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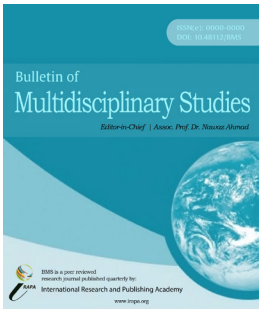

Original Article

# Relationship between Paid Academic Writing Services and Academic Integrity: A Perspective of Business Students in Pakistan

Samiullah Sarwar[1*] & Naila Siddiqua (Ph.D)[2]

[1] *Department of Education, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan*
[2] *Department of Education, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan*

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between Paid Academic Writing Services (PAWS) and Academic Integrity of Higher Education in Pakistan. Using a quantitative research method, data were gathered from business students in Pakistan, selected randomly, using a predesigned questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and inferential analysis were applied to analyse the data gathered from the survey. The findings revealed that a significant number of students in Higher Education in Pakistan were found to be involved in academic dishonesty. The relationship between AGAT and APAWS was found to be significant and positive. On the other hand, AGAT, AIT, AIRes, AA, and AP were found to be negatively correlated with each other, indicating that the increase in Academic Integrity and the awareness of plagiarism was associated with the decrease in the use of PAWS. Based on the study analysis, it was recommended that concerned authorities should develop an effective policy and/ or mechanism to prevent the growing trend of PAWS in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** *Academic Integrity, Business Students in Pakistan, Higher Education, Paid Academic Writing Services*

*Corresponding Author: Samiullah Sarwar | samiullah@uoli.edu.pk
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# INTRODUCTION

Paid Academic Writing Services (PAWS) is the other name of Contract Cheating Services (CCS). According to Amigud and Lancaster (2020), PAWS is a process where students outsource the completion of their academic tasks including assignments, quizzes, research papers, theses etc. to a third party that is otherwise to be accomplished by themselves. Amigud and Lancaster (2020) further claim that PAWS providers range from registered companies to freelance writers with a global workforce. Draper et al., (2021) explain the industry of PAWS as an 'Essay Mill', as it supplies essays and other work for students to misuse during the assessment process, and is proactive in encouraging students to cheat. For the term 'PAWS,' Tauginienė and Jurkevičius (2017) introduced a few other terms such as paper mill, essay mill, unethical tutoring, and ghost-writing. The investigators claimed the PAWS as plagiarism that occurred in the format of ghost-writing.

Wallace and Newton (2014) figured out that Turnitin revealed, in 2013, that 7% of students in Higher Education had self-reported having purchased an assignment. The rates are likely much higher, particularly given the ever-increasing use of the internet to facilitate such behaviour and the growing number of companies offering the service (Diaz et al., 2021). Rehman and Waheed (2014) found a significant number of students in Higher Education in Pakistan to be involved in the activities associated with the academic dishonesty. Among the such activities, various activities are known as PAWS, including giving own assignment, preparing a colleague's assignment, and preparing a friend's assignment. Therefore, the prior responsibility of academic institutions should be to define clear policies regarding academic dishonesty, the PAWS, to overcome the increasing trend. According to Ahsan, et al. (2022), the problem of PAWS has been increasing rapidly across the Higher Education Sector globally since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant number of PAWS providers have targeted the students enrolled in Higher Education to take advantage of the anxiety and uncertainty.

PAWS practice negatively affects the potential talent and academic growth of students though it may positively affect their performance in terms of increased academic grades (Knapp et al., 2017). Achieving higher grades is not merely the fundamental objective of Higher Education rather it has multidimensional purposes including personal, social, economic, and cultural development, which can be achieved via potential talent and academic growth (Cox et al., 2014). Nevertheless, detecting the PAWS used by students is not easy, as universities, particularly in Pakistan, do have not adequate policies in place to police it (Arshad et al., 2021). On the other hand, PAWS have the potential to be high quality, which attracts the students to use it. Subsequently, the trend among students to use PAWS is being increased day by day. As a result, the national intellectual economy is at stake because of the compromised Academic Integrity of Higher Education in Pakistan. The PAWS practice negatively affects the potential talent and academic growth of students though it may positively affect their performance in terms of increased academic grades (Knapp et al., 2017).

Achieving higher grades is not merely the fundamental objective of Higher Education rather it has multidimensional purposes including personal, social, economic, and cultural development, which can be achieved via potential talent and academic growth (Cox et al., 2014). Nevertheless, detecting the PAWS used by students is not easy, as universities, particularly in Pakistan, have not adequate policies in place to police it. On the other hand, PAWS have the potential to be high quality, which attracts the students to use it. Subsequently, the trend among the students to use PAWS is being increased day by day. Wallace and Newton (2014) figure out that Turnitin revealed, in 2013, that 7% of students in higher education had self-reported having purchased an assignment. It is extremely likely that, in reality, the rates are much higher, particularly given the ever-increasing use of the internet to facilitate such behaviour and the growing number of companies offering the service. Rehman and Waheed (2014) found a significant number of students in higher education in Pakistan to be involved in various activities associated with the academic dishonesty. Among them, some of the activities are based on PAWS, including giving own assignment, preparing colleague's assignment, preparing friend's assignment. Therefore, the prior responsibility of the academic institutions should be to define clear policies regarding the academic dishonesty, the PAWS, to overcome the increasing trend of it.

The present study contributes to addressing the growing issue of PAWS by providing empirical evidence on the factors influencing the use and perception of such services within higher education institutions. As contract cheating and academic outsourcing continue to challenge the academic integrity, this study offers valuable insights into how business students perceive and interact with these services. The study tends to identify the underlying factors encouraging the use of

PAWS. It contributes by raising awareness about the academic and ethical implications of PAWS, which may encourage universities and policymakers to develop stronger policies and guidelines to discourage PAWS. It also provides evidence-based recommendations for higher education institutions in Pakistan. These recommendations may include strengthening academic integrity policies, improving student support systems, enhancing research, and writing training, and integrating digital tools to detect academic misconduct.

### Objective of the Study

- To investigate the relationship between PAWS and Academic Integrity

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Commercialization of Academic Credentials

PAWS reflects the marketization of higher education, where degrees become commodities and academic work becomes a purchasable product. The academic marketplace includes freelancers, essay mills, and informal peer networks (Eaton & Carmichael, 2023). PAWS, which involves students outsourcing academic assignments to third parties for payment, represents a significant manifestation of the commercialization of academic credentials (Xu & Li, 2023). This practice fundamentally undermines the integrity of educational assessment, devalues legitimate learning outcomes, and erodes trust in academic qualifications. Unlike traditional forms of academic misconduct such as plagiarism or collusion, PAWS involves external agents, often referred to as essay mills or freelance writers, producing original but unauthorized work that students submit as their own (Parnther, 2022). This commodification transforms academic achievement and credentialing into purchasable goods, signifying a shift where knowledge is treated as a commodity, and transcripts and credentials as products that students, in effect, consume (Thacker, 2022).

The prevalence and sophistication of PAWS platforms underscore this commercialization. Studies in Spain, for instance, have analysed the advertising practices and digital infrastructures of several active websites and hundreds of the associated advertisements, revealing sophisticated marketing tactics that present these services as legitimate academic support. These platforms exploit legal ambiguities and contribute to a growing normalization of academic outsourcing (Daly & Ryan, 2024; Lancaster, 2022). Similarly, in the United States, major PAWS websites employ search engine optimization (SEO) strategies to enhance visibility and recruit clients, indicating a business-driven approach to academic fraud (Khan, 2022; Kreitz & Stoesz, 2025). The industry's international reach has been observed across various disciplines and locations, including Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, highlighting its global commercial footprint.

The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened the issue, with the shift to online learning leading to heightened instances of PAWS (Felski, 2025). Essay mills capitalized on the lack of face-to-face interaction and traditional proctoring, employing aggressive marketing to attract students (Ahsan et al., 2022). This surge demonstrated how commercial entities adapt to changing educational landscapes to exploit vulnerabilities for profit (Bubas & Cizmesija, 2023). The commercial nature of PAWS creates a complex ethical dilemma. As articulated in expert insights, it involves external agents producing original but unauthorized work, effectively commodifying knowledge production and credentialing. This transforms academic achievement into a purchasable good, challenging the very foundation of academic integrity (Eaton, 2022). The financial transaction inherent in PAWS also raises concerns about institutional ethics, especially when education itself becomes increasingly viewed as a financial transaction rather than an intrinsic pursuit of knowledge (Ferguson, et al., 2023). From a criminological perspective, PAWS has the hallmarks of white-collar crime, involving intentional deception for financial gain (Baran & Jonason, 2022). Some jurisdictions have begun to address this through legislation, prohibiting the operation or promotion of PAWS services (Curtis, 2024).

For example, the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 in England and Wales criminalizes the provision or advertising of essay mills (Draper & Boland, 2024). The potential application of these laws even to general-purpose AI services like ChatGPT, without specific knowledge of their use for cheating, further illustrates the evolving intersection of technology, commercialization, and academic integrity. The issue extends to the motivations behind student engagement in PAWS. Research indicates that students who engage in commercial PAWS often experience significantly higher levels of stress, which can be a contributing factor (Ferguson, et al., 2023). Factors such as difficulties with challenging written assessments and perceptions of authorship can also mediate student engagement in PAWS. This suggests that while commercial providers capitalize on academic vulnerabilities, underlying student pressures also play a role.

The phenomenon of PAWS also highlights broader issues within the commercial determinants of

health framework, by analogy. Although primarily focused on health, this framework illustrates how commercial entities can influence outcomes through various pathways, including shaping environments, influencing policy, and shaping evidence (Xu & Li, 2023). In the context of education, PAWS platforms shape the academic environment by offering 'solutions' that bypass traditional learning, influence academic discourse by normalizing outsourcing, and effectively create a false 'evidence base' of student achievement. Moreover, just as commercial interests in other sectors can create conflicts of interest by prioritizing financial gain over primary interests (e.g., patient welfare, scientific integrity), essay mills and PAWS providers prioritize profit over academic integrity. Ultimately, addressing PAWS requires a multidimensional approach that goes beyond traditional plagiarism detection tools, which are often insufficient for detecting original work produced by a third party (Curtis, et al., 2022). This includes fostering a culture of academic integrity, ethical considerations in educational technology, and robust institutional policies (Yorke, et al., 2022). The commercialization of academic credentials through PAWS poses an enduring threat that demands comprehensive responses from academic institutions, policymakers, and the wider educational community.

## Motivations for Students Engaging in PAWS

The motivations for students engaging in PAWS are the factors such as academic stress and fear of failure are significant contributors (Ajit et al., 2024; Ferguson et al., 2023; Goh et al., 2024). Studies have shown that students who engage in commercial PAWS often experience higher levels of stress (Ferguson et al., 2023; Crossman, 2022). Additionally, a lack of understanding regarding authorship perceptions can mediate the relationship between approaches to learning and PAWS behaviours. Addressing PAWS and authorship misrepresentation requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes both preventative and deterrent strategies. Preventative measures involve fostering a culture of academic integrity, ethical education, and support for student learning. For example, educational interventions aimed at reducing students' trust in commercial PAWS websites have shown promise. Pedagogical strategies that encourage active engagement in learning activities and assessments can also support student learning and deter cheating. On the detection front, traditional plagiarism tools are often insufficient because contract-cheated assignments are typically original content, albeit not created by the student (Xu & Li, 2023).

New approaches are being explored, such as authorship verification platforms that analyse a student's writing style. Furthermore, institutions are developing holistic frameworks to mitigate and detect PAWS, involving domain analysis, institute-wide policy analysis, and the application of self-efficacy theories. These frameworks often involve a combination of policy adjustments, educational initiatives, and technological solutions to create a comprehensive defense against academic dishonesty (Xu & Li, 2023). The increasing use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents new challenges to academic integrity, leading to an emergent form of academic dishonesty termed 'AI-giarism' (Chan, 2025). Bissessar (2025) found that the perception of students for using AI for research and study purposes, and their understanding of how it relates to traditional plagiarism, are evolving. The integration of AI into commercial PAWS further complicates detection and necessitates continuous adaptation of academic integrity policies and educational practices.

## PAWS and Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity

Wang (2025) explained the Academic Honesty as one of the most affected values, which requires students to produce and present their own work and to acknowledge the contributions of others through proper citation and referencing. However, when students use PAWS to complete assignments or academic tasks on their behalf, they misrepresent the authorship of the work. This form of academic outsourcing constitutes contract cheating and violates the principle of honesty that is essential to the learning process. According to Thomson et al. (2023), the use of PAWS weakens the value of trust within the academic community. Educational institutions rely on trust between students, faculty members, and administrators. Instructors trust that students submit work that reflects their own understanding and effort. When students rely on PAWS, this trust is compromised, creating doubts about the authenticity of academic submissions and weakening the credibility of academic evaluation systems.

The academic fairness (another significant fundamental value of academic integrity) requires that all students be evaluated based on their individual efforts and abilities (Ahsan, et al., 2022). Students who use paid writing services gain an unfair advantage over those who complete their assignments independently. This practice creates inequality in academic assessment and undermines the principle of merit-based evaluation in higher education. The value of respect is also

compromised when students tend to use PAWS. Respect in academic environments includes acknowledging intellectual contributions and valuing the efforts of scholars and researchers (Gray, 2022; Allen & Kizilcec, 2024). By presenting outsourced work as their own, students fail to respect the intellectual property of the actual writers and disregard the academic standards established by educational institutions. The use of PAWS likewise weakens the value of responsibility. Academic responsibility requires students to take ownership of their learning and academic development. Relying on external writing services prevents students to develop essential research, analytical, and writing skills, ultimately affecting their academic growth and professional competence (Lancaster, 2022).

### Hypotheses

$H_1$: Academic integrity – honesty (AIH) is associated with the tendency of business students in Pakistan towards the paid academic writing services (TPAWS)

$H_2$: Academic integrity - fairness (AIF) is associated with the tendency of business students in Pakistan towards the paid academic writing services (TPAWS)

$H_3$: Academic integrity - respect (AIR) is associated with the tendency of business students in Pakistan towards the paid academic writing services (TPAWS)

$H_4$: Academic integrity – trust (AIT) is associated with the tendency of business students in Pakistan towards the paid academic writing services (TPAWS)

$H_5$: Academic integrity - Responsibility (AIRes) is associated with the tendency of business students in Pakistan towards the paid academic writing services (TPAWS)

$H_6$: Attitude towards assignments (AA) is associated with the tendency of business students in Pakistan towards the paid academic writing services (TPAWS)

$H_7$: Awareness about Plagiarism (AP) is associated with the tendency of business students in Pakistan towards the paid academic writing services (TPAWS)

$H_8$: Awareness about Generative AI Tools (AGAT) is associated with the tendency of business students in Pakistan towards the paid academic writing services (TPAWS)

## METHODOLOGY

To identify the patterns and trends of the relationship between the Academic Integrity and tendency of students to avail PAWS, the present study used a non-experimental survey design. Ghanad (2023) explains that "Unlike experimental research, which is fully based on scientific technique and hypothesis, this sort of study is descriptive" (p. 3796). In other words, this non-experimental survey design was a non-experimental, quantitative method, which measured the statistical relationship, using a correlational research strategy, between the chosen variables without manipulating them. It identified patterns, trends, and the direction (positive or negative) of relationships. A predesigned questionnaire / survey, on the other hand, was used to collect data from the students currently enrolled in a business school in Pakistan to identify the patterns and trends of the relationship between the Academic Integrity and their tendency towards the PAWS. According to Nardi (2018), survey design is particularly appropriate for studies attempting to quantify attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, or other quantifiable variables and to evaluate hypothesized relationships between constructs using statistical procedures. To get quantitative data, a systematic and structured survey method was used to collect numerical data from a sample of a targeted population using an adopted tool, the questionnaire.

In the present study, the stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure an adequate representation of the business students in Pakistan. Stratified sampling is appropriate with a heterogeneous population and can be meaningfully divided into distinct subgroups (known as strata) to increase the representativeness and generalizability. From this perspective, the targeted population in the present study was comprised of business students currently enrolled in Business Schools across Pakistan. Initially, the population was divided into various strata based on the geographical regions (provinces), including, Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Once the strata were defined, a proportionate stratified random sampling approach was applied. For instance, the number of respondents selected from each province was determined based on the relative proportion of business student enrolment in that province, ensuring that larger provinces had proportionally higher representation in the sample (the initial data for enrolment was accessed from HEC, 2023). Respondents were selected, within each stratum, using the simple random sampling technique, such as, distribution of

questionnaires using randomized outreach within the selected universities. Since this approach ensured the equal probability of the selection of each student within the chosen stratum, it thereby minimized the selection biasness. The total sample size was distributed proportionally across the four provinces.

A predesigned questionnaire was used that was comprised of five constructs associated with the five fundamental values of the Academic Integrity i.e. Honesty (AIH), Fairness (AIF), Respect (AIR), Trust (AIT), and Responsibility (AIRes), a construct associated the attitude of business students towards assignments (AA), a construct associated the awareness of business students about plagiarism (AP), a construct associated the tendency of business students towards paid academic writing services (TPAWS), and a construct associated the awareness of business students about Generative AI Tools (AGAT). Each of the constructs was adopted from published scholarly research papers. In this way, the constructs for Academic Integrity were adopted from the study conducted by Ramdani (2018) and Guerrero-Dib et al. (2020), the constructs 'Attitude towards Assignments,' 'Awareness about Plagiarism,' and 'Tendency towards Paid Academic Writing Services' were adopted from the study conducted by Sarwar, et al., (2018), and the construct 'Awareness about Generative AI Tools' was adopted from the document of HEC Pakistan (2023). Each of the item under their respective constructs was measured on 5-points Likert scale, having 1 as the least while 5 as the highest level of their agreement. From this perspective, AIH carried five items, AIF carried five items, AIR carried four items, AIT carried three items, AIRes carried three items, AA carried seven items, AP carried six items, TPAWS carried four items, and AGAT carried four items. To avoid blind responses from the participants, at least one item selected randomly from each construct was reversed coded, having 1 as the highest while 5 as the least level of their agreement.

The data collected from the business students was organized, at first step, in Microsoft Excel Sheet to compile smoothly which, later on, were inserted in Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for further statistical procedures. Frequency and percentage distributions were applied to analyse the demographic information of the Business Students as well as their responses against each of the items for their respective constructs. Descriptive Statistics (the central tendency and dispersion) was applied to analyse the responses of the Business Students against the chosen constructs. To identify the patterns and trends of the relationship between the Academic Integrity and tendency of students to avail PAWS, the present study used Correlational Research Design. Furthermore, various statistical tests were applied to measure the reliability and validity of the instrument (questionnaire).

## RESULTS & FINDINGS

Table 1 describes the background characteristics (the Demographic Information) of the respondents (Business Students) who participated in the study. Demographic variables help contextualize the findings and provide insight into the sample composition.

**Table 1**
Demographic Information

| Demographic Variables | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 554 | 44.2 |
| | Female | 698 | 55.8 |
| Age Group | 20-25 | 405 | 32.3 |
| | 26-30 | 510 | 40.7 |
| | 31-35 | 164 | 13.1 |
| | 35+ | 173 | 13.8 |
| Profession / Specialization | Student Only | 196 | 15.7 |
| | Accounting & Finance | 311 | 24.8 |
| | Sales & Marketing | 344 | 27.5 |
| | HR & Recruitment | 161 | 12.9 |
| | Advertising & Marketing | 240 | 19.2 |
| Enrolled Programmes | BBA/BS | 779 | 62.2 |
| | MBA | 299 | 23.9 |
| | Executive MBA (EMBA) | 154 | 12.3 |
| | MS/M.Phil. | 17 | 1.4 |
| | Ph.D. | 3 | 0.2 |
| | Total | 1252 | 100 |

The descriptive statistics, as portrayed in Table 2, reveal that the mean values of the study variables (including Academic Integrity - Honesty, Academic Integrity - Fairness, Academic Integrity - Respect, Academic Integrity - Trust, Academic Integrity - Responsibility, Attitude towards Assignments, Awareness about Plagiarism, Awareness about Paid Academic Writing Services, and Awareness about Generative AI Tools) ranged from 2.805 to 3.462, indicating the moderate agreement level by the participating business students across all constructs. From this perspective, the highest mean was observed for Academic Integrity - Trust (M = 3.462) having Std. Deviation (SD) as 1.060 and Variance as 1.124, followed by Attitude towards Assignments (M = 3.296) having SD as 0.767 and Variance as 0.588, Awareness about Plagiarism (M = 3.263) having SD as 0.813 and Variance as 0.661, Academic Integrity - Responsibility (M = 3.144) having SD as 1.098 and Variance as 1.207, Academic Integrity - Honesty (M = 3.143) having SD as 0.903 and Variance as 0.815, Academic Integrity - Fairness (M = 3.084) having SD as 0.759 and Variance as 0.577, Awareness about Paid Academic Writing Services (M = 2.927) having SD as 0.811 and Variance as 0.657, and Academic Integrity - Respect (M = 2.891) having SD as 0.935 and Variance as 0.875, whereas Awareness about Generative AI Tools (M = 2.805) having SD as 0.834 and Variance as 0.696 showed the lowest mean value. Skewness and Kurtosis values for all variables were found within the acceptable range of ±1 and between −1 and +1 respectively, indicating normal distributions and thus suitable for the parametric analysis.

**Table 2**

Descriptive Statistics for Variables

| | AIH | AIF | AIR | AIT | AIRes | AA | AP | TPAWS | AGAT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mean | 3.143 | 3.084 | 2.891 | 3.462 | 3.144 | 3.296 | 3.263 | 2.927 | 2.805 |
| Median | 3.200 | 3.000 | 3.000 | 3.667 | 3.000 | 3.286 | 3.333 | 3.000 | 2.750 |
| Mode | 3.400 | 3.000 | 4.000 | 4.000 | 3.000 | 3.286 | 3.667 | 3.250 | 2.500 |
| Std. Deviation | 0.903 | 0.759 | 0.935 | 1.060 | 1.098 | 0.767 | 0.813 | 0.811 | 0.834 |
| Variance | 0.815 | 0.577 | 0.875 | 1.124 | 1.207 | 0.588 | 0.661 | 0.657 | 0.696 |
| Skewness | 0.003 | -0.148 | -0.055 | -0.291 | -0.109 | -0.213 | -0.296 | 0.065 | 0.000 |
| Kurtosis | -0.592 | -0.034 | -0.889 | -0.836 | -0.912 | -0.206 | -0.475 | -0.454 | -0.430 |
| Minimum | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Maximum | 5.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 |

*AIH = Academic Integrity (Honesty), AIF = Academic Integrity (Fairness), AIR = Academic Integrity (Respect), AIT = Academic Integrity (Trust), AIRes = Academic Integrity (Responsibility), AA = Attitude towards Assignments, AP = Awareness about Plagiarism, TPAWS = Awareness about Paid Academic Writing Services, AGAT = Awareness about Generative AI Tools*

The output of Cronbach's Alpha (α), the test used for the measurement of the internal consistency of the items used for each construct, established a satisfactory internal consistency for the scales of their respective constructs. The value of α to be > .6 that is perceived as satisfactory. The satisfactory α values of the constructs portrait that the items used for each construct are reliable to conclude the findings being internally consistent. As discussed by Edelsbrunner et al. (2025), the values of Cronbach's Alpha greater than 0.60 are acceptable, Table 3 demonstrates the Cronbach's Alpha greater than 0.60 against each scale of their respective constructs.

**Table 3**

Internal Consistency

| Constructs | Cronbach's Alpha | No. of Items |
|---|---|---|
| AIH | 0.727 | 5 |
| AIF | 0.727 | 5 |
| AIR1 | 0.686 | 4 |
| AIT | 0.768 | 3 |
| AIRes | 0.756 | 3 |
| AA | 0.73 | 7 |
| AP | 0.729 | 6 |
| TPAWS | 0.725 | 4 |
| AGAT | 0.703 | 4 |

## Hypotheses Testing

Pearson correlation analysis portrayed a statistically strong and positive correlation between the variables AIF and AIH (r = .460, p < .001), AIR, AIH, and AIF (r = .286, p < .001 and r = .511, p < .001 respectively), AIT, AIH, AIF, and AIR (r = .206, p < .001, r = .331, p < .001, and r = .218, p < .001 respectively), AIRes, AIH, AIF, AIR, and AIT (r = .088, p < .001, r = .292, p < .001, r = .341, p < .001, and r = .459, p < .001 respectively), AA, AIH, AIF, AIR, AIT, and AIRes (r = .264, p < .001, r = .359, p < .001, r = .285, p < .001, r = .524, p < .001, and r = .401, p < .001 respectively), AP, AIH, AIF, AIR, AIT, AIRes, and AA (r = .152, p < .001, r = .281, p < .001, r = .235, p < .001, r = .466, p < .001, r = .329, p < .001, and r = .485, p < .001 respectively) and APAWS, AIH, AIF, AIR, AIT, AIRes, AA, and AP (r = .057, p < .001, r = .223, p < .001, r = .248, p < .001, r = .156, p < .001, r = .239, p < .001, r = .148, p < .001, and r = .367, p < .001 respectively). Nevertheless, AGAT, AIF, and AIR (r = .014, p < .611 and r = .038, p < .177 respectively) were not found to be correlated with each other). However, AGAT and APAWS (r = .132, p < .0.001 and r = .096, p < .0.001, respectively) were found to be correlated with each other). On the other hand, AGAT, AIT, AIRes, AA, and AP (r = -.191, p < .0.001, r = -.227, p < .0.001, r = -.166, p < .0.001, and r = -.133, p < .0.001 respectively) were found to be negatively correlated with each other). The findings indicate consistency in respondents' awareness levels (Table 4).

**Table 4**
Correlations

| Variables | | AIH | AIF | AIR | AIT | AIRes | AA | AP | TPAWS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AIF | Pearson Correlation | .460** | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.001 | | | | | | | |
| AIR | Pearson Correlation | .286** | .511** | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.001 | 0.001 | | | | | | |
| AIT | Pearson Correlation | .206** | .331** | .218** | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | | | | | |
| AIRes | Pearson Correlation | .088** | .292** | .341** | .459** | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.002 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | | | | |
| AA | Pearson Correlation | .264** | .359** | .285** | .524** | .401** | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | | | |
| AP | Pearson Correlation | .152** | .281** | .235** | .466** | .329** | .485** | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | | |
| TPAWS | Pearson Correlation | .057* | .223** | .248** | .156** | .239** | .148** | .367** | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.045 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | |
| AGAT | Pearson Correlation | .132** | 0.014 | 0.038 | -.191** | -.227** | -.166** | -.133** | .096** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.001 | 0.611 | 0.177 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

*AIH = Academic Integrity (Honesty), AIF = Academic Integrity (Fairness), AIR = Academic Integrity (Respect), AIT = Academic Integrity (Trust), AIRes = Academic Integrity (Responsibility), AA = Attitude towards Assignments, AP = Awareness about Plagiarism, TPAWS = Tendency towards Paid Academic Writing Services, AGAT = Awareness about Generative AI Tools*

## Discussion

The findings of this study are in line with the revised literature in terms of the usage of PAWS. For instance, Rehman and Waheed (2014) found a significant number of students in Professional Education in Pakistan to be involved in academic dishonesty, based on PAWS, including giving own assignment, preparing a colleague's assignment, and preparing a friend's assignment. For instance, senior students or classmates usually offer PAWS to their junior students that is not easy to recognize. According to Knapp, et al., (2017), PAWS practice negatively affects the potential talent and academic growth of students though it may positively affect their performance in terms of increased academic grades. The findings of this study reveal that researchers in Pakistan are least bother if their knowledge is being increased or not, they merely need academic degree to get their desired job.

# CONCLUSION

A significant number of students in Higher Education in Pakistan were found to be involved in academic dishonesty, based on PAWS, including giving own assignment, preparing a colleague's assignment, and preparing a friend's assignment. PAWS practice negatively affects the potential talent and academic growth of students though it may positively affect their performance in terms of increased academic grades. This research study contributes significantly to academic scholarship, policy discourse, and institutional reform, particularly within the context of higher education in Pakistan. Based on the study analysis, it was recommended that concerned authorities should develop an effective policy and/ or mechanism to prevent the growing trend of PAWS in Pakistan. The contributions extend across theoretical, empirical, methodological, and practical domains. This study advances the conceptual understanding of PAWS by expanding the framework beyond plagiarism to include authorship misrepresentation and intellectual substitution. Furthermore, it leads the integrating PAWS within theories of credentialism, commercialization of higher education, and academic capitalism by conceptualizing PAWS as a systemic governance issue rather than merely individual misconduct. By contextualizing PAWS within Pakistan, the study contributes a Global South perspective to a field largely dominated by Western scholarship, as it differentiates between the paid and unpaid academic outsourcing, thus refining typological clarity in PAWS literature.

## Competing Interest

The authors had no competing interests.

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## Author Biographies

**Samiullah Sarwar** is a PhD Scholar at the Department of Education, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan. He is currently serving as a Lecturer at the Department of Education, University of Loralai, Loralai, Pakistan. He completed his M.Phil. in Education from the Institute of Business Management (IoBM), Karachi, Pakistan.

**Naila Siddiqua (Ph.D)** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Education, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan. She obtained her Doctorate in Education from Hamdard University, Karachi, Pakistan.