing activity could help students do it on their own. Teachers can ask to complete writing activities in the classroom in real time without the help of any gadget or application (PSET18). This will increase the confidence of the students toward writing and even in themselves.

*"In a classroom setting, the teacher can do writing activities inside the classroom within the schedule without any gadgets/applications."*  
(PSET18)

Doing in-class writing activity within classroom setting serves as a proactive approach to promote academic integrity. These activities give students the opportunities to practice authentic writing under supervision which lessens their chance to plagiarize or to engage in dishonest practices. Dewi and Tanjung (2020) affirm that in-class writing enhances students' understanding and competency in English writing skills. This inculcates a sense of ownership to their work as well as confidence in applying the skill. Harris and Pitts (2019) added that in-class activities give a chance for immediate teachers' feedback, which is important in guiding students' ethical behavior.

Clear regulations and penalties are also suggested to avoid academic dishonesty. It was stated that clear and stricter regulations and penalties regarding academic dishonesty must be implemented (PSET10). Chances are fine to help students learn to write with integrity; however, if it is only chances, it may lead to abuse. Restrictions must be made to put a limitation or stop to it.

*"We must create regulations to academic dishonesty. If it is just chances, students tend to abuse that. Restrictions must be done. It is a disgrace that must not be tolerated."* (PSET10)

Establishing policies and penalties for academic dishonesty sets clear boundaries for students. Clear regulations help students understand what actions are unacceptable and fosters a culture of responsibility. McCabe and Trevino (2019) find that universities with well-defined, consistently implemented academic integrity policies experience lower rates of academic dishonesty acts. Spear and Mergen (2021) explained that the awareness of consequence influences ethical decision-making among students.

Preventing academic dishonesty and promoting academic integrity could be done through different pedagogical strategies and policy enforcement. Adopting these strategies and enforcing some policies could create a supportive academic environment helping students to write right, to write responsibly, and to write with integrity.

## **5. Discussion**

Academic integrity is one of the core pillars in ensuring educational quality and success. However, today, this pillar is being threatened by different forms and practices of academic dishonesty. It is important to see how future educators perceive academic dishonesty, the different influencing factors, and ways to ensure academic integrity, especially in their English writings.

The research revealed a high level of awareness among participants regarding the existence and different forms of academic dishonesty in English writings. Some of the identified forms concern plagiarism, issues with proper citations, collusion, contract cheating, and self-plagiarism. Identifying this level of awareness is important but does not directly translate to the involvement of the participants in the said violations (Seldman, 2004).

The pre-service BSEd-English students perceived academic dishonesty as “wrong,” “serious,” and “deceitful.” However, some participants saw it as “useful” or “helpful,” leading to a justification of academically dishonest acts. This finding strongly connects to the findings of Kim and Lee (2020) and Zembat and Gencel (2020) which stated that students tend to normalize dishonest acts due to the benefits they gain after the conduct such practice. Further, Akcayir et al. (2019) perceived that the result of something outweighs whether an act is good or bad.

Various factors were identified influencing the engagement of pre-service BSEd-English students in academically dishonest acts. The pressure to succeed and meet academic standards was identified as the most significant factor. These standards and pressures are found to be sourced from teachers, subjects, and students. From the lens of self-determination theory (SDT), students feel forced to perform in response to high expectations or external demands, and their sense of autonomy is lessened. Students resort to plagiarism or cheating to pass or to satisfy the set standards. This illustrates the behavior driven by external aspects rather than intrinsic motivation. This aligns to the study of Sevansson et al. (202) which found that pressure increases susceptibility to cheating when success is perceived to be challenging or crucial.

Laziness and fear to be criticized are other factors identified in engagement with academic dishonesty in English writings, creating issues about students’ sense of competence, especially in writing in English. These factors indicate low motivation for the effort required in authentic writing and fear of having not-well written outputs leading to dishonest shortcuts to finish the assigned output. This lack of confidence in their ability to write ethically is connected to the common struggle with proper citations and paraphrasing techniques (Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz, 2016; Roig, 2001).

Normalizing academic dishonesty in writing is also a key factor. The perception of the “majority are doing it” is related to acceptance of doing it even if it is found to be wrong. This compromises the need for relatedness in the lens of SDT suggesting that the academic community does not strongly impose academic integrity. This supports Graham et al.’s (2020) finding that when something bad or wrong is seen as an “acceptable wrong” or a routine practice, the motivation to observe the right things or integrity norms decline.

In addressing these challenges, the participants identified strategic intervention for fostering academic integrity in English writing. The use of practice and skills development is highlighted, which can be contributory in building competence

among future educators. Schunk et al. (2019) and Chen and Zhang (2021) emphasized that mastery in learning and practicing a skill reduce the engagement to cheat. Further, doing reflection and intervention allows teachers and students to process ethical concerns and adjust pedagogical approaches to foster autonomy as well as having a supportive academic environment relative to giving constructive feedback. Reed et al. (2019) and Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2020) highlighted the benefit of the reflective process in improving ethical awareness.

In addition, in-class writing activities serve as a proactive strategy to promote and ensure authenticity through the supervision of a teacher or anticipates limiting the opportunity to cheat or to plagiarize. In doing so, students build ownership and competence as to their written outputs (Dewi & Tanjung, 2020). Another suggestion is for clear and stricter regulations and penalties for academically dishonest acts. This is necessary to set ethical boundaries as well as the consequences once engaged with such acts. McCabe and Trevino (2019) noted that institutions with well-defined and consistently implemented policies had lower rates of engagement to a violation.

As educative institution and implementers of curriculum, it must be assured and ensured that students' academic outputs mirror their actual skills and competence. It is in such manner that the learning can be really assessed and proper feedback to the pedagogies could be gained as a basis for proper intervention or improvement.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study aimed to explore how pre-service Based-English students understand academic dishonesty in connection to their English writings. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through focus-group discussion involving 21 participants, with analysis guided by Clark-Braun's thematic analysis. The findings revealed that pre-service Based-English students are aware of various forms of academic dishonesty including plagiarism, proper citation, contract cheating, collusion, unsupported claims and exaggerated results, and self-paraphrasing. Despite seeing forms of academic dishonesty as serious and deceitful, the pre-service Based-English students also see it as helpful. Students often justify dishonest behaviors due to pressure, laziness, fear, and the normalization of dishonest practices within an academic setting.

The implications of these findings suggest that promoting academic integrity requires comprehensive strategies beyond merely defining dishonest acts. Educational institutions should develop clear, consistently enforced policies, and foster an environment where teachers serve as role models of integrity. Further, curricula should include targeted interventions like skills development, reflective activities, and in-class writing exercises that build students' confidence and understanding of ethical writing. Addressing various factors influencing engagement in academic dishonesty practices can cultivate a culture of academic honesty and responsibility among future educators.

Despite its valuable insights, the study has limitations in its sample size and locale, which may affect the generalizations of the results. Future research could

investigate further in regard to different institutions and incorporate quantitative methods to verify and complement these findings. Conducting longitudinal studies could also assess the effectiveness of proposed strategies over time. Generally, fostering a culture of academic integrity is crucial in shaping ethically responsible future educators and maintaining quality educational standards. Academic dishonesty could be addressed by utilizing different pedagogical strategies as well as enforcing policies to clarify ethical boundaries and foster a culture of integrity that promotes ethical actions and decisions among students.

### **7. Conflict of Interest, Acknowledgments, etc.**

The paper does not have any conflict of interest.

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