

Scientific Ethics in Teaching of Social Sciences in Iran

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Abstract

The ethic of education is a set of professional rules and regulations agreed upon by the scientific community that obliges actors to comply with codes of conduct in the science education process. This article is asking about levels and types of academic dishonesty and recognizing factors affecting it in Iran's social sciences education. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews with Ph.D. students of public Universities in Tehran were analyzed with qualitative content analysis. Research findings show that academic dishonesty and factors affecting it are evident in the education of social science at two levels of micro and macro. At the micro or actor's level, individual characteristics and personality traits of students and professors impact on the occurrence of academic dishonesty. Moreover, at the macro or structural level, the way of distribution of resources and rules in the education paves the way for and facilitates the occurrence of academic dishonesty. Consequently, dishonesty in the education of Iran's social sciences and factors affecting it can be explained in the light of a structuration approach.

Keywords: ethics of science; ethics of education; academic dishonesty; structure; actor.

Introduction

The ethic of education is a set of professional rules and regulations agreed upon by the scientific community that obliges actors in education to comply with ethics and avoid immorality in science education process (Qarakhani & Mirzaie, 2017, 2013; Mirzaie & Qarakhani, 2013). As it was clearly stated in this definition, education is not only focused on learning and teaching but includes the interactive space between involved actors in education issues. Therefore, ethical values are an integrated part of the education process. Educational styles, students and professors' interactive relationships, and so on are part of education process which embraces an ethical aspect. Especially, "under the change and development in higher education conditions, the scientific community members, education managers, faculty members, employees, and students should become ready to encounter and solve ethical dilemmas of the larger society" (International Association of Universities, 2010, 1).

In Hartnett (1976) and Baird's (1990) view, the quality of relationship between student and professor, the concept of scientific community in the college, faculty members' contribution to learning, assessment of students' performance, and flexibility of the curriculum are some of the significant characteristics in determining normative space of education departments. (as cited in by Schulte, 2001-2002) The quality and status of these characteristics can determine the normative space of professional departments. Therefore, what we know as ethics failure may be transient and causal or specific to institutes, individuals or certain situations. But, some of the ethics failures are common in universities. (Bruhn, 2008) In an investigation of factors affecting academic dishonesty and misconduct, two groups of factors have been often recognized in research studies. Considering factors at micro and macro levels, Gerdeman (2001) showed that individual characteristics (such as academic achievement, age, and gender), peer influences, the effect of professor and organizational policies are amongst the effective factors on academic misconduct.

Kelley and Chang (2007) assert that institutional factors play a more effective role in ethical lapses in the university. They believe that academic pressure has an important role in ethical behavior in higher education. (as cited in Stuber-McEwen et al. 2009; Harmon, et al. 2010). But, on the other hand, McCabe and Trevino (1993) and McCabe, (et al. 2008), view individual factors such as gender, grade point average, ethics in work, personality type, competitive achievement-striving, self-respect, and contextual factors such as the presence of honor codes, reaction of faculty members, warnings about penalties and social education are effective. These factors which are usually proposed regarding one of the common norm-violations in academic education that is, cheating, and are more related to students can also be generalized to other academic misconducts and its other actors. The students' reasons to cheat include inappropriate acceptance criteria, incomplete understanding of plagiarism and weakness of scientific skills, issues related to learning/teaching, laziness and seeking comfort, plagiarizing with pride, and education pressures and costs (Cited by Brent & Atkinson, 2011). These factors are a little beyond individual-level factors and are also focused on factors related to education's organization. In a classification which is more related to the study of structural contexts affecting academic honor, Meizlish (2005) refers to seven factors of academic dishonesty occurrence: 1) defining academic integrity and academic dishonesty, 2) distributing information about academic integrity and fostering an environment supportive of academic integrity, 3) the role of honor codes, 4) adjudication procedures for violations of academic integrity, 5) role of faculty in the adjudication process, 6) role of students in the adjudication process, 7) penalties available for academic misconduct.

Understanding how the scientific community adheres to a set of specific norms cannot represent an exact embodiment of practicing norms status or deviating from them by the scientific community. In addition, there is no equal comprehension of

a behavior which is contrary to the norms of scientific ethics. Therefore, one of the ways to recognize scientific norms is the recognition of counter norm and scientific dishonesties in specific scientific groups and communities and access to their daily experiences in putting norms in practice. Sociological investigation and study of factors affecting dishonesty in education (see Qarakhani and Mirzaie 2017) makes obvious the contexts of nonconformity to ethical norms in scientific space and provide access to some of the methods for social monitoring and preventing from dishonesty in ethics of science. Therefore, recognizing the levels of violation of professional norms in social sciences education, as well as, factors affecting it can be a diagnosis to improve it and prevent from dishonesty in the space of social sciences education in Iran. The current research was conducted with the aim to investigate and recognize the levels of dishonesty in education of social sciences on the one hand, and factors affecting it by answering this question on the other hand. What are the levels and types of nonconformity to the educational norms related to the main actors' role (professors and students)? What are the factors affecting the occurrence of academic dishonesty in this scientific area? In order to achieve this, the experiences of Ph.D. students of Tehran city universities are studied and explored with regard to ethics in the space of social sciences education.

In social sciences, the detailed analysis and explanation of social phenomena, namely ethical issues, have often been performed using two micro and macro approaches. The former is focused on actors, their goals and intentions, motives, values, and beliefs in shaping the social world, and the later is focused on organizational, institutional and social structures and their effect on actors. If we accept the assumptions of two approaches, we may carry out a closer to reality-analysis about structural space of science in general and social science in Iran and its relation to actors in this area in particular. As a theoretical pre-assumption in this study and based on explicit and implicit indications of levels and types of violation of ethical norms in social science area and factors affecting it, we can consider scientific dishonesty at two levels of agency and structure (see Giddens, 1984). Corresponding to these two levels, nonconformity to ethics of science norms in social science is considered in 1) ethical dishonesty related to social science actor, 2) social science institutional construction (rules and organizational resources of education and research), and also the interaction between these two in production, reproduction, and continuity of normative social science system.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research study with semi – structured interview. The current research was conducted in an area of investigation of five main public universities in Tehran (including *Tarbiat Modares Uni*, *Tehran Uni*, *Allameh Tabataba'i Uni*,

Alzahra Uni, and *Shahid Beheshti Uni*). Theoretical sampling technique was used for sampling and 11 interviews were conducted with Ph.D. students of social sciences. Each interview lasted 1.5 hours on average. In order to extract data, theoretical or thematic coding was employed. After that coding, data were questioned and compared, and categories for analysis and interpretation were extracted from interviews text.

Research Findings

The present reality restoration of violation of the ethics of science norms in the social sciences education in Iran shows that ethics in social sciences education has two challenging dimensions. One is the actor's dimension (professors, students, and education department managers including dean of the faculty, chief of the department) and the other, is the structure. In the structural dimension, we face two levels, including the social structure and the university organizational structure which is related more to rules and regulations and procedures of the educational organization. Therefore, paying attention to individual behavior patterns in representing types of dishonesty should not be led to the ignorance of various structural dishonesty underlying and strengthening norm-violation in the social sciences education. Thus, it can be claimed that types of dishonesty restored in this research are focused both on the structural and individual level (students, faculty members and managers). In the following, considering interviews with Ph.D. students and analyzing their experiences, we address dishonesty between two groups of actors of education area, that is, professors and students.

Types of dishonesty amongst Faculty Members

A faculty member's tasks and role include norms which are proportional to each aspect of his professional role. As a teacher, advisor, researcher, supervisor and curriculum developer programmer, the faculty member conforms to its related norms. In the interviewees' view, education is not simply limited to teaching, but the role of the professor in the classroom, his position toward social issues, and his role in the scientific society is considered as a part of the education process. The role of the faculty member as a teacher is shown in some aspects including teaching method, course content, and the relationship with students during teaching process in the classroom. According to the students who were interviewed, topics are not presented according to the educational norms-based criteria, and "teaching method" is mainly based on course notes rather than main books and articles related to the course topic.

"Course content" is another aspect considered in the education process which has the required rules and norms with it. Types of norm-violation by faculty members with regard to the content of courses presented in social sciences education classes are often based on "presenting incomplete and superficial syllabus". The relationship

between professor and student in the classroom is one of the important aspects of a normative space. Some of the dishonesty in this regard include “the lack of precision and diligence to assess the scientific and academic activities of students”, “failure to provide ample opportunity for student in class to propose challenges and scientific debates”, “Lack of seriousness in class and follow-up activities”, “Lack of flexibility in teaching methods”.

Faculty members are obligating to developing academic links with other actors, especially colleagues and students, in the academy. The overall assessment of this study findings shows that there is not required motivation in the social science for education with the aim to change the students’ ideas and thoughts. Weakness of guiding students properly to achieve resources and databases and scientific information, the lack of truthful relationship between professor and student in thesis supervision process, not spending enough time and lack of care in advising and supervising thesis, weakness of creating motivation to present better research work and preventing them from flourishing are some types of dishonesty taken place by faculty member in the structural roles.

As a researcher, the faculty member is obliged to comply with requirements of this role besides those of an educator both in performing customized research and in the position of a researcher who guides students. The most type of dishonesty with regard to the relationship between the researcher and colleagues has been reported to be “poor attention to colleagues’ scientific achievements”. This has caused an interruption in researching a topic and led to conducting repeated studies and duplicating works, and even marking time in research without presenting new findings and achievements. The other type of dishonesty with regard to the researcher’s behavior is “lack of experts use for research collaboration and lack of attention to attract the participation of experts in the study”.

Types of dishonesty by Students

Nonconformity to the norms amongst students can be restored with regard to the students’ role in the position of “student”, “researcher”, “counselee”, and “member of the group”. Dishonesty of students in the position of “student” manifests itself in cases such as, “lack of active participation in class”, “cheating at exams”, “lack of preparation before class”, “relying on course notes instead of book”, “not studying significant texts of major”, “misunderstanding and insisting on it”,

Regarding the role of students as a group member, some types of dishonesty can be seen in the relationship between students and professors and the relationship between students and peers. for example, “lack of sharing one’s knowledge with others”, “unfair criticism of professors and classmates”, “accusing professors of illiteracy”, “getting a

piggyback ride from classmates”, and “entering into unhealthy scientific competitions”. According to some of the interviewees, the student, as a “researcher”, acts as a poor researcher in conforming to the norms. Some cases of dishonesty include “violation of integrity in citing and referencing”, “conducting Internet research”, “falsification and fabrication”, “lack of concern and scientific issue”.

Disorder in the University Organizational Structure

In addition to dishonesties related to educational actors, research findings refer to some examples focused on university organizational structure which paves the way for the Academic violations. The existence of some procedures and organizational rules such as “obliging students to publish the paper” is causing some of the professors to be easily the owner of several papers on various topics. Moreover, “the existence of unclear educational rules and regulations”, “not providing accurate information about educational rules and regulations by university, faculty and department for beneficiary actors”, “weakness of assessment system in professors assessment, “the governance of bureaucracy on the Academy”, “converting university to for-profit company regardless of the education quality”, “the governance of political space on scientific space ” are not only some examples of dishonesty of university organizational structure in Iran, but also lead to the occurrence of other types of academic dishonesty and causes academic integrity to be weakened. also, affect other social structures.

Factors Affecting Academic Dishonesty

As mentioned before, two groups of structural and individual factors are specifically referred to in the formation and continuation scientific dishonesty in social sciences. Amongst them, representation of structural factors has been more evident in our study. Generally, structural factors at interconnected levels include social macrostructure, scientific institution, academic structure, and then lower levels, that is, faculties and departments. Factors influencing academic dishonesty at structural level include lack of professional ethics, lack of internal self-assessment, lack of enough education and defect in the scientific socialization process,, the governance of political institution on scientific institution and determining criteria and standards of scientific activity by political arena, quantity-oriented assessment of educational actors especially faculty members and students, and lack of controlling mechanisms affecting educational dishonesty.

According to the most of the interviewees, though structural factors lead to nonconformity to the norms of ethics of science by actors in the academy, the intensity of misconduct among all actors is not the same. Now, this question is raised that if the institutional situation is the same for all, why does the intensity of its occurrence differ among actors? This question leads us immediately toward the role and the

effect of actors as a relative trait in the occurrence of academic misconduct. One may possess this trait to a greater or lesser degree. In interviewees' view, the following personal traits and characteristics are amongst individual factors playing a role in the incidence of scientific dishonesty in the social sciences education: the existence of actors who prefer their individual interests to collective ones, the existence of actors who interpret ethical criteria with the aim to get the maximum individual benefit, the existence of actors who are unaware of their rights and responsibilities, the existence of actors who are unaware of legal procedures, and the existence of actors who pay no attention to the professional education. Table 1 shows factors affecting academic dishonesty amongst professors and students.

Factors affecting academic dishonesty amongst professors	Factors affecting academic dishonesty amongst students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigid, inefficient, and <i>mandatory</i> space governing universities; • The range of norm-violation in the public space and extending it to the universities; • Lack of internal assessment in educational system; • Lack of effective executive assurance in the case of scientific misconduct by faculty members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor quality and incomplete education; • Incomplete academic socialization and lack of internalization of professional ethics of science; • Being influenced by reference groups such as university professors; • Organizational and institutional constraints imposed on students for courses selection, curriculum planning, supervisor selection, and etc.; • Lack of tendency to participation and the absence of students' freedom; • Poor scientific relationships between students and professors; • Lack of scientific and accurate monitoring of students scientific activities by professors.

Table 1. Structural factors affecting academic dishonesty amongst professors and students

Both structural and individual factors affecting faculty members' nonconformity to the norms of ethics of science considered by interviewees are presented in Table 1. In expressing individual factors affecting nonconformity to the norms by faculty members it has been referred to the requirements of the professor's role, faculty members' financial problems, paying no attention to the fame of professor career, trying to maintain job position, lack of will to change and lack of self-critical.

Though some of the factors affecting scientific dishonesty are common amongst educational actors, factors affecting the occurrence and continuation of academic dishonesty amongst students are specifically presented and considered at two levels; structural factors presented in Table 1, and factors which are focused on the actor

himself. Individual factors influencing the occurrence and continuation of academic dishonesty amongst students include: selfishness; profiteering; financial constraints; believe in the governance of absenteeism in the society; belief in the lack of educational justice; a feeling of powerlessness; the absence of will for individual change and extending it to other spaces of action; feeling of discrimination.

Though it seems that structural factors are more evident in the occurrence of scientific norm-violation, evidence suggests both groups of factors play a role in the occurrence and continuation of academic dishonesty in the social sciences education. Structural factors have provided conditions for actions present in this structure and reproduce social actions of the present structure. On the one hand, these factors pave the way for the occurrence of professional dishonesty amongst its actors, and on the other hand, they restrict action to ethical-oriented scientific action. Therefore, the reciprocating motion between actor and structure in the plays a role in the occurrence of dishonesty in education of social sciences.

Conclusion

Considering dishonesty corresponding to the role of the actors in higher education that are, professors and students, this research identified and showed some types of dishonesty in the education of social sciences in Iran. The amount and type of scientific dishonesties are related to education organization (at the university, faculty, and department). Moreover, faulty rules and procedures, organizational pressures imposed on agents of social sciences education and education system inefficiency are among factors constituting the totality of education organization. structures of educational organizations facilitate the occurrence of academic dishonesty in the Iran's social sciences. Therefore, non-conformity to the rules and regulations and tendency to dishonesty are the result of the interaction of opportunist or unaware of science norms actor with the faulty and malfunction structure. It can be claimed that if institutional structure of education paves the way for academic dishonesty occurrence, therein lies the solution to ethical challenges of science. But on the other hand, if social sciences actors are aware of their position and they have self-critical, they can prevent from the reproduction of structural conditions facilitating academic dishonesty, and they can modify it.

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