

Original Article

## The world belongs to the smart ones? Dishonest behavior in business schools

O mundo pertence aos espertos? Comportamento desonesto nas escolas de negócios

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** the main objective of this study is to analyze the meanings and perceptions of graduate program students (master's and doctoral students) in Business Administration, as well as professors of graduate programs (PPGs) from different institutions, in relation to possible practices of dishonest behavior and plagiarism in the academic context. It highlights the causes, consequences and meanings of possible practices of dishonest behavior and plagiarism in the academic context, using the theoretical framework of possible reasons for plagiarism and dishonest behavior in this context.

**Design/methodology/approach:** the perceptions of 28 professors and students were analyzed, extracted from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, and later analyzed using Flores' categorical analysis, in which the qualitative data were reduced, categorized, and coded, capturing the relevant meanings.

**Findings:** the study highlights the phenomenon of academic dishonesty through reports from professors and students, listing four metacategories: meaning and perception of the phenomenon, causes, consequences and forms of combat, which in turn generated seven other categories.

**Practical implications:** possible causes and implications of plagiarism are discussed, as well as ways to combat or mitigate the impact of these acts in Business Administration teaching programs, fostering the debate about these deleterious practices in the academic context.

**Originality/value:** the paper highlights evidence of dishonest behavior in the academy, which is sometimes overlooked by several stricto sensu management postgraduate programs.

**Keywords:** Academic plagiarism; Dishonest behavior; Postgraduate studies; Business education

## RESUMO

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**Objetivo:** o objetivo principal deste estudo é analisar os significados e percepções de alunos de programas de pós-graduação (mestrandos e doutorandos) em Administração, bem como de professores de programas de pós-graduação (PPGs) de diferentes instituições, em relação às práticas possíveis de comportamento desonesto e plágio no contexto acadêmico. Destaca as causas, consequências e significados das possíveis práticas de desonestidade e plágio no contexto acadêmico, tendo como referencial teórico as possíveis razões para o plágio e desonestidade neste contexto.

**Desenho/metodologia/abordagem:** foram analisadas as percepções de 28 professores e alunos, extraídas de entrevistas semi-estruturadas e questionários, posteriormente analisadas por meio da análise categórica de Flores, na qual os dados qualitativos foram reduzidos, categorizados e codificados, capturando os significados relevantes.

**Resultados:** o estudo destaca o fenômeno da desonestidade acadêmica, por meio de relatos de professores e alunos, elencando quatro metacategorias: significado e percepção do fenômeno-não, causas, consequências e formas de combate, que por sua vez geraram outras sete categorias.

**Implicações práticas:** são discutidas possíveis causas e implicações do plágio, bem como formas de combater ou mitigar o impacto desses atos nos programas de ensino de Administração de Empresas, fomentando o debate sobre essas práticas deletérias no contexto acadêmico.

**Originalidade/valor:** o trabalho destaca indícios de condutas desonestas na academia, que por vezes passam despercebidas por diversos programas de pós-graduação stricto sensu em gestão.

**Palavras-chave:** Plágio acadêmico; Comportamento desonesto; Pós-graduação; Educação empresarial

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Dishonest behavior can be understood as a set of inappropriate behaviors practiced by an individual in different institutional environments, covering a variety of unethical attitudes (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2014). In the context of higher education, the appropriation of content made by third parties for use in academic works as if they were their own authorship is considered plagiarism (Lyon et al., 2006), in addition to other dishonest academic practices such as collusion, or undue collaboration in tasks (mainly individual ones) to benefit all participants (Barrett & Cox, 2005). Plagiarism has legal and even criminal repercussions and is also considered an ethical deviation (Pithan & Vidal, 2013).

Information and communication technologies have facilitated access to knowledge, also enabling dishonest behavior, especially those linked to plagiarism, which has been

occurring on a large scale in the academic context, among researchers, professors, and students of undergraduate and graduate programs (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2014).

Given that ethics is a conduct guide that enables discerning what is right or wrong and helps in understanding “why” some people seek to obtain personal advantages and others remain with moral firmness, regardless of the context (Motta & Alcadipani, 1999), it helps to explain what morality is and what its specific characteristics are (Cortina et al., 1996). Its origin derives from the Greek term *ethos*, which means “dwelling”, and was later interpreted as a “way of being” acquired during life (Cortina et al., 1996). The term “moral” originates from the Latin word that originally meant “custom”, and currently means “way of being” or “character” (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2014). While morality seeks to answer the question “What should we do?”, ethics answers the question “Why should we?” (Cortina et al., 1996).

Moreover, dishonest behavior in the academic include practices such as plagiarism, fraud (electronic or otherwise) and external assistance (from people or materials that should not be available) (Iyer & Eastman, 2008; Krou et al., 2021). And despite being considered a global academic phenomenon (Baran & Jonason, 2020), it suffers influence by regional and cultural elements in Brazil. Thus, the main objective of this study is to analyze the meanings and perceptions of graduate programs students (master’s and doctoral students) in Business Administration, as well as professors of graduate programs (PPGs) from different institutions, in relation to possible practices of dishonest behavior and plagiarism in the academic context. The specific objectives include: (i) analyzing the perceptions of respondents about possible causes and consequences of dishonest behavior and academic plagiarism and about (ii) possible ways to combat these ethical deviations. To carry out the study, the opinions of 28 academics, including professors and students, were accessed.

It should be noted that there is extant research on such theme in Brazil, such as the articles referenced in this paper, however, the field of administration in Brazil still needs to be deepened, as evidenced in the annals of several conferences: e.g., on

academic plagiarism: four articles in SemeAd/FEA-USP and one in EnANPAD; on academic dishonesty: three in SemeAd/FEA-USP and one in EnANPAD. In the journals hosted by the SciELO platform, only seven articles were found on academic plagiarism and only one on academic dishonesty in applied social sciences. In the above studies, it was found that plagiarism occurs when an author's ideas or words are used inappropriately and without proper mention of the source (Innarelli et al., 2011). And according to Lima, Lima e André (2021), this was facilitated by wide access to information and communication technologies. Authors such as Sanchez and Innarelli (2012) report several dishonest practices in academia, such as self-plagiarism, ghost authorship, co-authors without relevant participation, and copying texts or ideas without due credit. And according to the authors, among 162 articles retracted between 2002 and 2019 by Brazilian authors, almost 60% were associated with some form of misconduct (Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo [FAPESP], 2022). These practices are also influenced by professors that accept non-original work from their students (Lima et al., 2021; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2014). However, none of these studies have conducted a primary data collection highlighting the phenomenon of academic dishonesty, which are sometimes overlooked by several *stricto sensu* management post graduate programs. In the present study it is evidenced four metacategories, through reports by professors and students, namely: (i) meaning and perception of the phenomenon, (ii) causes, (iii) consequences and (iv) forms of combat, which in turn generated seven other categories. Therefore, the possible causes and implications of plagiarism are discussed, as well as ways to combat or mitigate the impact of these acts in Business Administration teaching programs, fostering the debate about these deleterious practices in the academic context.

## 2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

### 2.1 Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is the "set of attitudes and conduct considered fraudulent,

that violate a rule or behavior considered ethical, in an academic environment, which may occur in secondary, higher or postgraduate education” (Innarelli et al., 2011, p. 2). It also involves the practice of deceitful or unfair acts to obtain better results in a learning assessment (Miller et al., 2017).

In addition to plagiarism, dishonest behavior includes fraud (electronic or otherwise) and external assistance (from people or materials that should not be available) (Iyer & Eastman, 2008; Krou et al., 2021). However, there is no universal definition of academic dishonesty (see Santos et al., 2020; Krou et al., 2021). Despite being considered a global academic phenomenon (Baran & Jonason, 2020), it is influenced by regional and cultural elements. In Brazil, the relationship between individuals and the law has been mediated in some cases by the famous “Brazilian way” or “jeitinho” (Motta & Alcadipani, 1999), when unduly flexible (or disrespecting) a rule or regulation to meet a certain interest or personal and professional privilege (Oliveira & Machado-da-Silva, 2001). On these occasions, personal interests overlap with those of the collective, generating a growing absence of cohesion in the social life of Brazilians, with the use of their network of personal relationships in their favor, fitting into a Brazilian cultural element (Motta & Alcadipani, 1999).

According to the International Center for Academic Integrity - USA, 32% of undergraduate students admitted cheating on assessments, 28% improperly collaborated on individual assignments, and 15% copied or paraphrased content in papers without proper citation (International Center for Academic Integrity [ICAI], 2020). In the case of Brazilian business schools, the numbers are even higher, as pointed out by Veludo-de-Oliveira et al. (2014), which showed that more than 70% of participants (undergraduate and graduate programs students) have already engaged in fraudulent practices, and more than 90% of students believe that their colleagues have committed some dishonest action.

Some of the possible drivers of academic dishonesty are the perception of injustice or lack of transparency in the academic environment, and negative relationships between professors and students (Santos et al., 2020). Regarding

behaviors, disinhibition, and orientation towards mastery in goals can be predictors of the frequency of academic dishonesty (Baran & Jonason, 2020). The pressure for results and publication and the productivism fostered by regulatory bodies and passed on to postgraduate programs is also another factor that influences dishonest behavior in academia (see Zuin & Bianchetti, 2015; Morais, 2020).

## **2.2 Academic plagiarism**

Plagiarism occurs when an author's ideas or words are used inappropriately and without proper mention of the source (Innarelli et al., 2011). Although this is not a recent phenomenon, it was facilitated by wide access to information and communication technologies, which make content available in different formats and from various sources (Lima et al., 2021), significantly increasing the opportunities for plagiarists to use ideas or texts from a third party as their own authorship (Sanchez & Innarelli, 2012). Therefore, plagiarism, understood as the copying of content without proper citation, the use of sources that were not consulted, and the delivery of work carried out by third parties as one's own (Krou et al., 2021), can also be practiced by the undue reuse of one's own work already published (self-plagiarism), ghost authorship, co-authors without relevant participation, and copying texts or ideas without due credit (Sanchez & Innarelli, 2012).

Extant international extant literature also addresses plagiarism on faculty and students, such as Eret and Gokmenoglu (2010), who unveil cases of prospective academicians engaged in such practices; Heckler and Forde (2015) that relate cultural values to plagiarism in higher education; and Glendinning (2014) who reveals several strategies to prevent student plagiarism in higher education across Europe. Moreover, some students cheat and feel comfortable with that behavior, as depicted by Friedman, Blau, and Eshet-Alkalai (2016).

Studies regarding dishonest behavior and plagiarism have been conducted in different contexts, such as Asia and Middle Eastern countries (e.g., McCabe et al., 2008;

Thomas, 2017) and European countries (e.g., Gómez et al., 2013; Jereb et al., 2018), revealing certain behaviors associated to specific cultural traits.

In Brazil this is not different from other countries referred in the international literature. Plagiarism should not be confused with a possible forgetfulness, lack of knowledge, or lack of familiarity with academic norms for citation and publication. However, because it is intentional, plagiarism results from an individual and rational decision, motivated by personal beliefs and perceptions (Sanchez & Innarelli, 2012). Therefore, plagiarism, according to the authors, may even result in the retraction (withdrawal) of scientific publications.

Thus, among the 162 articles retracted between 2002 and 2019 by Brazilian authors, almost 60% were associated with some form of misconduct, against 19% of errors in good faith and 14.8% due to failures in the journals (Revista Pesquisa FAPESP, 2022). It is also up to professors not to passively accept non-original work from their students, as this attitude would also be configured as a practice of academic fraud (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2014; Lima et al., 2021). Still according to Veludo-de-Oliveira et al. (2014), the ability to reflect on the consequences of their own moral actions also helps individuals to develop emotional maturity and to overcome negative feelings of self-demand, anxiety, and immediacy in the face of the countless demands and dilemmas of everyday life.

### **3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

#### **3.1 Data collection**

Data was collected through six semi-structured interviews and 22 responses to questionnaires, which allowed anonymous reports regarding dishonest practices and plagiarism in their academic career to be told, encompassing a qualitative and interpretative study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). All respondents were informed that the interviews would be used only for academic proposals and the names of the respondents would be confidential. They all consented via audio of the recording of their interviews.

Of the six interviews, three were with master's students and three with doctoral students who were also professors (four women, two men), aged between 29 and 47 years old, and who belonged to different lines of research, being conducted in April/2020, with an average duration of 42 minutes and conducted via virtual platforms, due to social isolation due to the Covid-19 pandemic. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. In addition to the interviews, another data collection effort was conducted in November/2022, using Google-forms, containing the same semi-structured interview script. Respondents were master's students, doctoral students, and professors of Graduate Programs in Administration (PPGA), in addition to professors of Graduate Programs (PPGs) from different institutions. It should be noted that the secrecy of the identities of respondents and respondents was guaranteed, respondents were not asked to inform their age or gender, but only the institution and programs to which they were affiliated, their role as a professor and whether they were attending any postgraduate studies now (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Profile of respondents

<b>Code</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Engaged on a Stricto Sensu Program (Yes/No)</b>	<b>Role as Professor</b>	<b>Interview (I) or Survey (S) (duration min.)</b>
E1_M	Finance/USP	Yes	Undergraduate Professor	I (35 min)
E2_M	Quantitative Methods/USP	Yes	Undergraduate Professor	I (46 min)
E3_M	General ADM/USP	Yes	Monitor	I (43 min)
E4_D	Marketing/USP	Yes	Undergraduate Professor/ Monitor	I (48 min)
E5_D	Quantitative Methods/USP	Yes	Undergraduate Professor/ Monitor	I (38 min)
E6_D	General ADM/USP	Yes	Undergraduate Professor/ Monitor	I (45 min)
E7_PP	UNIGRANRIO/PPG not informed	No	Graduate Program Professor	S online
E8_PP	UEMG - Undergraduates in Computer Engineering.	No	Graduate Program Professor	S online

Continue...



Table 1 – Profile of respondents

				Conclusion
Code	Affiliation	Engaged on a Stricto Sensu Program (Yes/No)	Role as Professor	Interview (I) or Survey (S) (duration min.)
E9_PP	UNIGRANRIO/ PPG not informed	No	Graduate Program Professor	S online
E10_PP	FEA/USP- PPPGA	No	Graduate Program Professor	S online
E11_PP	UESC-BA PROFMAT	Yes	Graduate Program Professor	S online
E12_PG	UFRRJ/Graduate Course in Administration and PPGEN	Yes	Undergraduate Professor	S online
E13_PP	UNIGRANRIO - PPGA	No	Graduate Program Professor	S online
E14_M	USP - GAPP	Yes	Postgraduate student	S online
E15_M	USP - GAPP	Yes	Postgraduate student	S online
E16_PP	IFCE – PPGA at UNP	Yes	Graduate Program Professor	S online
E17_PG	UFPI	Yes	Undergraduate Professor	S online
E18_M	Faculdade Impacta - Undergraduates in the areas of technology	Yes	Postgraduate student	S online
E19_PP	UNIGRANRIO - PPGA	No	Graduate Program Professor	S online
E20_PP	Uninformed	No	Graduate Program Professor	S online
E21_M	UFF Professional Master's in Administration	Yes	Postgraduate student	S online
E22_M	CEPEAD/FACE/UFMG	Yes	Postgraduate student	S online
E23_PP	UFMG-PPGA	Yes	Graduate Program Professor	S online
E24_PG	UNIGRANRIO-PPG	No	Former undergraduate and free course professor	S online
E25_PG	None at the moment.	Yes	Undergraduate Professor	S online
E26_PG	UniDomBosco Resende RJ - Graduate Program	Yes	Undergraduate Professor	S online
E27_PP	IF Fluminense - Master's in Environmental Engineering	Yes	Graduate Program Professor	S online
E28_M	None at the moment	Yes	Postgraduate student	S online

Source: own elaboration (2022)

Of a total of 28 respondents, nine reported being undergraduate professors and studying a stricto sensu postgraduate course (master's or doctorate), six reported being graduate programs professors and studying a stricto sensu

postgraduate course (doctorate), seven reported being only *stricto sensu* graduate programs professors (master's or doctorate) and six only *stricto sensu* graduate students (master's).

### **3.2 Data analysis**

Flores Categorical analysis technique (see Donaires et al., 2023) was used, with qualitative data being reduced, categorized and coded in order to capture the relevant meanings in an analytical-investigative process, following the steps below: (i) reading of textual data from transcripts to capture information; (ii) segmentation of textual excerpts into groups with similarities by categorization and data coding; (iii) organization and presentation of data in a diagram and explanatory matrix; and (iv) extraction of meanings by abstractions and contextualized comparisons.

## **4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

During data analysis, according to Donaires et al. (2023), when using an inductive, open, and simultaneous process, the metacategories of this study were generated, directly linked to the main phenomenon investigated, namely: (1) meaning and perception of the phenomenon; (2) causes; (3) consequences; and (4) ways to combat dishonest practices. Therefore, derived from the procedures of segmentation and attribution of codes to the discursive fragments, seven categories were generated in the segmentation and codification: (1.1) plagiarism behavior – PLB, (1.2) other unethical behavior – OUB; (2.1) intrinsic factors – ITF, (2.2) extrinsic factors – ETF; (3.1) career obstacles – CAO; (4.1) post-incident actions – PIA, and (4.2) prevention policies – PVP. Table 2 explains the definition of each code and its categories.

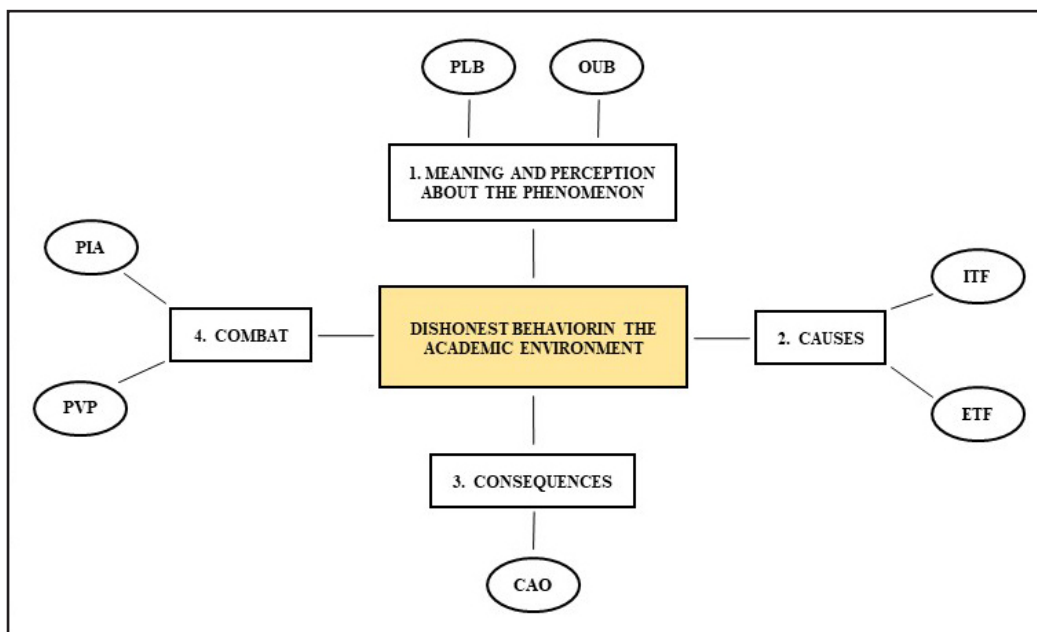
Table 2 – Codes and categories

Metacategories	Definition of each category	Code
Meaning and perceptions of the phenomenon (1)	(1.1) plagiarism behavior – plagiarism itself and its different interpretations.	PLB
Meaning and perceptions of the phenomenon (1)	(1.2) other unethical behaviors – other types of dishonest behaviors in the academic world.	OUB
Causes (2)	(2.1) intrinsic factors – related to the characteristics of dishonest behaviors in the academic world.	ITF
Causes (2)	(2.2) extrinsic factors – related to the academic environment.	ETF
Consequences (3)	(3.1) career obstacles – possible negative career consequences for someone caught plagiarizing.	CAO
Ways to combat dishonest practices (4)	(4.1) post-incident actions – possible actions to be taken after identifying dishonest behaviors in the academic world.	PIA
Ways to combat dishonest practices (4)	(4.2) prevention policies – possible preventive actions to be taken to curb dishonest behaviors in the academic world.	PVP

Source: own elaboration (2022)

Figure 1 shows the general design of the research, with the metacategories and categories identified and defined in Table 2, by a set of analysis units, aligned to the thematic axis of their corresponding category.

Figure 1 – Analysis Framework



Source: own elaboration based on Donaires et al. (2023)

These units of analysis, in turn, were captured through excerpts from the transcripts of the interviews that were coded and, with each unit of analysis having a frequency count, showing how many respondents expressed themselves about the same idea, perception and meaning of the investigated phenomenon in this study.

**Category 1 – Meaning and perception of the phenomenon:** is a metacategory that explains the assumptions behind dishonest behavior in academia. As shown in Table 3, plagiarism behavior is much more frequent in the interviewees' reports, with 48 occurrences, while other unethical practices add up to 12 reports. However, the reports of other unethical conducts help in the broader understanding of the phenomenon of academic dishonesty.

**Table 3 – Explanatory matrix for the metacategory “Meaning and perception of the phenomenon.”**

<b>Plagiarism behavior – PLB(1.1)</b>	<b>Other unethical behaviors – OUB (1.2)</b>
(11x) Copy of subject papers.	(2x) “Collaboration network” (exchange of favors)
(10x) Incorrect citation of other authors.	(2x) “Salami science”: clipping broad research into smaller pieces to obtain several publications.
(9x) Use text from third parties without citing authors.	(2x) Lack of commitment to teaching duties: non-compliance with subject’s syllabus and workload and/or non-compliance with their contract.
(7x) Theft of ideas in publication.	(2x) Taking advantage with the asymmetry between professor and student to exploit the student and/or humiliate, detract from student.
(6x) Copy answers in text and evaluations.	(1x) Abusing people’s trust.
(3x) Make comments about something you read or heard in seminars, appropriating the ideas.	(1x) “Moral flexibility”: teaching omission that does not educate students in situations of plagiarism and dishonesty.
(1x) Modify terms to appropriate third-party ideas.	(1x) Hire someone to do your final paper or part of your dissertation.
(1x) Self-plagiarism and self-citation.	(1x) Download pirated book on the internet.

Source: own elaboration based on Donaires et al. (2023)

**Category 1.1 – Plagiarism Behavior – PLB:** it was identified as one of the main dishonest academic practices in the statements of all respondents, diverging from

what Sanchez and Innarelli (2012) state, that plagiarism would be solely deliberate and rational, which is reflected below:

So, I think that [...] there are people who plagiarize and act in bad faith, intentionally, really plagiarizing and copying something without citing the source or copying an entire work, but I also think that there are people who acts unintentionally(E5\_D).  
Undergraduate students have difficulty writing, graduate students have an obligation to fight plagiarism, because the acquired knowledge which requires the use of ethics. He (she) is a learning facilitator (E16\_PP).

Among the characteristic behaviors of academic plagiarism, the ones most frequently reported were copying coursework and incorrect citation in papers. And although the participants claim that academic plagiarism is not rare, they manifested a certain distance from such a practice, emphasizing that it would occur more frequently in undergraduate than in stricto sensu postgraduate courses (masters and doctorates), as reported below:

An undergraduate student literally translated an article from English into Portuguese until the results found and the conclusion. Basically, she reproduced the study, but didn't bother to write the introduction, the theoretical basis and the methodology in her own words. [...] The article went to congress like that. When it came to my hand to organize for publication, I noticed the plagiarism and I modified the entire initial part [...] undergraduate students seem to commit plagiarism more frequently and freely than graduate students (E24\_PG).  
Undergraduate students sometimes hire someone to [SIC] do their TCC (E14\_M)

Intentional plagiarism emerged from the speeches as a “theft of ideas”, both in academic and professional terms. One report (E5\_D) mentioned the case of a student who plagiarized another’s article and managed to publish it in an impact journal, causing confusion after the discovery by the plagiarized author, and another (E4\_M) that mentioned a professor who appropriated ideas from the dissertation of a former advisee, but without due credit.

A professor cited an example at the university that happened to a boy who plagiarized an article from another. And that article ended up being approved in an A1 magazine. Then the original author found out and there was a mess, and a lot of confusion, they needed an ethics committee to decide (E5\_D).

In the case of graduate students, which include many who already work as professors, there are also reports such as the one cited below:

A colleague borrowed a mobile data recording device for a moment, but a noteworthy work was recorded. [she] cut and pasted it into her work. The professor called both to talk about [...] The discovery was due to the lack of connection that these copied parts had with the work of the said whose. [...] she tried to enrich the work but did not know how to use the tools (E16\_PP).

Similarly, taking advantage of his power in the institutional hierarchy, interviewee E3\_M commented that an evaluator rejected an article for publication and later published the same article in another journal as if it were his own. After the discovery, the fraudulent appraiser was disconnected from the university with which he had a link. In a report by a student who did part of his doctorate abroad, there was plagiarism on the part of the tutor's work, with misappropriation of his work.

Another point addressed was self-plagiarism, that is, the reuse of an idea or previous research as something new and original, without proper references. One of the testimonies (E4\_D) mentions the need to check the references used to avoid repeated quotations or reuse of ideas from previous works, especially when writing multiple works on the same subject.

In addition to intentional plagiarism, respondents also commented on when self-plagiarism occurs unintentionally, due to lack of knowledge or forgetfulness, resulting in the undue absence of a citation, as reported by participant E5\_D. One respondent to the questionnaire states that he has already committed "self-plagiarism once or twice, [since] it is difficult to say the same thing in 20 different ways" (E24\_PG).

### **Category 1.2 – Other Unethical Behaviors – OUB:**

Although most respondents understand plagiarism as a sort of academic dishonesty behavior, some participants related unethical behavior to other situations shown in Table 3.

Regarding the publication of articles, two types of behavior were reported by the participants. In the first case, there is the "salami science" process, where the student,

instead of publishing a broad article with a significant impact, “slices” the contribution into several less relevant articles, to give an image of productivity. Another practice mentioned is the undue exchange of collaborations between researchers, with credit to a co-author who did not participate in the work, which can occur in a reciprocal and systematic way, where each author writes an article and puts the name of others, and then all now have several publications – and not just one.

I've seen this unethical behavior in the academy, in the case of placing authors, doing a rotation, [such as] one writes and puts the name of others and so on. I know it exists, that there are people who will disagree, but that everyone comes in and takes advantage of this situation (E6\_D).

Reflection was also raised on another silent and potentially dishonest conduct, a “moral flexibility” where the professional presents a speech to combat academic plagiarism, but in the end is conniving with certain dishonest practices:

I remember when I was an assistant at a public university in Brasília, the professor would say “you can't accept it, it's zero, not even a stick”, but when I warned the professor (of plagiarism), then the professor just called attention, “I'm going to talk with him not to do that anymore”. So, there is always an unethical side, my perception is that professors know, but turn a blind eye (E6\_D).

This type of behavior is also related to that of the professor who is not committed to his/her duties and often takes advantage of the asymmetry between professor and student to exploit the advisee, and/or humiliate him, or even the professor who does not follow the syllabus entirely or misses work a lot (absenteeism), providing an inappropriate environment for student learning. In general, it is understood that there is plagiarism among professors, with 14 of the 22 who answered the questionnaires categorically affirming this, and another three of the 22 respondents to the questionnaire affirmed that “perhaps” there was.

Morality according to Cortina, Orts, and Navarro (1996) is not immutable, and at various times professionals are faced with ethical dilemmas in their work environments, and this is no different in academia. “Moral flexibility” has an imminent risk of biased interpretation and the normalization of undesirable behavior. This is

somewhat related to the culture of the “Brazilian way” (Oliveira & Machado-da-Silva, 2001), which includes, among other characteristics, the flexibility of social values to meet personal interests and thus obtain advantages.

### **Category 2 – Causes of the Phenomenon:**

There are several causes that help justify dishonest behavior in the academic environment, but without a main factor. Table 4 divides these factors into intrinsic and extrinsic, with relative imbalance in the reports obtained, with 51 for intrinsic factors, attributable by respondents to internal, contextual, social, and academic factors and 21 for extrinsic factors (from the academic environment).

**Table 4 – Explanatory matrix for the metacategory “Causes of the phenomenon.”**

<b>Intrinsic factors – ITF (2.1)</b>	<b>Extrinsic factors – ETF (2.2)</b>
(12x) Ignorance of scientific methodology and difficulty finding the original source.	(7x) Professor’s unsatisfactory scientific orientation
(9x) Stress, cognitive, physical, emotional fatigue due to overload of scientific and academic activities.	(6x) Pressure for results: overload of scientific and academic activities.
(8x) Low emotional maturity, anxiety, and self-demand.	(6x) Effects of technology.
(8x) Absence of ethical, moral values and character, academic dishonesty.	(2x) Challenging sociodemographic context for the student: double journey, lack of resources.
(4x) Laziness to study and prepare own’s work.	
(4x) Lack of interest in the topic studied, and urgency to finish the task/exercise, minimizing scientific work.	
(3x) Difficulty assimilating content.	
(3x) Interest in the diploma only.	

Source: own elaboration based on Donaires et al. (2023)

Respondents to the questionnaire/survey reported multiple simultaneous causes for the occurrence of plagiarism, the most relevant being mentioned below:

I highlight, on the one hand, dishonest and deliberate behavior; and on the other, ignorance. Although students are routinely warned and properly trained, especially in disciplines related to scientific and research methodology, [they] make mistakes due to complete lack of knowledge, especially undergraduate



students (E20\_PP).

Honestly, I think that, to a certain extent, it is the fault of undergraduate and graduate courses that do not encourage richer practical experiences and do not provide the necessary foundation for safer scientific writing. On the other hand, I think there is a cultural aspect, "Gerson's law", the Brazilian way [or *jeitinho*...] and a lack of encouragement for reading in general (E23\_PP).

Opportunism (why do it if it's already ready?), laziness (I don't have the patience), ignorance (I don't know how to do it), disdain (why waste my time with this? I have better things to do), access (there are several accessible paid sources free), dishonesty (no internalization of moral values) (E24\_PG).

## **2.1 – Intrinsic Factors – ITF:**

Intrinsic motivators for unwanted academic behavior include individuals' needs, interests, and values, which support certain behaviors while detracting from others. In this category, the intrinsic motivators reported are linked to the pursuit of academic, research and teaching goals imposed by HEIs (see Zuin & Bianchetti, 2015; Morais, 2020).

Ethics is a guide of conduct, of principles of what is right or wrong, helping to understand why some people seek to obtain personal advantages and others remain with moral firmness, regardless of the context (Cortina et al., 1996). For Veludo-de-Oliveira et al. (2014), the ability to reflect on the consequences of their own moral actions helps individuals to develop emotional maturity and to overcome negative feelings of self-demand, anxiety, and immediacy in the face of the countless demands and dilemmas of everyday life.

Another element that emerged in the speeches is the pressure to produce and time as a scarce resource. The overload of subjects, other activities and physical and mental fatigue make individuals must choose what would be most urgent, allocating their cognitive efforts to the execution of these tasks, and neglecting others (Bianchetti et al., 2018), which is corroborated in the report:

The person has a kind of motivation for this [plagiarism], it is the charge that happens. It's the charge for not being able to win the scholarship, the charge for getting published, keeping the grades high, the charge for being able to defend and qualify (E5\_D).

When considering the demand of the job market for the diploma and the academic lack of interest in the subject studied, the demotivation in the face of the effort that needs to be made to understand, reflect, and learn about a certain subject can be one of the triggers of these undesirable behaviors (Moraes, 2004). However, some reports attest that this phenomenon is less frequent in postgraduate students (enrolled in Graduate Programs), either due to the postgraduate student's awareness of developing a reflective-critical capacity to become a good researcher and professor or due to more emphatic training in scientific methodologies (see Zuin & Bianchetti, 2015).

At undergraduate courses, I see plagiarism mainly due to the obligation to study something and the person is not necessarily interested in the subject, he does not want to read about the subject and is forced to do a job (E3\_M)

I think plagiarism in the academic career is much lower because people who are following this career are already aware that they need to develop, have a critical analysis, have their own jobs to be able to grow in their own careers, different from undergraduates which is simply finish a course (E3\_M).

As mentioned in one of the testimonies (E5\_D), plagiarism can also occur unintentionally and unconsciously, due to lack of knowledge in scientific methodologies and even the student's inexperience. In this case, the student who makes the mistake of copying sentences, including excerpts from works by other authors without properly citing the original source, usually recants and changes his behavior.

### **Category 2.2 – Extrinsic Factors – ETF**

Contextual and social factors in which individuals are inserted motivate academically dishonest behavior. According to one of the reports (E6\_D), there are students who, in normal situations, would not use unethical practices to achieve their goals, but who end up committing academically dishonest acts due to external pressures (Morais, 2020).

Plagiarism does not only affect students, but also professors and, in some cases, reviewers of journals, positions that should ensure scientific ethical conduct (Nunes et al., 2012), as the report points out:

So, the reviewer simply rejected his article, took the article, and put his own name [and published it in another journal] (E3\_M).

According to the participants, the pressure for results is a preponderant factor for academically dishonest behavior, being leveraged by incentives from funding agencies, through development projects, by HEIs that require publication of articles in high-impact journals, by the environment corporate, by the family context, or by other social pressures exerted by different groups that affect the individual (Zuin & Bianchetti, 2015; Morais, 2020).

Imagine an undergraduate or graduate student who left the interior of some state and goes to São Paulo to study. How could he not achieve what was expected of him? Or that his parents were expecting him? (E5\_D).

Even the lack of adequate working and studying conditions can impose pressure that indirectly leads to a higher incidence of unethical academic behavior (Zuin & Bianchetti, 2015; Morais, 2020). In one of the reports, it is mentioned that due to the need to reconcile the study with a professional journey, there is not always time or conditions for the required activities to be carried out.

They [students] keep commenting, “professor, I work all day, I get home and I still have to take care of the house, children and everything”, so what do they do? Go research on the subject, take the first source that appears on Google and make a Frankenstein (E6\_D).

The participants also reported the unsatisfactory guidance and the teaching inability of the professor as possible causes of academically dishonest behavior (E2\_M), given the student’s stage of development and need for follow-up. It was also reported that scientific methodology is part of the curriculum, however, in some cases, it does not receive the proper attention from professors, causing difficulties for the student at the end of the course (E1\_M).

Finally, all interviewees reported that the use of new ICTs facilitated plagiarism and other unethical behavior by providing mass and agile access to articles and academic papers. However, these same ICTs can also be used as instruments to

combat plagiarism, through anti-plagiarism check applications, which identify copied excerpts (Nunes et al., 2012), as the report points out:

Technology with anti-plagiarism software helped a lot [...] there was a case of a student handing in a finished work, little changed. And then, would he do that if he didn't have the technology, if he didn't have the internet so easily? Hardly would he plagiarize. [Technology] has helped fight plagiarism, but it has also made it easier (E6\_D).

### **Category 3- Consequences of the Phenomenon**

#### **Category 3.1 – Career Obstacles – CAO**

Unethical behavior and plagiarism practices can have consequences that go beyond a poor assessment in a subject in case these behaviors are discovered, which can be an obstacle to critical-reflexive self-development and reduce the future competitiveness of a professional still in training (Colares et al., 2011). According to the respondents' reports, three factors that may be obstacles to the future career of this graduate, arising from the analysis of the Metacategory "Consequences of the Phenomenon": (i) professional development; (ii) Negative feelings like regret and (iii) having your image and credibility eroded.

Some students end up engaging in unethical practices to facilitate their insertion and professional consolidation, however, such a practice could reflect negatively on the preparation of these individuals for the job market, as in the report of the interviewee E2\_M, who highlighted that the most prestigious business schools in the country usually make strict selections of their candidates evaluating their real academic skills and experiences.

The participants also reported the feeling of guilt as a possible consequence and future obstacle to the career of these graduates, where after resorting to dishonest behavior to fulfill a certain objective without meritocracy, negative feelings such as regret, indignation and fear arise, not to mention the possibility of future punishments and a tarnished image if such conduct is discovered.

[...] this was the case of plagiarism that for me was the apex, it was a case of ethical

failure at a level that I would not know how to describe, there was a process, the evaluator there at the journal, he was a professor at universities, he was Dismissed from the university, name smeared and all, after action was taken. (E3\_M)  
 [...] so, you have that feeling, too bad! It's pitiful! It's hard that many times they will come across it up front, it may be too late. (E2\_M)

#### Category 4 – Ways to combat dishonest practices

To raise awareness of these acts and their consequences, participants suggested some actions to combat the investigated phenomenon through corrective (28 citations) and preventive (26 citations) actions, as shown in Table 5 and corroborating academic work on the subject. (e.g., Zuin & Bianchetti, 2015; Morais, 2020).

Table 5 – Explanatory matrix for the metacategory “Combating the phenomenon.”

Post-incident actions – PIA (4.1)	Prevention policies – PVP (4.2)
(11x) Post-incident mediation (call attention, warn, give advice).	(9x) Awareness and training, disseminating the rules for scientific writing, teaching about what plagiarism is and telling cases + consequences.
(10x) Disciplinary punishment (would give zero, report it, notify the advisor)	(7x) Use of detection
(6x) Request rectification or correction of the text.	(7x) Investment in structure for ethical and scientific training (incentive to seek answers).
(1x) I would ask that credits to be given to the authors.	(2x) Exemplary conduct by the professor, competent and ethical behavior.
	(1x) Incorporate a clear and objective policy against plagiarism in the course PPC.

Source: own elaboration based on Donaires et al. (2023)

#### Category 4.1 – Post-incident Actions – PIA

According to the perceptions of most respondents to the questionnaire, the two most cited actions are (i) post-incident mediation (e.g., drawing attention, warning of the consequences, or giving advice) and (ii) disciplinary punishment (e.g., disapproval, report, notification to advisor). The disciplinary attitude is seen by some interviewees as a means of making students aware of the impact and consequences of unethical conduct on others and on themselves (harming their career, citizenship education and

the development of critical-reflective thinking), as pointed out by the good practices undertaken by university libraries (Colares et al., 2011; Alves et al., 2016).

It is necessary to curb the student so that this does not happen and make the rules very clear. When they get to the front, they will thank these professors, who demanded a lot, as they will be better professionals for it. I myself thank my undergraduate professors for not tolerating dishonesty, who really taught me the value of it. (E2\_M)

In fact, punishment is cited by several respondents to the questionnaire as a mechanism that should be combined with guidance. Respondents suggest:

I always try, at first, to use the warning. However, in situations of recurrence, it would act with the rigor of the law and institutional norms. (E20\_PP)

As I have already done, I would indicate the problem and ask the student to work on the text. I often demonstrate in the presence of the student how he should do it, in order to clarify the records and their consequences for the present and future life. (E12\_PG)

I usually comment facetiously, advise workarounds that eliminate plagiarism in the future and zero the issue or work. They are told in advance that if they are caught, they will be punished. (E24\_PG)

The other half of the interviewees defended that the best way to combat a dishonest act already committed would be through a conciliatory posture, with dialogues that guide students to overcome their difficulties. According to them, students practiced such acts out of mere immaturity, and for not knowing how to produce a work in accordance with scientific norms, sometimes due to a lack of adequate teaching guidance, or even omission and toxic conduct that, according to the reports, is a type of common practice among some of these professionals who work in academia. This statement corroborates the article that points out the good practices of anti-plagiarism scientific guidance (Alves et al., 2016) and with the report:

I would guide him, I would talk to him saying that this is a crime, that he needs to respect copyright, and I would ask him to rewrite the work with the proper citations, that is, [...] instruction in scientific methodology. (E1\_M)

Another report worth mentioning is the need for these professors to manifest a consistent ethical conduct in their academic routine, transparency, emotional intelligence, and empathy, given the historical and social role of this professional

as a trainer and even an inspirer, of conscious and trained professionals for the labor market.

I believe that a professor who is open and genuinely interested in working on ethical issues in a transparent and humble way with students and co-workers will manage to reduce dishonesty. (E2\_M)

Finally, when analyzing the study by Aires and Pilatti (2017), which separately points out regulatory actions (such as policies and regulations) and preventive actions (such as community orientation), it is concluded that, the measures of the fight against plagiarism, promoted by HEIs, were ineffective, even in those Institutions that formalized some of their actions, with the need to improve or intensify the confrontation of dishonest academic practices.

#### **Category 4.2 – Prevention Policies – PVP**

In addition to punishing, it is also necessary to think about ways to prevent dishonest behavior and plagiarism in the academic environment (Nunes et al., 2012). For most of the participants in this study, such prevention depends on changing people's mentalities and values, through a structural transformation of universities, often focused on scientific productivity and neglecting the formation of ethical values, on the development of an academic structure that discuss topics such as good conduct in research, among professors, students, technical-administrative staff, etc.

I think the fundamental thing would be ethical training because it would be beneficial not only for plagiarism, but for many issues that today in society we have problems because of that, so countries that already have this critical, educational development, from the base, they have lower levels of fraud. (E3\_M)

But, however, the reports brought other interesting preventive suggestions:

In a participative way, create debates between the different courses, creating an atmosphere of judgement [...] clarifying from different angles and professions. "Journey of the professions." (E16\_PP)

In the program I work on, we have a plagiarism booklet and a code of conduct. There are still routines for submitting work to anti-plagiarism systems, but they are time-consuming, costly, and depend on people. (E20\_PP)

Use control and verification platforms and applications. Periodically modify the formats

and content of works to be delivered in order to prevent [...] teaching ethics and morals, as well as the impacts and meanings of dishonest behavior. (E24\_PG)

Some participants reported that an effective way to minimize dishonest activities would be through the professor's ability to engage during the school period, because according to them, a professor who can adapt to student needs and manage to offer a course that engages students will naturally be able to reduce cases of plagiarism in academic papers and assessments, this is because the student will feel motivated to study and will be committed to the content of the course.

The good academic environment restrains this type of behavior, which encourages enthusiasm within the classroom. You know when that student says he has to go to class? That that class is ten? Is it too much? I love that class? I can't miss it! (E2\_M)

The interviews evidenced several important issues revealed according to the categories. They explain possible origins and causes of the phenomenon, such as pressure to produce and time as a scarce resource, as well as the unintentionally and unconsciously occurrence of plagiarism, for example. Due to these pressures and unconscious behaviors, masters and doctoral students engage in certain dishonest practices. Therefore, the current paper is important to highlight possible consequences and practices to prevent dishonest practices in academia. The next section consolidates the final considerations of this paper.

## **5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The article aimed to analyze the meanings and perceptions of graduate programs students (master's and doctoral students) in Business Administration, as well as professors of graduate programs (PPGs) from different institutions, in relation to possible practices of dishonest behavior and plagiarism in the academic context. Therefore, the reports addressed unethical practices linked to the postures of university students and professors in their academic daily lives.



The findings of this research are consistent with the idea that such dishonest behavior is motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and that these frauds occur despite laws that prohibit appropriating third-party content (Aires & Pilatti, 2017). The participants expressed concern about the consequences that academic dishonesty may cause for the future careers of these individuals, corroborating the findings of studies such as those by Innarelli et al. (2011), Sanchez and Innarelli (2012), as well as Veludo-de-Oliveira et al. (2014).

As theoretical contributions, the study brings current and contextualized evidence in testimonials from students and professors, mostly from PPGs in the area of management, which, as informed in the introduction, would be a research gap to be explored. Respondents reported preventive and corrective practices to combat plagiarism and dishonest behavior but did not specify more detailed planning to seek to resolve such challenges in graduate business programs. Although many proposals have already been tried in other contexts (e.g., Nunes et al., 2012; Aires & Pilatti, 2017), the present study points to certain paths including the use of more than one preventive and corrective approach. Practical implications encompass the discussion of possible causes and implications of plagiarism and the forms to combat or mitigate the impact of these acts in Business Administration teaching programs, fostering the debate about these deleterious practices in the academic context.

Furthermore, the ethical training of these professionals is a point that can be improved, aiming at their civic development. Limitations of the current research encompass the size of the sample and the fact that the research was conducted only on Brazilian universities. Thus, future research can also expand the investigation to the perceptions of professors and undergraduate students, to graduate programs with different profiles, such as federal institutes focused on technical education, private HEIs, or located in other regions and countries. Finally, it may be interesting to systematically investigate current structures to combat plagiarism and existing ethics committees in PPGs, aiming to assess their performance and perceived

effectiveness in combating plagiarism and other unethical behaviors that have affected these HEIs.

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1. Definition of research problem	√		√		
2. Development of hypotheses or research questions (empirical studies)	√		√		
3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)	√		√		
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review		√		√	√
5. Definition of methodological procedures	√	√	√		
6. Data collection	√		√		
7. Statistical analysis		√		√	
8. Analysis and interpretation of data	√	√	√	√	
9. Critical revision of the manuscript		√		√	√
10. Manuscript writing	√	√	√	√	√

### **Conflict of Interest**

*The authors have stated that there is no conflict of interest.*

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