

# DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON AWARENESS & ATTITUDES AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN WEST BENGAL

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**Abstract :** This present study seeks to explore the level of awareness and attitude towards plagiarism among higher education students in West Bengal, India. Academic integrity is faced with new challenges in light of the so-called 'AI revolution' and access to the internet. According to UGC 2026 statistics, despite all the existing global and national guidelines, the level of academic submissions that demonstrate high-level similarity in India is around 28%. Therefore, the purpose of this research is the investigation of the so-called "knowledge-practice gap", when academic awareness about plagiarism cannot guarantee ethical behavior. The primary quantitative descriptive survey design was utilized in order to collect data from 109 graduate/postgraduate students from different educational streams (science/arts), districts (Nadia/Howrah). For the purpose of analysis, a validated 20 items Likert-scale survey, measuring the Awareness, Attitudes, Behavior and Motivation in relation to plagiarism, was used. Inferential techniques such as independent t-tests were also utilized during the process of data interpretation. It was found out that there are no statistically significant differences regarding age, gender, location, educational stream and the degree obtained in terms of level of academic integrity and awareness about plagiarism. The conclusion made is that software and other policies implemented in institutions on their own are not enough; at the same time, it is critical to switch from punishment techniques to instruction, which should emphasize proper referencing and academic integrity awareness.

**IndexTerms - Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, Awareness, Attitude, Higher Education.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Academic integrity is the backbone to any higher education, whereby knowledge generation is authentic and credible. But with the advent of the digital revolution and the availability of open source content, plagiarism became a hot topic around the world. The widespread unapproved, unauthorized use of the ideas, language, or information of others as if they are one's own and the representation of them as such is a major breach of ethical standards in the academic world known as plagiarism. This is deemed to be "intellectual theft," which can include word-for-word copying, but may also involve more subtle plagiarism, known as "mosaic plagiarism," where phrases from multiple sources are aggregated and not cited. Plagiarism, done on purpose or unintentionally, violates the principles of academic honesty and scientific credibility that all members of the scientific community should adhere to. Academic dishonesty is now one of the critical issues faced by all Universities in the quest for development in Higher Education. Misusing another work or idea without giving the proper credit may be considered plagiarism. It does not solely have to do with duplicative transcription. These are exceptions to this; otherwise, the study becomes a very significant link between theory and practice of policy-making in classrooms. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has laid strict guidelines on plagiarism, but it is important to note that they rely solely on students' ethical principles and technical knowledge and understanding of citation. By uncovering the areas where students find themselves confused, this research highlights where there are specific gaps and can help institutions move from a reactive to a proactive approach that educates students on plagiarism and how to use AI. This research pinpoints the specific areas of confusion – whether paraphrasing, self-plagiarism, or the navigation of tools that allow students to use AI – that reveal important areas of student confusion, helping institutions transition from a purely punitive approach to instilling a positive, learning-focused environment.

## II. REVIEW ON PLAGIARISM AWARENESS AND BEHAVIOR

The analysed literature has facilitated an in-depth discussion of the complex relationship between plagiarism awareness, attitudes, and actual academic actions across various geographical, and throughout different educational levels. One of the main themes revealed in the course of the studies is the great gap between the theoretical knowledge about academic integrity and the practical implementation, or lifestyle following the ethical principles.

- The Knowledge-Practice Gap  
Various researches point out that awareness level does not always result in ethical actions. For instance, with high theoretical knowledge, 75.8% of students in Rwanda were able to identify involvement, whereas with practical plagiarism writing only 11.6% did manage to ascertain the involvement (Olivia et al. 2023). Similarly, the Indian and Omani scholars demonstrated a strong sense of academic honesty, but had experienced technical difficulties, such as citation methods or leniency towards

plagiarism with ChatGPT (Ahmed, 2025). This chapter examines psychological issues and psychological motives. Against this background, the application of the psychological framework, i.e., Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to predict plagiarism has been found to be strong at predicting plagiarism behaviour in the uses of psychological framework. Any attitudes that are positive to misconduct are likely due to academic pressure, certificates fixation in the society and excess load are some of the factors that largely influence the chances of plagiarism (Nidha & Kadeeja, 2021). Give seniors the flexibility with technology be flexible in technology to the seniors. The use of Plagiarism Detection Tools (PDT) along with the use of Text-Matching Software (TMS) in support of the tools used for plagiarism detection is favourable for the purpose of prevention (Mamun et al., 2021). Few projects like ShodhShuddhi have been well successful in India, but have faced technical hurdles and a lack of training (Vijay & Ashwani, 2024).

- Local and Regional Impression

Uneven research occurs internationally. There is a paucity of literature research on Sub-Saharan Africa with a major emphasis on research focused on Nigeria and Ghana literature (Daniel et al. 2023). Take the time to review and discuss plagiarism with students. High seniority translates to Disapproval and/or ethical knowledge. A positive attitude has a very positive association with intent to steal. Academics give too much pressure on students to indulge in plagiarism (Rayees & Aisha, 2022). Informing someone of ethical judgements improves it but if the goal is to change behaviour, it would take work to make that happen. Lastly, even though there are various indicators of the importance of the institutional policies and software tools, they are insufficient. Strategies should do more than merely bring awareness down to reduce it, but should also reinforce education values by instilling them into students' consciousness (internalisation), teach students how to use a reference effectively, and address overall systemic issues that can encourage students to engage in academic dishonesty.

### III. OBJECTIVES

3.1. To compare the levels of awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism among higher education students in West Bengal according to different demographic characteristics (Gender, Residential location, Stream of Study, and Level of Education).

### IV. HYPOTHESES

- 4.1 **Ho<sub>1</sub>** : There is no significant difference of the levels of awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism between male and female students in West Bengal.
- 4.2 **Ho<sub>2</sub>** : There is no significant difference of the levels of awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism between rural and urban students in West Bengal.
- 4.3 **Ho<sub>3</sub>** : There is no significant difference of the levels of awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism among science and arts students in West Bengal.
- 4.4 **Ho<sub>4</sub>** : There is no significant difference of the levels of awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism between post-graduate and graduate students in West Bengal.

### V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A Quantitative Approach is justified as it allows for the objective measurement of students' awareness and attitudes using standardized scales. Total 109 students from currently enrolled Graduate (Hons./Gen.) and Post Graduate (PG) students of UGC recognized Universities in West Bengal were considered as sample of this present study. Stratified Random Sampling has been opted for sampling area selection from different districts of West Bengal. A Standardised Self-Reported Inventory consisting 20 items for Student using a 5-point Likert Scale has been used to collect responses, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," which allows for the quantification of subjective beliefs and behaviors. The highest marks can be obtained is  $12 \times 5 = 60$ . By summing the Total Inventory Scores across all 12 items, the researcher has quantified the overall level of awareness and attitudes toward plagiarism for each student. Physical copies has been distributed in libraries and different departments to ensure a higher response rate and minimize "search engine assistance" while they answer awareness statements. Google Forms has been distributed via institutional email and students' WhatsApp groups, because it is cost-effective and reaches a wider area. To test for significant differences in mean scores of Gender, Residential Location, Stream of Study (Science, Arts), and Level of Education, at different higher education institutions in selected areas; Independent t-test has been computed.

### VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1. **Ho<sub>1</sub>** : There is no significant difference in the levels of awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism between Male and Female students in West Bengal.

Table 6.1: Difference between male and female students towards plagiarism

Group	Number	Mean	SD	df	' t ' value	' p ' value	Level of Significance at 0.05%
Male	47	43.17	4.71	107	0.218	0.827	Not Significant
Female	62	42.97	4.86				

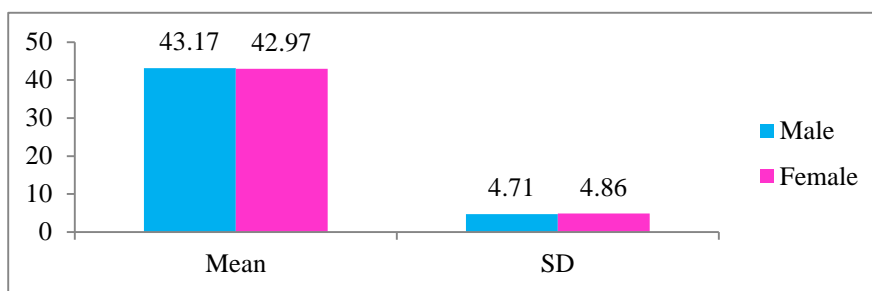


Figure 6.1:

Difference between male and female students towards plagiarism

In this table number 6.1, the computed 't'-value is 0.218 which is less than the table value of 1.96 ( $0.218 < 1.96$ ) at 0.05% level of significance. The obtained 'p'-value is 0.827, which is greater than 0.05 ( $0.05 < 0.827$ ). Hence, it is Not Significant. Therefore, the corresponding Null Hypothesis ( $H_01$ ) is accepted. It indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean score of male and female students towards Plagiarism. The level of awareness and attitude towards plagiarism of male and female students are equal.

**6.2.  $H_{02}$  : There is no significant difference in the levels of awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism between Rural and Urban students in West Bengal.**

Table 6.2: Difference between rural and urban students towards plagiarism

Group	Number	Mean	SD	df	' t ' value	' p ' value	Level of Significance at 0.05%
Rural	57	42.65	4.77	107	0.101	0.919	Not Significant
Urban	52	42.56	4.61				

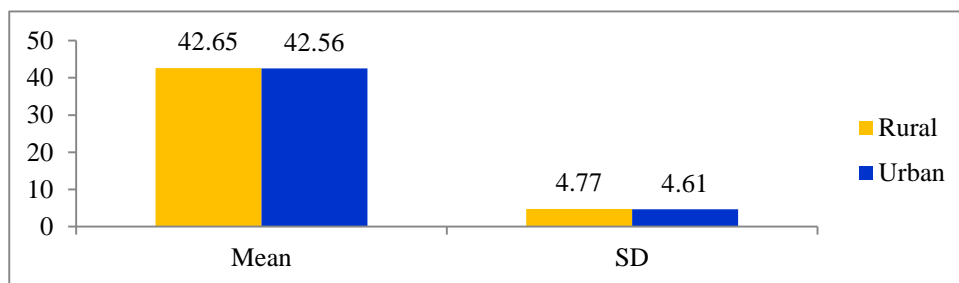


Figure 6.2: Difference between rural and urban students towards plagiarism

In this table number 5.2.2, the computed 't'-value is 0.101 which is less than the table value of 1.96 ( $0.101 < 1.96$ ) at 0.05% level of significance. The obtained 'p'-value is 0.919, which is greater than 0.05 ( $0.05 < 0.919$ ). Hence, it is Not Significant. Therefore, the corresponding Null Hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) is accepted. It indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean score of rural and urban students towards Plagiarism. The level of awareness and attitude towards plagiarism of rural and urban students are equal.

**6.3.  $H_{03}$  : There is no significant difference in the levels of awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism between students of Science and Arts departments in West Bengal.**

Table 6.3: Difference between science and arts students towards plagiarism

Group	Number	Mean	SD	df	' t ' value	' p ' value	Level of Significance at 0.05%
Science	43	43.12	5.25	107	0.649	0.517	Not Significant
Arts	66	42.5	4.56				

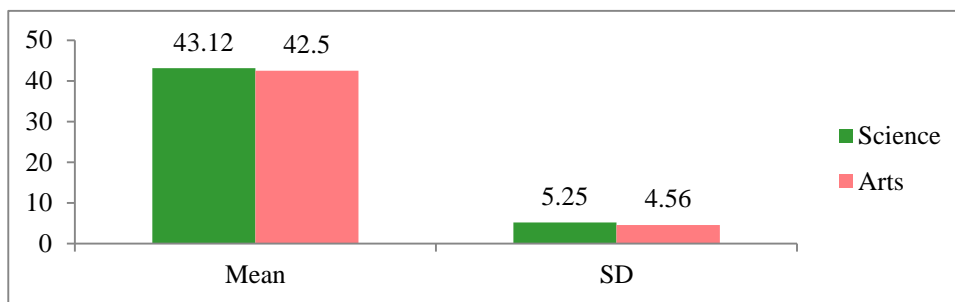


Figure 6.3: Difference between science and arts students towards plagiarism

In this table number 5.2.3, the computed ‘t’-value is 0.649 which is less than the table value of 1.96 ( $0.649 < 1.96$ ) at 0.05% level of significance. The obtained ‘p’-value is 0.517, which is greater than 0.05 ( $0.05 < 0.517$ ). Hence, it is Not Significant. Therefore, the corresponding Null Hypothesis (Ho3) is accepted. It indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean score of science and arts students towards Plagiarism. The level of awareness and attitude towards plagiarism of students of science and arts departments are equal.

**6.4. Ho<sub>4</sub> : There is no significant difference in the levels of awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism between Post-Graduate and Graduate students in West Bengal.**

Table 6.4: Difference between post-graduate and graduate students towards plagiarism

Group	Number	Mean	SD	df	‘ t ’ value	‘ p ’ value	Level of Significance at 0.05%
Post-Graduate	68	42.45	4.61	107	0.957	0.341	Not Significant
Graduate	41	43.34	4.79				

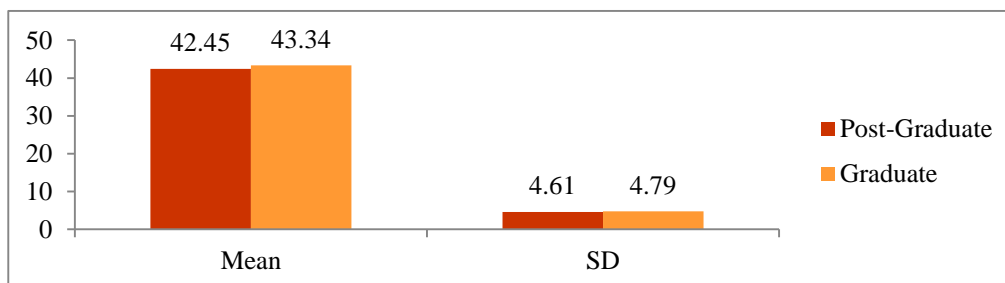


Figure 6.4: Difference between post-graduate and graduate students towards plagiarism

In this table number 5.2.4, the computed ‘t’-value is 0.957 which is less than the table value of 1.96 ( $0.957 < 1.96$ ) at 0.05% level of significance. The obtained ‘p’-value is 0.341, which is greater than 0.05 ( $0.05 < 0.341$ ). Hence, it is Not Significant. Therefore, the corresponding Null Hypothesis (Ho4) is accepted. It indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean score of post-graduate and graduate students towards Plagiarism. The level of awareness and attitude towards plagiarism of post-graduate and graduate students are equal.

**VII. FINDINGS**

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There was no significant difference observed between the performance of male students and female students regarding the level of awareness and attitude of the students of West Bengal regarding plagiarism. Based on the data, it seems that gender appears to be not a significant factor in academic honesty perception or understanding by the students. Male and female students show a similar level of awareness and ethically generous attitude.

**Ho<sub>2</sub> :** The finding showed there was no significant difference between the extent of awareness and attitudes of the students with regard to plagiarism according to their rural and urban places. Comparable ethical position and understanding of plagiarism across geographical locations in the study area: even if there may be differences in time and space, in terms of infrastructure or access to digital resources, the ethical approach and understanding of plagiarism are comparable across geographical locations in the study area.

**Ho<sub>3</sub> :** The finding is that there was no significant difference between awareness and attitude towards plagiarism between science and arts stream students. Academic discipline (Science vs Arts) is not found to have a significant effect on understanding plagiarism policies or moral outlook on plagiarism.

**Ho<sub>4</sub> :** No significant difference was observed between awareness and attitudes of graduate and post graduate students.

There was no significant difference between students' ethical framework and knowledge of plagiarism at the higher levels of education (Graduation, Post-Graduation) within the sampled group.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The study implies that there is a need for more than "instruction. It is important for institutions to help their students learn how to write rather than just telling them to not plagiarize. This is why there is a need to incorporate AW Modules as part of the laying foundation years of all streams. The results give an insight to universities of West Bengal to shift their punitive approach to preventative approach. Consequences are a need for standardized codes for students, and the creation of separate Writing Centers to give them advice before they submit their final papers. This has a major implication with respect to the role of the teacher. Teachers need to be educated not only about how to have students submit their work using plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin but on how to make assessment instruments "plagiarism-proof. This includes developing away from "topic" to tasks that involve themselves personally in significant critical analysis that will challenge "copy and paste" answers. The findings of this study reveal the need to make education focused on skills, rather than punishment, to address academic dishonesty in West Bengal. Academic writing is a tool that can help top universities close the gap between different audiences and go beyond detection to a true culture of original writing by embedding it in courses, implementing policies across the university and encouraging the core development of "scholar identity".

## IX. SCOPE OF FUTURE STUDY

- a. Longitudinal Studies : Longitudinal studies might be repeated on students across several years to determine if there is a great change in awareness and attitudes over the longitudinal period from first year of graduation to the completion of the post-graduation years.
- b. Qualitative Depth : The quantitative approach was taken in this study but future study can be done using qualitative interviews / focus group interview to understand the underlying reasons for student plagiarism in relation to West Bengal students psychology.
- c. Disciplinary Focus : Enhanced studies should be done in order to remove the current research bias in Arts and Science subjects to include all the various subjects.
- d. Geographical Expansion : As mentioned earlier to account the academic integrity situation at the entire region considering Howrah and Nadia districts with other more diverse districts across West Bengal would be helpful.

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