

Academic cheating in the context of a pandemic: report of physiotherapy students.

Engaño académico en contexto de pandemia: reporte de estudiantes de fisioterapia.

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Abstract: Introduction: Within the framework of the current health scenario, medical education has had to align its training processes based on confinement and the e-learning modality. SARS COV-2 prompted the massive use of technology to continue with the different programs, which has not only meant a change in the modality of content delivery, clinical practices and evaluation, but also a significant increase in academic cheating behaviors by the student body. Objective: To describe the report of second-year health students on academic cheating in the context of a pandemic. Method: Qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study with content analysis technique, through data collection by individual interview to a sample of 73 second-year physiotherapy students at the Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción, Chile. Results: Categories of student discourse on academic cheating were obtained: a) Motivation of the phenomenon, b) Recommendations to avoid the phenomenon, c) Obstacles to the phenomenon, d) Facilitators of the phenomenon and e) Reflections on the phenomenon. Conclusions: Students who admit to cheating academically during the e-learning modality relate the virtual modality as one of the facilitators of this behavior, which strengthens social and academic ties with their peers and recommends modifications in the forms of evaluation.

Keywords: Academic deception; e-learning evaluation; Physiotherapy; Deception facilitators.

Resumen: Introducción: En el marco del actual escenario sanitario, la educación médica ha debido alinear sus procesos de formación con base en el confinamiento y la modalidad e-learning. El SARS COV-2 impulsó el uso masivo de la tecnología para continuar con los diferentes programas, lo que no sólo ha significado un cambio en la modalidad de entrega de contenidos, prácticas clínicas y evaluación, sino un aumento significativo en los comportamientos de engaño académico por parte del cuerpo estudiantil. Objetivo: Describir el reporte de estudiantes de segundo año de la salud sobre el engaño académico en contexto de pandemia. Método: Estudio cualitativo fenomenológico hermenéutico con técnica de análisis de contenido, mediante recolección de datos por entrevista individual a una muestra de 73 estudiantes de segundo año de fisioterapia de la Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción, Chile. Resultados: Se obtuvieron categorías del discurso estudiantil sobre el engaño académico: a) Motivación del fenómeno, b) Recomendaciones para evitar el fenómeno, c) Obstaculizadores del fenómeno, d) Facilitadores del fenómeno y e) Reflexiones sobre el fenómeno. Conclusiones: Los estudiantes que reconocen realizar engaño académico durante la modalidad e-learning relacionan la modalidad virtual como uno de los facilitadores de esta conducta, que fortalece vínculos sociales y académicos con sus pares y recomiendan modificaciones en las formas de evaluación.

Keywords: Engaño académico; Evaluación e-learning; Fisioterapia; Facilitadores de engaño.

1. Introduction

Academic cheating is defined as the set of behaviors not accepted by the study centers where the student makes use of materials, information or access to information in an unauthorized way at the time of the evaluation, to obtain individual or collective advantage. . These behaviors, which have also been classified as aberrant actions (1), comprise a wide scope in terms of research; In them, correlations have been sought with both sociodemographic or academic variables (2), which allow anticipating cheating behaviors in evaluations; Other studies propose preventive measures that are more effective at the time of generating a content measurement process (3). There are also investigations that delve into perceptions, both of students and the academic body regarding cheating in evaluations, reporting this last group documentation and relevant suggestions for the moment of evaluation, controlling the number of evaluated and the evaluation model, and recognizing that it is a serious and widespread problem that must be considered at all times of professional training (4). From the point of view of the formation of the human being, the lie is part of the sociocognitive development, it works as a promoter in the exploration of the social world that surrounds us and in turn represents a high cognitive ability of the person who executes it. The fact of planning and combining all the possibilities involved in altering an event through a story or an action, allows the subject who is lying to anticipate later the possibilities of reaction or consequence of their actions (5).

Carrying out this behavior in education has been sanctioned throughout its history, because when the student group is capable of altering the events and norms established in an evaluation, it prevents teachers from accurately measuring knowledge, skills and behaviors (6- 8), generating in educational institutions a constant problem that arises from the nature of being, as opposed to the development of knowledge. With the appearance of SARS COV-2, educational processes had to be structured in sync with the health measures suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO) and those imposed by the respective executive powers of each country. The main measure as a way to deal with the numerous contagions has been the confinement of people in their respective homes, depriving them of social participation in closed environments (7), a determination that quickly prompted the traditional modification of education to an e-learning modality. that allowed to continue with the teaching-learning processes.

In higher education, the continuity of the distance learning process is not unrelated to the appearance of deceptive behavior on the part of the student body. The e-learning modality has reported greater ease to perform improper actions compared to face-to-face classes, mainly during evaluations, where the absence of physical surveillance during the measurement process (10), facilitates the opportunity to perform deceitful behavior, obtaining unreliable results of what is to be verified: to this is added the easy access that technological devices allow to deliver a quick link to the contents consulted during the exams (9), a situation that generates an increase in the temptation on the part of the student body to execute academic cheating. Under this concept, academic cheating over the years has reported various behaviors that are considered dishonest during evaluations, such as copying information, unauthorized collaboration with peers or others, use of technology to access exact answers and gain advantage (12), not to mention that as more strategies and sanctions are generated, the forms of fraud by the group of students increase (13).

Understanding the increase in the possibility of engaging in deceptive behavior that the distance education modality can present is a latent concern in the university, which is not only a local problem, but also a global problem of the academic world. Highly prestigious universities such as Harvard constantly suffer situations that involve their students in acts of fraud, both to enter and during the execution of their evaluations (14), which leads us to think that we are facing another pandemic that harms the new generations of students and future professionals, who will have to face a labor world lacking in social integrity, where study centers are passive accomplices by allowing dishonest acts without intervention, since they allow the formation of a fractured

health professional at the base of the being that It will present bad practices (13), questioning the bioethical bases, individualistic and vicious behaviors, in order to obtain a product that is not real at any cost.

In medical education, factors that influence the student group to perform academic cheating have been identified, such as motivation, learning strategies, teaching strategies and types of evaluation (16-17). In addition, their perception produces exhausting routines that include long preparations for evaluations with passive learning (18), which is why many students choose to make summaries to use as a trap during the evaluation (16). In a systematic review (6), actions of copying other peers, unauthorized notes, sharing information at times of evaluation or accessing medical records prior to the exam were identified as academic cheating; In addition, the variability that this behavior means both in its definition and in the type of deception carried out by students has been described, as well as the difficulty for health institutions to be able to reduce the rates of deception and dishonest behavior on the part of students. medicine (6-7).

The pandemic and the presence of this misleading behavior in the health sciences forces medical career managers to inquire about this behavior in students, including a constant responsibility on the part of administrators to configure responses that allow lower rates of deception, sometimes through the use of bioethics and other preventive actions. Although these decisions have been extensively studied and applied, the new e-learning modality format once again leads to a conversation about this problem and brings it up for discussion, forcing the investigation of the bases of both individual and collective deception behaviors (14).

In this study, a report of physiotherapy students who engaged in academic cheating in the context of the pandemic was described, supported by relevant information extracted from a review of the literature on academic cheating in e-learning educational modality in health sciences. We have used an interpretive and inductive approach that configures an explanatory model on individual and collective behaviors, with the addition of the qualitative model with content analysis technique, and the use of data collection by individual interview, waiting for reflexive results and discussions on the theoretical implications, its limitations and opportunities to continue with a qualitative inquiry about the reality of the student involved in acts of deception.

2. Methods

We present a hermeneutic-phenomenological qualitative study (17) that seeks to develop explanations of the behavior of academic cheating that occurred during confinement, for which we have used a content analysis technique. 73 students participated in this study, belonging to the health sciences, physiotherapy degree, from the Catholic University of the Santísima Concepción in Chile. The inclusion criteria for the student group were to be regular students belonging to the physiotherapy career and who were caught cheating academically during the first semester of the year 2020. The exclusion criteria corresponded to cases in which the students did not recognize having performed any act of deception during an evaluation process. To delimit the sample, the cases with the greatest potential in providing information for the development of emerging categories were identified. A semi-structured interview was applied after the application of informed consent. The study followed the steps of configuring an ontological, epistemological and methodological process. The elimination criterion corresponded to cases in which the interview could not be completed. An analysis of the data was carried out using open coding, comparison methods, identifying and inductively describing the categories with the support of *Atlas.ti software* to identify the highest frequency, which included the coding of the transcripts of the interviews. They were coded under the inductive approach, which generated labels that allowed the concepts to be related to the codes created, in order to later interpret the academic deception in distance education from the perception of the students and their understanding of this reality.

2.1 Ontological

Understanding that the reality of a phenomenon does not exist outside the interpretation of the subjects, the meaning of the student group about academic deception must be identified that allows us to understand the interpretation of this reality in e-learning mode.

2.2 Epistemological

In order to access the reality of the subjects through the construction of interpretations about academic deception in e-learning modality, it is sought to obtain an understanding of the student group about deception behavior from an interpretive epistemology that adapts to research.

2.3 Methodological

Configured for a hermeneutical interpretive research that shows the conception of the student group about academic deception, producing stories that allow understanding academic deception from its perception in a context of distance education.

2.4 Data collection

For data analysis, convenience sampling was applied using a semi-structured interview (18), with prior informed consent, to a sample of 73 students who engaged in academic cheating out of a total of 274 enrolled in the degree. Annex 1 shows the guide that was followed for the interview.

3. Results

Of a total of 73 students, 49 were women (67%) and 24 men (33%), who described the following aspects: a) Motivation of the phenomenon, b) Recommendations to avoid the phenomenon, c) Facilitators of the phenomenon, d) Obstacles of the phenomenon and e) Reflections on the phenomenon. The criteria of scientific rigor typical of the qualitative paradigm of credibility, transferability and confirmability were safeguarded.

3.1 Definition of the phenomenon

Academic cheating in medical education through the e-learning modality was understood as the set of acts not accepted by the university where the student group obtained an advantage by accessing information online through the use of technology, their peers or clinical information at the time of an evaluation that allowed him to obtain individual or collective advantage during the appraisal process. This definition was recognized and judged by the students, also highlighting the recognition, the manifestation of questioning situations of deception, and recognizing lack of knowledge, difficulty of connectivity and fear of qualification. Some answers were:

...The lack of some knowledge and desperation in the face of the evaluation, since with my bad connection I was afraid and anxious that at some point it would close and then I would not be able to continue responding (S35).

...I think it is not so much like cheating, but rather that three or two people work together and try to solve how it is a clinical case, and the truth is that I did not understand very well how I had to relate the matter to get a job with a person... (S4).

...The pressure of not wanting to get a bad grade and not feeling ready in terms of knowledge of the subject, that added to the fact that when I saw the questions I did not fully understand them...(S10).

...The supposed "academic hoax", I say supposed because it cannot be confirmed. It was carried out due to the lack of material to carry out the contest, for which it was necessary to seek information from another place...(S33).

3.2 Motivation of the Phenomenon

When asked about the personal and collective motivation of their classmates to commit academic cheating, fear of failing and lack of knowledge to solve the evaluations were identified in the interviewees. As an example, we point to these responses:

...Pass the bouquet because there is a lot of material and time is short...(S54)

...Not knowing the answers to the questions despite having seen all the classes...(S46).

... I guess my classmates did it because they were not aware of the answer to the question posed... (S23).

3.3 Recommendations to avoid the phenomenon

When inquiring about recommendations for teachers about cheating situations, it was perceived by the student group resistance to recognize all responsibility for the situation, because they mentioned that teachers should be aware at the time of planning the evaluations that the Current Situation allows students to instantly access information during assessments. Some selected answers:

...I would recommend that they consider the situation and the possibilities that the students have when evaluating. They cannot not consider that there is the internet and many applications that facilitate academic cheating, so also under these conditions consider the phrase "academic cheating", that is, what is cheating? if the teacher must be clear about the conditions in which he is doing his contest, being this way there is no deception, it is a bad evaluation...(S9).

... In these times of contingency, the spirit of study and also the speed and teaching methods are not the same, also leaving the test open for hours without a time limit is an error that calls for cheating, although each student is responsible, it is obvious that there will be traffic from the answers and searching the internet and copying from there is also enhanced by the characteristic of the tests being carried out at home, so I think there is a lack of flexibility...(S2).

When asked about recommendations for peers on how to avoid this misleading behavior, the positions were controversial with the bioethics of the fact, because they justified the situation of cheating, because sharing information during the evaluation is considered a learning moment , along with the fact that confinement makes it impossible not to engage in deceitful behavior and they see this situation as help between peers and reinforcement of friendship.

...Firstly, consider knowing the concept of deception. then see if they really feel part of those behaviors, and finally rethink if they are learning, since I assume that it is everyone's goal, if the student could not understand the question of something he studied and thanks to the debate with another person he knew what to answer , most likely you have learned, so the goal is met. The end justifies the means...(S9)

...I really don't know, because according to me the copy will always exist, therefore, it only remains to appeal to their honesty and that they simply don't do it, but if they feel that they don't know, we are going to tend to seek help, more so if we are at home...(S19)

3.4 Facilitators of the phenomenon

Regarding the factors perceived in the student group as facilitators to carry out academic cheating behaviors, the answers pointed to a lack of preparation prior to the exam and to the use of the Internet as the main resource for the teaching-learning process.

...Bad preparation to face the evaluation, either because of the questions or the material covered in class and also because of the dissipation of us as students to dedicate ourselves to studying...(S8).

...I guess the comfort of doing the contest from our home...(S34).

...Internet copy/paste...(S20).

...Online classes...(S25).

...Not being clear about the contents of classes, since this causes having to search in media such as Internet or asking a classmate how to answer a question...(S41)

3.5 Obstacles to the phenomenon

When consulting on the factors that make it difficult to carry out academic cheating, the student group mentioned a variety of options that together can help the governing bodies to plan a unified way of evaluating and reflecting on these barriers identified by the students that in the future could improve rates of cheating behaviors; Great variability was observed in the responses, such as: that it is an act of camaraderie (understood as a hindering camaraderie that encourages copying information), of dishonesty and the responsibility of the teacher to always plan under the paradigm of mistrust.

...Time, random questions, etc. although time is not possible due to the situation of modifying the schedules...(S53)

...Let the online classes end...(S40)

...That the evaluations are different...(S35)

...Not having friends...(S29)

...The honesty of the student... (S27)

...That the teacher distrusts the students...(S24)

3.6 Reflections on the phenomenon

Finally, in the interviews some reflections were recorded by the student group as they responded; It was perceived that education in e-learning mode is the main facilitator of the increase in behavior and that it is practically impossible to prevent it from happening, referring to the shorter response times and the warning about sanctions before the evaluation could be forms of prevention. reduce the percentages of occurrence of the phenomenon. These are the most interesting responses:

...It is practically impossible to avoid it, it would be shorter periods in evaluations, but connection problems or other possible unforeseen events are generated...(S52)

...Make different contests, put instructions at the beginning of the evaluation where it says that, if there is a copy of answers, it will be evaluated with a minimum grade...(S35).

Self-critical reflections that labeled academic deception as a shameful act and reports of uncertainty about the student's future regarding the management of knowledge when having to face a patient were also recorded.

...Obviously it is not the teacher's responsibility to ensure the student's knowledge, what is more, past matter NOT forgotten matter... we are training professionally... the truth is that I am very ashamed...(S44).

...A bad application of programs on my part towards the patient, finding myself drifting in terms of content, I think that more than influencing, I even consider it as a personal fear, not knowing how to face a situation for which I should be prepared to face...(S5).

4. Discussion

From the results obtained in this study, it is possible to recognize some distinctive aspects of the type of concept that students currently have about academic cheating. This makes it necessary to consider that academic cheating should not be restricted only to its classical conception by definition (1), but rather a new paradigm should be considered from the perspective of students in view of the new health-educational context they face.

Regarding the planning of subjects in e-learning mode, this scenario allows us to be aware of this threatening attitude for all evaluations and that it must be analyzed and studied with circumspection, highlighting that higher education is facing a completely different context. to what was previously reported in the medical education literature (6), because online training as a new educational modality facilitates access to immediate information by the group of students at unauthorized times, considerably harming the possibility of teachers to objectively evaluate educational processes (19), a situation that generates a very serious problem for health science faculties, which train professionals who are constantly faced with ethical decisions during their working life (20).

Multiple studies seek to identify the different perceptions in the group of students about academic cheating (22-24). This analysis highlights opposing statements regarding the concept in online mode, although most managed to acknowledge having carried out acts described in its definition, they do not support the concept in its entirety, finding positive results to the fact of sharing information during the evaluations, since it improves their relationships between peers and friendship is reinforced, a valid resource when information is not remembered, and navigation as a facilitator of information for fear of obtaining low results. The main motivation on the part of the students was not to pass the exam despite recognizing that they do not handle all the knowledge, an attitude that leads them to reflect on the dissonance that this means in the projections of the health professional, such as the meaning of success or what the qualifications and their professional integrity really represent, generating teaching-administrative responsibility to emphasize the importance of the process over the product, which is a difficult mission for medicine (25) and other faculty careers (26-27). Online education is recognized by students as the main facilitator of the phenomenon, which invites them to consider how to use this tool in favor of education, question evaluation processes and include other modalities that measure learning according to contingency that we are living This information should be considered at the time of planning the evaluations, despite the fact that the students did not identify concrete solutions to this problem, they did express the difficulty that it means for the teacher and added strategic evaluative suggestions such as highlighting sanctions, reducing response times (28). However, it is worrying that reflections on the importance of the inherent values of a professional (such as ethics) were not presented, but quite the opposite: the idea that academic deception is not detrimental to the future ethical or professional professional was reinforced. learning.

5. Conclusions

- The conception of the student group on academic cheating in e-learning modality identified that online classes are the main facilitator to carry out acts prohibited by the university to obtain advantage in moments of evaluation.
- Although the students recognized that they carried out acts included in the concept of academic cheating, they are not satisfied with the definition since they perceive that they are acts that entail positive results in social and academic ties with their peers.

- The recommendations are focused on the modification of the evaluations and not focused on bioethics or spaces for reflection, since they perceive that there is no relationship between them and it does not harm their professional future.

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Annex I. Semi-structured Interview Guide	
Research topic: Academic deception in the context of a pandemic: Report of physiotherapy students.	
Researcher: Eduardo Reinoso González	
interview date	
Interviewed	
Objective: The purpose of this interview is to find out what individual and collective behaviors of academic cheating in e-learning mean to you.	
<p>QUESTIONS</p> <p>ownership questions</p> <p>What does academic cheating (AE) mean to you?</p> <p><i>If there is no very elaborate answer, the interviewee will be given a definition of AE. For the purposes of this interview, academic deception (EA) will be understood as the set of behaviors not accepted by the study centers where the student makes use of materials, information or access to information in an unauthorized manner at a time of evaluation. for individual or collective advantage. These behaviors, which have also been classified as aberrant actions (Shanahan KJ, 2013).</i></p> <p>Thinking about the inclusion criterion in which the students recognized having carried out EA. What led you to academic cheating? What emotions or feelings have you had that made it easier to do EA?</p> <p>In relation to your experiences and perspective on academic cheating in e-learning mode, what do you think led the other students to engage in academic cheating? What would you recommend to students to avoid the appearance of behaviors of academic cheating?</p> <p>In relation to barriers and facilitators</p> <p><i>The following questions seek to know, from your perspective, the barriers and facilitators of the process of academic deception in e-learning mode.</i></p> <p>What would you recommend to the teacher to avoid situations of academic cheating?</p> <p>What factors make it difficult for academic cheating to take place?</p> <p>What factors hinder the educational process that led to academic cheating?</p> <p>From your personal opinion, how could academic cheating in the subjects influence your future professional work?</p>	

In relation to the facilitators of academic deception in e-learning modality

What factors facilitate academic cheating?

Free comment from the interviewee

Comment freely on academic cheating.



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