



Proceedings of the
Estonian Academy of Sciences
2025, **74**, 3, 353–360

<https://doi.org/10.3176/proc.2025.3.05>

www.eap.ee/proceedings
Estonian Academy Publishers

ACADEMIC ETHICS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Received 17 December 2024
Accepted 25 February 2025
Available online 12 August 2025

Keywords:

academic ethics, faculty, distance
learning, perceptions

Corresponding author:

Maigi Lepik
maigi.lepik@ttk.ee

Citation:

Lepik, M., Rannula, K. and Männiksaar, L.
2025. Faculty perceptions and conveyance
of academic ethics to students in distance
learning. *Proceedings of the Estonian
Academy of Sciences*, **74**(3), 353–360.
<https://doi.org/10.3176/proc.2025.3.05>

Faculty perceptions and conveyance of academic ethics to students in distance learning

Maigi Lepik^a, Kateriina Rannula^a and Liina Männiksaar^b

^a Lifelong-Learning Centre, Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences, Kännu 67, 13418 Tallinn, Estonia

^b Chair of Nursing, Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences, Kännu 67, 13418 Tallinn, Estonia

ABSTRACT

Emphasising academic ethics throughout the educational process is crucial for all learners. The applied research project at Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences, titled 'Academic ethics as lecturer's toolkit in the teaching process – adapting to the changing environment', explores how faculty perceive ethical values and how they communicate these values during distance learning. The study aims to describe how faculty perceive and convey academic ethics in the context of distance learning. An inductive thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data from twenty semi-structured interviews conducted with faculty members of Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences. The analysis revealed four main categories that describe faculty perceptions regarding the nature and conveyance of academic ethics to students during distance learning. The interview data indicated that faculty primarily rely on peer support and prior experiences when navigating ethical issues. The interviews consistently reflected four key themes: academic integrity, ethical communication, peer collaboration in maintaining academic discourse, and the promotion of and adherence to established guidelines. Faculty also highlighted ethical dilemmas in distance learning, such as academic dishonesty during examinations and the challenges of monitoring student activities online. The study identified several key factors, including faculty awareness of academic ethics, the importance of colleague and institutional support, and the unique ethical challenges posed by distance learning. The findings suggest that faculty not only comprehend academic ethics but also actively promote these values, thereby enhancing students' understanding of their significance.

1. Introduction

Academic ethics plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational environment, influencing not only the behaviour of students but also guiding the instructional practices of educators. As education increasingly shifts towards online and distance learning formats, the importance of upholding academic integrity and ethical standards has never been more pronounced (Bretag et al. 2019). Faculty are at the forefront of this initiative, acting as both role models and enforcers of academic ethics. Their ability to effectively communicate ethical values is crucial for fostering an environment of trust and integrity in the learning process (Eaton 2020).

During the transition to distance learning, faculty faced a significant dilemma. On the one hand, they were responsible for the content they delivered; on the other hand, they had to adhere to governmental regulations. This situation necessitated modifications to existing practices through the rethinking and renewal of methods, materials, and other aspects of instruction. Consequently, many educators were required to rapidly enhance their skills (Sachs 2016).

Nowell et al. (2021) emphasise the need for new approaches to integrating technology into teaching, particularly in fostering communication, connection, and collaboration. These elements are crucial components in caring professions, where interpersonal interactions play a vital role (ibid.). Pedagogical personnel were not prepared for the technical and pedagogical problems that occurred in the online classroom. This strongly influenced how they viewed themselves professionally (AbdAlgae 2023).

Academic institutions are impacted by plagiarism in various ways, particularly in research and the teaching-learning process, and addressing it requires a multi-level approach (Malik et al. 2021; Meccaway et al. 2021). Dixon et al. (2021) highlight that

monitoring online coursework exchanges provides a proactive approach to understanding and mitigating plagiarism, complementing traditional methods such as self-reporting and similarity detection. This real-time monitoring is particularly valuable in distance education, as it helps identify vulnerable courses and assignments, enabling educators to take timely action against academic misconduct (ibid.). In recent years, the challenges of maintaining academic ethics have been amplified by the widespread adoption of distance learning, driven by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift has introduced new complexities in how educators interact with students and uphold ethical standards, often lacking the traditional classroom tools to monitor and guide student behaviour (Sotiriadou et al. 2020). The need for clear guidelines and consistent communication of ethical expectations has become more critical as faculty navigate the intricacies of remote instruction and assessment.

The study by Koskinen et al. (2024) underscores the critical need for continuous pedagogical and didactic training for healthcare educators, particularly considering emerging technologies and associated ethical challenges. As remote teaching becomes more prevalent, it is essential to address the ethical dilemmas and moral stress experienced by educators. Institutions must take responsibility for supporting teachers' well-being through ongoing ethical education and structured discussions (ibid.).

According to a study conducted by Walsh et al. (2024), a significant portion of faculty (over 60%) regarded cheating as a problem within the university context, while fewer than 35% of students shared this view. This discrepancy suggests that students often fail to recognise behaviours that faculty categorise as cheating, which prevents them from acknowledging a problem they do not perceive. Furthermore, the research highlighted several areas of divergence between faculty and student perspectives on cheating, including collaboration with peers to find answers during exams – an area in which faculty members frequently expressed uncertainty (ibid.).

Concurrently, Kim (2022) notes that there are misconceptions regarding academic dishonesty in online and remote learning. A common but mistaken belief is that plagiarism and cheating occur more frequently in online education compared to traditional in-person learning. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this issue became particularly relevant as educational institutions had to transition rapidly to remote learning. This suggests a perceived, rather than an actual difference in academic integrity between online and traditional education (ibid.).

The ongoing applied research project at Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences, titled 'Academic ethics as lecturer's toolkit in the teaching process – adapting to the changing environment', seeks to understand how faculty perceive and convey academic ethics in the context of distance learning. This study examines the experiences of faculty members to offer insights into the evolving role of faculty in promoting academic ethics and to identify the challenges they encounter in an increasingly dynamic educational landscape.

Relevant topics regarding the nature of academic ethics in online education are addressed in this research, including the reliance on peer support, the consistency of ethical perspectives among faculty, and the strategies employed to reduce academic dishonesty. Specifically, the research poses the following questions:

1. How do faculty at Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences perceive and interpret academic ethics within the context of distance learning, and what specific strategies do they employ to promote these values among students?
2. What challenges do faculty members face in conveying academic ethics during online education, and how do these challenges influence their approaches to mitigating academic dishonesty?

By highlighting the personal experiences of faculty, the research emphasises the ongoing need for strong ethical frameworks and support systems to ensure the integrity of the educational process in a changing environment.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

The study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on how faculty members teaching during the spring semester of 2020 perceive and convey academic ethics in the context of distance learning at Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences. Given the exploratory nature of the research topic, a qualitative approach was adopted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic (Creswell and Poth 2018).

A qualitative approach was chosen due to its suitability for investigating complex social phenomena such as ethical behaviour and communication in education, where rich, descriptive data is required to understand subjective experiences and interpretations (Creswell and Poth 2018). The research adopts an inductive thematic analysis, which allows patterns and themes to emerge organically from the data without imposing preconceived categories (Braun and Clarke 2006). This approach is particularly well-suited to understanding how academic ethics is interpreted, enacted, and challenged in the context of distance education, where diverse experiences and evolving practices require deep contextual insight.

The sample comprised 20 faculty members from Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences who were teaching during the spring semester of 2020. The research employed convenience sampling, selecting participants based on their availability and accessibility, which allowed for a practical approach to data collection. No speciality-specific information was requested; rather, the focus was solely on the perception of academic ethics. The questionnaire was not differentiated by study programmes or fields of specialisation.

The data collection period was selected to ensure that participants had sufficient experience with distance learning, enabling them to reflect on their observations and challenges regarding academic ethics. As the volume of distance learning increased, these initial data provided the most authentic insights, allowing faculty members to critically reflect on their experiences with academic ethics with greater clarity.

Table 1. Substantive codes and themes

Substantive codes	Themes
Ethics perceived as preventing plagiarism Ensuring honesty and proper citation of sources Challenges in verifying authenticity in distance learning	Academic integrity
Respectful interactions, tolerance, and professionalism between faculty and students Faculty as role models of ethical behaviour	Ethical communication
Supervisor trainings Importance and support of colleagues in navigating challenges Assistance in discussions on technical and ethical issues	Peer support in maintaining academic discourse
Need for clear agreements and rules in the learning environment Repeated introduction of rules, guidelines, and institutional rules Communication of academic ethics	Promoting and adhering to existing guidelines

2.2. Data collection and analysis

The data collection process was conducted by the researchers of this study. Responsibility for conducting the interviews was shared equally between the members of the working group. In the initial phase of the study (1 April 2023 – 30 May 2023), three (3) pilot interviews were conducted to assess the interview questions and to gain preliminary insights into general perceptions of the academically ethical environment. The emphasis of these interviews was on the communication of academic ethics in online learning and the methods used to uphold ethical standards.

These semi-structured interviews allowed for flexible discussion, in which topics evolved naturally based on the participants’ thoughts and insights, providing a rich and nuanced understanding of their experiences (Silverman 2011). The findings from the pilot study informed the development of the semi-structured interview guide used in the subsequent main study phase. The questions were revised, and redundancies eliminated. The suitability of the questionnaire for the study’s objectives was confirmed.

In the main phase of the study (1 September 2023 – 30 April 2024), twenty (20) semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty members to further investigate their interpretations of academic ethics and the influence of distance learning on ethical practices. An inductive thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data, allowing themes to emerge organically from the participants’ narratives (Braun and Clarke 2006). This method enabled the identification of key themes that describe the faculty perceptions of the nature and dissemination of academic ethics during distance learning. The timing of data collection was chosen to ensure that participants had sufficient experience with distance learning, enabling them to reflect on their long-term observations and challenges regarding academic ethics. With the initial adjustment period having passed, participants were better able to critically assess and articulate their perspectives on academic ethics in the context of distance learning.

Researchers thoroughly reviewed the transcribed interviews multiple times, selecting and coding segments that reflected faculty perceptions of academic ethics. Key expressions were identified and coded to allow easy reference to the original data if needed. The substantive codes were then

organised into four main categories (Table 1). To illustrate these categories in greater detail, characteristic expressions from the interviews were quoted anonymously in the results. Each category was named according to the themes it represented, with four primary categories established.

This methodological approach allowed for a detailed exploration of how academic ethics is perceived and enacted by faculty in the context of a changing educational landscape, providing valuable insights into the challenges and strategies associated with maintaining ethical standards in distance learning.

2.3. Ethics

The research adhered to ethical guidelines throughout the study’s planning, data collection, and analysis phases, ensuring that the findings contribute to the broader understanding of academic ethics without compromising the rights and privacy of the participants (Orb et al. 2001; Tartu Ülikooli eetikakeskus 2023)

Participants were fully informed about the study’s aims, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research. Participants provided written consent prior to their involvement, and the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed using Microsoft Word. The interview recordings and transcripts were securely managed, and measures were taken to anonymise the data to protect the identity of the respondents. The data was securely stored on the cloud server of Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences, accessible only to individuals directly involved in the research. To ensure confidentiality, all raw data were destroyed upon the completion of the study, and findings were presented in aggregated form, with no possibility of identifying individual participants (Flick 2018). No personal details of the research participants were collected, and the researchers took every precaution to ensure that their identities remained confidential in publishing the research findings.

3. Results

Twenty semi-structured interviews with faculty from Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences revealed a multifaceted understanding of academic ethics in the context of

distance learning. Four main categories emerged from the data: academic integrity, ethical communication, peer support in maintaining academic discourse, and academic communication in online classes. The analysis of these categories offers insights into how faculty perceive, convey, and address the challenges of academic ethics in the evolving context of online learning. The following section presents the results along with relevant quotations.

3.1. Academic integrity

Academic ethics was predominantly understood as the prevention of cheating and plagiarism. Comments included: *'It's important to avoid self-plagiarism, and we must also ensure proper citation of all other authors.'*, *'Honesty, reliability, academic accuracy, proper use of materials, including those from other teachers ... and avoiding plagiarism...'*, *'From a direct teaching perspective, academic ethics is closely related to student integrity ... particularly in ensuring that they properly reference the sources they use.'*

The interviewees noted that discussions around cheating in their classes occurred more frequently than in previous years. Distance learning introduces new challenges to upholding academic integrity, particularly in verifying the authenticity of students' submissions.

Academic ethics was also described as complex and multifaceted:

'Evidence-based, institution-centred ... highly framed system.', *'Many aspects ... broad-based concept. Also includes the behavioural component.'*, *'Multifaceted ... teacher as an academic.'*

Several participants admitted they had not reflected on academic ethics in some time, suggesting that while the concept is foundational, it may often be implicit in their daily practices. This initial hesitation indicates that academic ethics is deeply ingrained in the institutional and pedagogical context, but is not always at the forefront of faculty members' conscious deliberation.

3.2. Ethical communication

Academic ethics was also described as encompassing respectful and dignified communication. The promotion of tolerance towards diverse opinions and cultures was considered crucial. Several interviews highlighted the importance of communication between faculty, noting that when this communication lacks an academic focus, it sets the stage for a non-academic environment among students as well: *'Mutual respectful behaviour.'*, *'Communication with one another, respect between teachers and students, as well as between students and teachers, and respectful interactions among teachers themselves.'*, *'Additionally, it is important that interactions with students are conducted with mutual respect and professionalism.'*

Faculty are expected to model ethical behaviour by incorporating examples and practical exercises into their teaching practices: *'Teachers must serve as role models for students in matters of ethics within their professional responsibilities.'*, *'I aim to convey ethical principles through my own*

example, although I recognise that I may not always fully succeed in doing so.', *'Be a role model for them: place the same demands on yourself as on them ... Try to avoid slang in actions and words, develop a refined spoken language.'*

It was found that faculty members are also expected to explain the rules and documents used within the institution to uphold academic integrity: *'... teach and advise how to ensure academic ethics ... follow instructions that are important for academic work.'*, *'... introduce the guidelines valid in the higher education institution (good practice, academic code) ... explain why this is important in research ... established the rules and told students how to behave in the new learning environment ... made agreements...'* This highlights the dual role of faculty members, not only as educators but also as key enforcers and communicators of institutional policies, ensuring that students understand the importance of academic integrity in both their studies and research practices.

Distance learning has both advantages and disadvantages in promoting ethical communication. While it offers flexibility and the use of diverse teaching methods, it limits direct observation of students' non-verbal cues, making it harder to assess their understanding and involvement. Comments reflecting this include:

'This situation had a negative impact, as I lack direct contact and am unable to observe how actively they participate, particularly when the cameras are turned off. As a result, it becomes difficult to ascertain what is happening on the other side.', *'Regarding the teaching of ethics, I initially struggled, as my primary focus was on managing the technical aspects...'*, *'Difficult at first – how to design a picture (via the internet) ... How do I make the person behind the screen work? It required more attention. How to motivate? A big challenge indeed...'*, *'... How much is it ethical to demand from students during a pandemic situation, and how can their performance be fairly evaluated under these challenging circumstances?'*

New techniques for conducting lessons were developed alongside practicing the use of technical tools, focusing on how to ensure that students are actively participating, how to motivate them to engage, and how to encourage honest collaboration. The challenges mentioned highlight the complexity of fostering ethical communication in a virtual environment, where the lack of physical presence and direct interaction raises critical questions about student engagement, motivation, and the fairness of evaluation methods.

3.3. Peer support in maintaining academic discourse

Peer support among faculty is crucial in navigating the ethical challenges of both in-person and distance learning environments: *'Support is always necessary, and the primary source of support comes from interactions with colleagues, both through personal conversations and meetings.'*

Faculty rely on their peers for assistance, particularly in technical areas, though few express a need for help in communicating ethical topics: *'While the educational technologist provides technical assistance, substantive and emotional sup-*

port is best received from colleagues.’ Collaborative experience-sharing and open discussions are seen as essential in enhancing faculty members’ ability to uphold academic ethics during teaching: *‘When I didn’t know something, I would consult my colleagues, as we often discussed matters together, which helped to resolve issues efficiently.’*

Experience-sharing sessions and open discussions are viewed as key to helping faculty members maintain academic ethics in their teaching. Given the value placed on these interactions, formalised experience-sharing initiatives should be organised to further enhance this support network.

3.4. Promoting and adhering to existing guidelines

There is a recognised need to support faculty in continuously emphasising academic ethics throughout the teaching process to raise student awareness of academic integrity. This was reflected as follows: *‘Although all guidelines are clearly outlined, it is essential to consistently reiterate both the citation requirements and the expected behaviour during exams.’*, *‘... repeat the necessity of confidentiality in every lecture.’*

Practical guidelines suggest the importance of regular meetings to exchange experiences, raise awareness, and encourage open discussion about ethical issues. Despite a strong understanding of academic ethics, many faculty members do not actively seek assistance in ethical matters, which highlights a gap between knowledge and practical application. *‘I didn’t consciously think about ethical issues – so I did not seek help.’* Thus, raising awareness is a key factor in fostering academically ethical environments.

4. Discussion

The study focuses on academic integrity, which the interviewees primarily defined as avoiding cheating and plagiarism. According to Malik et al. (2021), most students lacked knowledge and perception of plagiarism. The study highlights that discussions about academic misconduct have become more frequent, especially with the rise of distance learning. Since instructors no longer have the physical ability to ensure that students are submitting their own work, the focus has shifted towards overall student engagement and participation. According to Sotiriadou et al. (2020), this shift suggests that traditional methods may not be sufficient to ensure academic integrity in an online environment.

The study emphasises the importance of promoting and following existing guidelines on academic ethics. While faculty are aware of ethical principles, there is often a gap between that awareness and practical implementation. According to Walsh et al. (2024), regular discussions, experience sharing, and creating support groups are necessary to bridge this gap and ensure that academic ethics is consistently emphasised throughout the teaching process. This is especially crucial in the context of distance learning, where traditional methods for monitoring student behaviour may not be as effective. A structured approach to integrating ethical guidelines into teaching practices is essential for fostering a culture of honesty and integrity and preventing academic misconduct.

The findings emphasise the significant role of ethical communication in maintaining academic integrity, especially in the context of distance learning. Participants highlighted the importance of respectful and professional interactions between students and faculty, as well as among educators themselves. Ethical communication was seen as essential for fostering mutual respect and trust in the online learning environment, reinforcing earlier research by Bretag et al. (2019) and Eaton (2020), which underscores the educator’s role as a model for ethical behaviour.

However, the transition to online education presented challenges in maintaining the quality of these interactions. Faculty reported difficulties in assessing student engagement and understanding, particularly when deprived of the non-verbal cues present in face-to-face interactions. The reduced visibility of student reactions during online classes, especially when cameras were off, hindered the effectiveness of communication. According to Nowell et al. (2021), this limitation not only complicated the transmission of ethical values but also affected faculty members’ ability to provide personalised guidance, echoing the concerns raised.

Despite these challenges, educators remained committed to promoting ethical communication through the clear articulation of academic guidelines and institutional codes of conduct. Many faculty members emphasised the importance of explaining ethical standards and modelling ethical behaviour, even as they adapted to the technical constraints of online platforms. Over time, they developed strategies to overcome the initial difficulties, ensuring that ethical principles were consistently communicated to students.

Findings highlight that, while ethical communication remains a cornerstone of academic integrity, its practice in distance learning requires ongoing adaptation. The challenges posed by the online environment underscore the need for innovative approaches to fostering respectful, clear, and effective communication between educators and students.

The role of peer support is highlighted in maintaining academic discourse. The study reveals that faculty often rely on their peers for support, especially in addressing technical challenges, though few seek assistance regarding ethical issues. This reflects a reliance on informal networks rather than institutional support systems. Nonetheless, collective discussions and experience-sharing are vital for promoting academic ethics, particularly in navigating the new challenges posed by distance education (Dixon et al. 2021). The findings suggest that peer collaboration plays an essential role in ensuring consistency and adherence to ethical standards.

Peer support among faculty emerged as a crucial element in navigating the ethical challenges posed by both in-person and distance learning environments. The study’s participants frequently cited their reliance on colleagues for technical and emotional support, particularly when addressing complex ethical dilemmas. This collaborative approach to maintaining academic discourse is essential, as it enables instructors to share experiences, clarify uncertainties, and collectively uphold ethical standards in their teaching practices.

However, the data also revealed a notable gap in the perceived need for peer support in communicating ethical topics.

While faculty often turn to peers for assistance with technical challenges, few express the same level of need when it comes to discussing ethical issues. This suggests a potential disconnect between awareness of academic ethics and the active pursuit of peer collaboration in addressing these topics. Nevertheless, the importance of regular experience-sharing and open discussions among faculty members cannot be overstated, as these practices not only enhance individual understanding but also contribute to a more cohesive approach to upholding academic ethics within the institution (Dixon et al. 2021).

The role of technology in distance learning presents both opportunities and challenges. While it offers flexibility and innovative teaching methods, the lack of direct contact with students complicates ethical instruction. This is particularly evident in the frustrations shared by the educators who struggled to maintain student engagement when cameras were turned off or when students were less responsive. This is consistent with previous research, such as that of AbdAlgane (2023), which highlighted how technological barriers can alter educators' self-perception and professional identity. Despite these challenges, faculty reported that over time, they adapted to the new environment and found ways to make ethical principles more relevant to the online format, reflecting the resilience and adaptability of teachers in the face of unprecedented changes.

Another significant finding from the study is the discrepancy between students' and faculty members' perceptions of academic dishonesty. As noted previously, Walsh et al. (2024) reported a significant gap between how students and faculty view cheating, with faculty members perceiving it as a more prevalent issue. This misalignment poses a challenge for educators who aim to cultivate academic integrity, especially in an online setting where opportunities for academic dishonesty may increase due to the perceived anonymity of distance learning. Educators expressed concerns about how to monitor and address academic misconduct when traditional methods of supervision and interaction are limited. According to Meccawy et al. (2021), it is necessary to address all three parties: lecturers, students and institutions. Students need to raise their awareness of plagiarism, lecturers need training in how to detect plagiarism, and institutions need activation of their codes (ibid.).

While faculty have made admirable efforts to adapt to the challenges of distance learning, the study highlights ongoing issues in promoting and maintaining academic ethics in the changing environment.

The findings emphasise the need for continuous support – both technical and pedagogical – to help faculty navigate these challenges. Furthermore, clearer guidelines and more effective communication between students and faculty are essential for bridging the gap in perceptions of academic dishonesty. This research reinforces the importance of adapting ethical frameworks to meet the evolving needs of both faculty and students in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

The study's focus on the perceptions of faculty may relegate to the background the perspectives and experiences

of students, who are crucial in the academic integrity landscape. Understanding students' views on ethical communication and academic misconduct could provide a more comprehensive picture of the challenges faced in promoting academic ethics in online education. Future research should consider integrating student feedback to broaden the scope of inquiry and develop more effective strategies for fostering an ethical academic environment.

Kim (2022) noted that the claim in higher levels of academic dishonesty in online learning compared to traditional education is widely debated. The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened these discussions, highlighting the need for a more nuanced approach to academic integrity across different learning environments. As a result, it is crucial to explore the nature of distance learning from various perspectives, identify the challenges, and suggest new, effective methods to ease the workload of educators (ibid.).

To strengthen academic integrity and address challenges related to academic dishonesty, this study highlights the need for clear ethical guidelines, consistent communication, and structured experience-sharing among faculty members. Furthermore, fostering open discussions and regular meetings among faculty can enhance alignment in ethical expectations and teaching practices. It is essential to develop a shared understanding of academic ethics to ensure consistency in its application. Implementing structured training sessions and awareness initiatives can further support a culture of academic integrity, ensuring that ethical principles are actively integrated into academic environments.

5. Limitations

While the sample size was sufficient for a qualitative exploratory analysis, it may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives present within the broader academic community, which means that the findings may not be generalised beyond the studied group. Additionally, selection bias could have influenced the results, as those participants who were more motivated or had greater familiarity with the research topic may have been more prevalent. This could limit the extent to which the study's outcomes reflect the full range of experiences and perspectives on academic ethics.

The evolving nature of distance education, particularly in response to global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may affect the relevance of findings over time. As technological advancements and pedagogical practices continue to change, ongoing research is needed to address emerging challenges and to adapt strategies for fostering academic integrity in diverse educational settings.

However, despite these limitations, all protocols for qualitative data collection, processing, and storage were strictly adhered to, ensuring the reliability and integrity of the data.

In the context of our organisation, this study is significant, as it provides valuable insights that contribute to the professional development of faculty members, particularly in fostering their competencies in academic ethics. The outcomes of the research aim to assist faculty in deepening their knowledge and practice of academic ethics.

6. Conclusions

The findings of the study conducted to explore faculty members' perceptions and experiences in promoting academic ethics during distance learning at Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences revealed that faculty view ethical communication, including mutual respect and dignified interactions, as crucial to upholding academic integrity. While distance learning offers flexibility, it also presents challenges, such as difficulties in monitoring student engagement and preventing academic misconduct.

Overall, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of how academic ethics is conveyed in distance learning, highlighting the challenges faculty face and the strategies they use to maintain academic integrity in a changing educational environment. The study also emphasises the need for flexibility and continuous adaptation to keep pace with the rapidly evolving nature of online education.

Data availability statement

All research data are contained within the article and can be shared upon request from the authors.

Acknowledgements

The study was conducted as part of the applied research project 'Academic ethics as lecturer's toolkit in the teaching process – adapting to the changing environment' (No. 474, 2023–2025) at Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences. The research team would like to extend their gratitude to the faculty members of Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences for their valuable participation and insights, which made this research possible. Their willingness to share their experiences and perspectives on academic ethics in distance learning has greatly contributed to the depth and relevance of this study. The publication costs of this article were partially covered by the Estonian Academy of Sciences.

References

- AbdAlgane, M. 2023. Professionalism in the classroom: how online learning influences English language instructors. *Contemp. Educ. Technol.*, **15**(4), ep476. <https://doi.org/10.30935/cedtech/13741>
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual. Res. Psychol.*, **3**(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bretag, T., Harper, R., Burton, M., Ellis, C., Newton, P., van Haeringen, K. et al. 2019. Contract cheating and assessment design: exploring the connection. *Assess. Eval. High. Educ.*, **44**(5), 676–691.
- Creswell, J. W. and Poth, C. N. 2018. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. 4th ed. SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks. https://pubhtml5.com/enuk/cykh/Creswell_and_Poth%2C_2018%2C_Qualitative_Inquiry_4th/
- Dixon, Z., George, K. and Carr, T. 2021. Catching lightning in a bottle: surveying plagiarism futures. *Online Learn.*, **25**(3). <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v25i3.2422>
- Eaton, S. E. 2020. Academic integrity during COVID-19: reflections from the University of Calgary. *J. Commonw. Counc. Educ. Adm. Manag.*, **48**(1), 80–85.
- Flick, U. 2018. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 6th ed. SAGE Publications.
- Kim, D. L. 2022. Plagiarism in higher education: tackling tough topics in academic integrity. Sarah Elaine Eaton, Libraries Unlimited. *Public Serv. Q.*, **18**(3), 199–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228959.2022.2085422>
- Koskinen, M., Hilli, Y., Keskitalo, T., Talvik, M., Sandvik, A.-H., Thorkildsen, K. M. et al. 2024. Ethical dilemmas faced by healthcare teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Nurs. Ethics*, **31**(5), 907–918. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09697330231215957>
- Malik, M. A., Mahroof, A. and Ashraf, M. A. 2021. Online university students' perceptions on the awareness of, reasons for, and solutions to plagiarism in higher education: the development of the AS&P model to combat plagiarism. *Appl. Sci.*, **11**(24), 12055. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app112412055>
- Meccawy, Z., Meccawy, M. and Alsobhi, A. 2021. Assessment in 'survival mode': student and faculty perceptions of online assessment practices in HE during COVID-19 pandemic. *Int. J. Educ. Integr.*, **17**, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-021-00083-9>
- Nowell, L., Lorenzetti, D., Jacobsen, M., Lorenzetti, L. and Paolucci, E. O. 2021. Translating caring competencies to remote working environments: a systematic review protocol. *BMJ Open*, **11**(5), e048459. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-048459>
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L. and Wynaden, D. 2001. Ethics in qualitative research. *J. Nurs. Scholarsh.*, **33**(1), 93–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x>
- Sachs, J. 2016. Teacher professionalism: why are we still talking about it? *Teach. Teach.*, **22**(4), 413–425. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1082732>
- Silverman, D. 2011. *Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. SAGE Publications, London.
- Sotiriadou, P., Logan, D., Daly, A. and Guest, R. 2020. The role of authentic assessment to preserve academic integrity and promote skill development and employability. *Stud. High. Educ.*, **45**(11), 2132–2148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1582015>
- Tartu Ülikooli eetikakeskus. 2023. *Hea teadustava (Good Scientific Practice)*. https://eetika.ee/sites/default/files/2023-06/HEA%20TEADUSTAVA_2023.pdf (accessed 2025-02-09).
- Walsh, J., Kriener, J., Cannon, K. and Honan, S. 2024. Professors call it cheating, students call it teamwork. *J. Scholarsh. Teach. Learn.*, **24**(2). <https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v24i2.35191>

Õppejõudude arusaamad akadeemilisest eetikast ja selle edasiandmine üliõpilastele distantsõppe kontekstis

Maigi Lepik, Kateriina Rannula ja Liina Männiksaar

Akadeemilise eetika rõhutamine kogu õppeprotsessi vältel on õppijate jaoks äärmiselt oluline. Tallinna Tervishoiu Kõrgkooli rakendusuuringus „Akadeemiline eetika kui õppejõu töövahend õppeprotsessis – kohanemine muutuva keskkonnaga“ uuritakse, kuidas õppejõud tõlgendavad eetilisi väärtusi oma igapäevatoos ja kuidas distantsõpe on mõjutanud nende väärtuste edastamist. Tallinna Tervishoiu Kõrgkooli kahekümne õppejõuga läbi viidud poolstruktureeritud intervjuu andmete analüüsimiseks kasutati induktiivset temaatilist analüüsi. Analüüsi käigus selgusid neli peamist kategooriat, mis kirjeldavad õppejõudude arusaamu akadeemilise eetika olemusest ja selle edasiandmisest üliõpilastele distantsõppe ajal: akadeemiline ausus, eetiline suhtlus, kolleegide koostöö akadeemilise diskursuse hoidmisel ning olemasolevate juhiste tutvustamine ja järgimine. Intervjuude vastustest võib järeldada, et eetilistes küsimustes orienteerumisel toetuvad õppejõud eelkõige kolleegide toele ja varasematele kogemustele. Esile tõsteti ka distantsõppes esinevaid eetilisi dilemmasid, näiteks akadeemilise ebaaususe juhtumid eksamite ajal ja raskused üliõpilaste tegevuse jälgimisel veebikeskkonnas. Uuring tuvastas mitmed võtmetegurid, sealhulgas õppejõudude teadlikkus akadeemilisest eetikast, kolleegide ja institutsioonilise toetuse olulisus ning distantsõppega kaasnevad ainulaadsed eetilised väljakutsed. Tulemused viitavad sellele, et õppejõud mitte ainult ei mõista akadeemilist eetikat, vaid edendavad aktiivselt nende väärtuste tähtsust, aidates seeläbi kaasa ka üliõpilaste teadlikkuse kasvule.
