

# Measured Influence of Personal Factors on Academic Dishonesty among University Postgraduate Students in South-West, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Academic dishonesty (AD) as a psychological construct in educational psychology has not been fully given attention in this part of the world in spite of its prevalence especially in higher institutions of learning. This paper interrogates influence of some personal factors (self-control, self-monitoring and planned behavior) on academic dishonesty among University Postgraduate students in South-West, Nigeria. With the aid of validated instruments and relevant statistical measures, these were investigated. Findings revealed significant relationships of the predictors on the dependent variable (AD). Discussions are made of this; and policy implications, also drawn.

(Keywords: academic dishonesty, personal factors, University postgraduate students).

## INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty is a common phenomenon in institutions of learning and being a socially unapproved behavior, it has always attracted sanctions. However, most institutions of learning are now paying utmost attention to it because of its impact on learning outcome, students and the institution. Acts of academic dishonesty are fundamentally destructive of the process of education. We find in the society, quite a number of unskilled and unproductive graduates who are unable to make meaningful contributions in their places of work, whether in the private or public sector. Apart from this, academic institutions are also affected by academic dishonesty, in the sense that it undermines the integrity of these institutions and the credentials being awarded are not valued, while such institutions become less attractive to prospective students and parents. In some cases, employers are not willing to employ

graduates of such academic institutions. All these have lowered the standard of education, affected work force development and other aspects of the economy.

Postgraduate education is considered as an important part of higher education. It is therefore, regarded as the foundation for work force development. In Nigeria, there are in existence, several institutions of higher learning that provide good and quality education to different category of students. Mafiana (2014) reported that Nigeria has the largest university system in the Sub-Saharan Africa. Ultimately, these universities provide the platform for individuals to add to their specialized knowledge or skills, thereby enhancing both personal achievement and professional success. However, there are indications that attainment of these goals is marred with unethical behaviors such as academic dishonesty, which is also called academic misconduct. Academic dishonesty has to do with any dishonest act related to a prescribed educational exercise. It is the violation of established standards of behavior.

According to Storch and Storch (2002), academic dishonesty is the act of giving or receiving unauthorized assistance in an academic task or receiving credit for plagiarized work. Saana, Ablordeppey, Mensah and Karikari (2016) described academic dishonesty as academic behavior that does not comply with stated assessment requirements and other institutional policies. In the same vein, Miller and Ronit (2016) revealed that academic dishonesty constitutes an attempt to make unsanctioned use of knowledge in the completion of an academic task. Academic dishonesty involves untruthfulness, deception, and misrepresentation. In general, academic dishonesty or academic misconduct as used in some instances is regarded as any type of

cheating that occurs in relation to a formal academic exercise.

Academic dishonesty in higher institutions and particularly among university students is found to be on the increase given the number of students' disciplinary cases that are related to academic cheating. For instance, in 2012, the University of Ibadan published a comprehensive list of students who faced its Central Student Disciplinary Committee (CSDC) for various offences. Apart from the undergraduate students that were rusticated and expelled for various offences, two Masters' degree students were also expelled and the Doctorate degree of another postgraduate student in the Department of Adult Education was withdrawn, for examination misconduct (University of Ibadan Official Bulletin, 2012). Similarly, in 2018, the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, in its official publication of 28 August, 2018 expelled 28 students, rusticated 10, reprimanded 16; and withdrew the certificates of other students for gross misconduct. These disciplinary cases and others not stated are examples of academic dishonesty found in higher institutions of learning.

The prevalence of academic dishonesty has led to the conclusion that it is a problem worth investigating. Hence, Saana, Ablordeppey, Mensah and Karikari (2016) reported it as a serious problem affecting educational institutions in Africa. Williams and Williams (2012) also noted that academic dishonesty is an insidious problem that besets most tertiary institutions. Supporting these assertions, Adeniyi and Taiwo (2011) reported a prevalence rate of 70% and more of dishonest academic behavior among students. A publication of Academic Paradigms (2016) also revealed a study by the Center for Academic Integrity, which found that almost 80% of college students admit to cheating at least once in the course of their programs. The problem of cheating in universities seems to be more serious now and the number of students' cheating has increased rapidly over the last decade.

The prevalence of academic dishonesty is very alarming and quite disturbing. Its effect in undermining the learning process and the menace to academic integrity of universities and other academic institutions have greatly threatened the efficacy of the process of education, especially in Nigeria where the quality of university graduates is being questioned by the public and private sectors. Academic dishonesty has a host of

consequences on the students, teachers/lecturers, on individual schools and on the educational system itself. Lambert, Hogan and Barton (2003) noted that academic dishonesty has serious implications and one of the possible consequences is that successfully cheating students will end up not having the knowledge and skills that they are expected to have when they graduate. Based on the foregoing, academic dishonesty is a critical issue that needs attention of relevant stakeholders as it has huge negative implications on postgraduate students, which in turn affect productivity in the world of work as well as in personal life.

Literature are replete on factors that influence academic dishonesty. Miller and Ronit (2016) revealed the connection between demographic, personal and situational variables on academic dishonesty among students. The study of Jereb, Urh, Jerebic, and Sprajc (2017) also revealed that specific individual characteristics influence plagiarism. More than this, several other factors have been identified as reasons why university students engage in academic dishonesty. Some of these include peer influence (Gaberson, 1997), peer pressure from school (Tanner, 2004), undue importance placed on certificate acquisition by employers (Azuka, 2014), low self-efficacy (Permatasari, 2017) and lack of self-control (Isakov, 2017). Also, Wells (2005) reported that students' academic fraud is generally caused by three factors: pressure, opportunity and rationalization. Other factors include, to pass by all means, emotional drains, and technological evolution. This notwithstanding, the present study investigated factors like self-control, self-surveillance and planned behavior as possible determinants of academic dishonesty among postgraduate students.

The willpower that conquers the desire for impulsive behaviors is premised on self-controlled individuals. Arneklev, Grasmick, Tittle and Bursik (1993) asserted that people who lack self-control have personalities that predispose them to commit deviant acts. This implies that students who are unable to exercise control over their emotions or actions are likely to engage in socially unacceptable behaviors such as academic dishonesty. In the same vein, Duckworth, Taxer, Eskreis-Winkler, Galla and Gross (2019) defined self-control as the alignment of thoughts, feelings, and actions with enduringly valued goals in the face of momentarily more alluring alternatives. This also

infers conformity with established and acceptable behaviors. Therefore, the ability to regulate, especially socially unacceptable behavior, is self-control.

Our study also looked at the predicting influence of self-surveillance on students' academic dishonesty. Self-surveillance is essentially collecting data about your personal behaviors and surroundings to gain a better understanding of how you live and what goes on around you (Yau and Schneider, 2009). Simply put, it is described as the individual monitoring and understanding of one's behaviors. Thus, dishonest behaviors could be influenced by self-surveillance and students who are high in self-monitoring would look for pointers around them to help manage their behaviors and conform to acceptable standard without violation. Confirming this, Covey, Saladin and Killen (2010) identified self-monitoring as one of the factors influencing dishonest behavior.

Another factor that could predict academic dishonesty is planned behavior. It is known as a theory about the link between beliefs and behavior. The assumptions of planned behavior suggest that a person's behavior is determined by his/her intention to perform the behavior and that this intention is, in turn, a function of attitude towards the behavior. This explains that perceived intention towards a particular act or behavior will determine the level of success of the behavior. Harding, Mayhew, Finelli and Carpenter (2007) supported the use of the model of planned behavior in predicting ethical decision-making regarding cheating. In particular, the model demonstrated that certain variables and moral constructs are related to the intention to cheat.

Concisely, it has been expressed that personal factors have association with academic dishonesty. The obvious implications academic dishonesty has on the society have showed that there is need to conduct a research of this nature, considering also, the seeming dearth of literature and research on the variables reported in the current study. Thus, it is instructive from the above and literature cited that the rate of dishonesty in higher institutions of learning is becoming more worrisome. This could rub up on the quality of students (especially those on the postgraduate programs) that are produced by universities in Nigeria. This is supported by Lambert, et. al. (2003) in their contention that academic dishonesty has assumed a serious problem, which should be addressed. This study,

therefore investigated the influence of personal factors on academic dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-west, Nigeria. The study, therefore, seeks to answer the following research questions:

- Would there be significant relationship between each of the personal factors and academic dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-west, Nigeria?
- Would there be significant joint contribution of the personal factors to the prediction of academic dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-west, Nigeria?
- Would there be relative contribution of each of the personal factors to the prediction of academic dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-west, Nigeria?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

The correlational survey design was adopted for the study to establish the level of relationship of the variables with no attempt of manipulation.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population for the study consists of university postgraduate students from three federal universities in south-west, Nigeria. These are Oyo (University of Ibadan), Ogun (Federal University of Agriculture), and Lagos (University of Lagos). Multistage sampling technique was used to select participants for this study, which involved three hundred university postgraduate students, consisting of 160 males and 140 females.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument used for collection of data for the study consists of two sections. Section A consists of the bio-demographic information which includes gender, age, religion, tribe and faculty, while Section B consists of five sub-scales adapted from Academic Ethical Scale (Eastman,

Iyer and Reisenwitz, 2008), Postgraduate Students' Self Control Scale (Grasmick, Tittle, Bursik, and Arneklev, 1993), Postgraduate Students' Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974) and Postgraduate Students' Planned Behavior Scale (Harding et. al., 2007). Each of these had 12 items, which were measured using 5-point likert format. The Academic Ethical Scale ranged from "never occurred to me" to "has occurred to me many times", while others ranged from "strongly agree (1)" to "strongly disagree (5)". The minimum and maximum obtainable scores are 12 and 60, respectively. The overall instrument possesses high internal consistency and adequate construct validity.

### Data Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data generated. PPMC was used to establish the relationship between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis was also used in estimating the joint and relative contributions of the personal factors (self-control, self-surveillance and planned behavior) to the prediction of academic dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-west, Nigeria.

## RESULTS

### Research Question 1

Would there be significant relationship between each of the personal factors and academic dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-west, Nigeria?

**Table 1:** Table showing the P.P.M.C. scores of each of the Independent Variables and the Dependent Variable.

Independent Variables	Academic Dishonesty (Dependent Variable)
Self-control	r. calculated = 0.01 Df = 298 P = Not significant
Self-surveillance	r. calculated = 0.13 Df = 298 P = Significant
Planned Behaviour	r. calculated = 0.07 Df = 298 P = Not significant

Table 1 shows that there was no significant relationship between self-control and academic dishonesty (r. calculate = 0.01, df = 298 P > 0.05); there was significant relationship between self-surveillance and academic dishonesty (r. calculate = 0.13, df = 298 P < 0.05); and there was no significant relationship between planned behavior and academic dishonesty (r. calculate = 0.07, df = 298 P > 0.05).

### Research Question 2

Would there be significant joint contribution of the personal factors to the prediction of academic dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-west, Nigeria?

**Table 2:** Regression Table

Regression = 0.15					
Regression Square = 0.02					
Adjusted Regression Square = 0.01					
Error of Estimate = 8.92					
Model	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F. Ratio	S.
Regression	517.85	3	172.62	2.17	NS
Residual	23562.99	296	79.61		
Total	24080.84	299			

NS (Not significant at 0.05 critical region)

Table 2 shows that multiple R is 0.15, multiple R square is 0.02, adjusted multiple R square is 0.01 and standard error of estimate is 8.92. This shows that the independent variables jointly contributed 1% to the variance in the academic dishonesty of the respondents. The anova table also shows F ratio value of 2.17 which is found to be not significant at 0.05 critical region.

### **Research Question 3**

Would there be relative contribution of each of the personal factors to the prediction of academic dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-west, Nigeria?

Table 3 shows that B values range from -0.07 to 22.99, standard error values range from 0.06 to 2.33, Beta values range from -0.07 to 0.16 and t. values range from -1.06 to 9.87. Based on these figures, self-surveillance ( $\beta = 0.16$ ) had significant relative contribution at 0.05 critical region to the prediction of academic dishonesty of the participants. Self-control ( $\beta = -0.07$ ) and planned behavior ( $\beta = 0.02$ ) did not have significant relative contributions to the prediction of academic dishonesty of the participants.

### **DISCUSSION**

This study examined a germane concern in our educational system, particularly the institutions of learning. The study brings to limelight, the views of dishonesty in the academic domain and the need to emphasize the tenets of integrity and honesty, thereby reducing unethical acts among students in universities. The study will also build confidence of the process and value of education and raise the quality of university products, as well as boost their academic prowess.

Results obtained from the first research question found that academic dishonesty had no significant relationship with self-control. This supports the results of Masood and Mazahir (2015) which revealed that self-control had negative link with academic plagiarism. Their results also revealed that there is a significant negative relation of extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience and self-control with academic cheating. This does not support Bolin (2004) which reported a strong relationship between self-control and academic dishonesty. However, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) reported that although the absence of self-control appears to be a valid explanation for cheating that takes place impulsively in response to a perceived opportunity, the general theory of crime does not explain why students with self-control do not cheat.

Having self-control might lead students to deliberately (rather than impulsively) cheat in circumstances that are common on college campuses today, such as: "detection is unlikely", "opportunity is high", "norms favor cheating", and "cheats have an advantage in the race for a high GPA" (Graham, Monday, O'Brien and Steffen, 1994). This may be attributed to the findings of this study on self-control as a predictor to the criterion measure. It shows that self-control could be negatively induced. In other words, students with self-control may deliberately cheat depending on the circumstances or opportunity within the learning environment.

In support of this assertion, Vazsonyi, Pickering, Junger and Hensing (2001) reported that lack of self-control may be sufficient to explain cheating in an opportunity-rich environment but having self-control does not seem sufficient to explain why some students do not cheat when cheating may be in their best interest.

**Table 3:** Table Showing the Relative Contributions of the Independent Variables to the Prediction of the Dependent Variable.

Model	Standard. Coeffi. B	Unstandard. Stand. Err.	Beta	t. Val.	S
Constant	22.99	2.33		9.87	0.00
Self-control	-0.07	0.06	-0.07	-1.06	0.29
Self-surveillance	0.18	0.08	0.16	2.23	0.03
Planned Behavior	0.02	0.07	0.02	0.27	0.79

Also supporting this, Grasmick and Tittle (1993) found that a substantial proportion of variance in deviant behavior is left unexplained by the variables of self-control and opportunity alone, the general theory of crime could not fully explain the phenomenon. Then relating the findings of Grasmick and Tittle with other unethical or deviant behavior, additional variables may also be desirable to explain academic dishonesty. Findings of the current study also showed that there is significant relationship between self-surveillance and academic dishonesty.

The study of Covey, Saladin and Killen (2010) give acceptance to this and showed that low self-monitors' and comparative lack of concern regarding self-presentation increased dishonesty. The study also indicated that surveillance reduced dishonesty. Planned behavior as a variable in the study had no significant relationship with academic dishonesty. This result showed that planned behavior plays insignificant role in the prediction of academic dishonesty among university postgraduate students. The insignificant relationship is different to similar studies. Although the study of Stone, Jawahar and Kiasamore (2010) reported that, the TPB (Theory of Planned Behavior) model explained only 21% of the variance in cheating intentions and 36% of the cheating behavior. The study concluded that the TPB model might parsimoniously integrate and advance academic misconduct research. This notwithstanding, there had been studies where results supported the use of the TPB model in predicting ethical decision-making regarding cheating (Harding et al, 2007). On the other hand, Nkhungulu and Deda (2013) reported that TPB had much more predictive accuracy when investigating attitudes towards specific behavior than when trying to investigate global attitudes.

Given the results of the second research question, it is shown that the three-predictor variables (self-control, self-surveillance and planned behavior) had significant joint effect on the prediction of academic dishonesty among postgraduate students. This finding supports McCabe and Trevino (1997) which showed that cheating was influenced by a number of characteristics of individuals. It also corroborates Ellahi, Mushtaq and Khan (2013) who found individual, situational and ethical factors as predictors of students' academic dishonesty. This also corresponds to the findings of Miller and Ronit (2016) which showed that analysis of the personal and psychological factors showed significant

correlations between attitudes towards cheating and cheating in practice. Based on this, it will not be out of place for academic institutions to focus attention on likely indicators of academic dishonesty and expedite action on nipping it in the bud. This will obviously enhance academic prowess, build confidence of the process of education and improve the quality of university graduates.

Based on the results establishing that the three-predictor variables could jointly predict academic dishonesty, it became necessary to establish their relative contributions on academic dishonesty among university postgraduate students. Interestingly, the result shows that only self-surveillance had significant relative contribution to the prediction of academic dishonesty of the postgraduate students. This is in support of Concoran and Rotter (1987) as well as Covey, Saladin and Killen (2010) who found that students' cheating can be attributed to freedom from surveillance by the teacher. However, on the other hand, empirical research has also shown negative associations between responsibility judgments and academic dishonesty (Alleyne and Phillips, 2011). These responsibility judgments produce a sense of personal accountability to "follow through" and "perform the right action" (Kolberg and Candee, 1984). Weiner (1995) described it as an important factor in regulating moral behavior.

Also on one hand, self-control and planned behavior did not have significant relative contributions to the prediction of academic dishonesty of the participants. This confirms the findings of Graham, Monday, O'Brien and Steffen (1994) that self-control might lead students to deliberately (rather than impulsively) cheat in circumstances that are common within the college campus. This shows that self-control could or not discourage academic dishonesty. In effect, additional available factors comparatively serve as function of what provokes self-control and academic dishonesty. Similarly, in the study of Coşkan (2010) which investigated the trait self-control and conformity as predictors of academic dishonesty, correlational results underlined the importance of low self-control and high susceptibility to social influence as predictors of past behavior of academic dishonesty.

Experimental results revealed that first, groups cheating levels and cheats frequencies did not differ as a function of ego depletion, while they

differed as a function of norm induction in the sense that “cheat” norm groups had higher levels of cheating and higher frequencies of cheats than “not cheat” and neutral norm groups. On planned behavior variable not having significant relative contribution to the prediction of academic dishonesty, the study of Nkhungulu and Deda (2013) lay credence to this. It shows that planned behavior cannot fully explain students’ predisposition to cheat or commit academic fraud.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicates that a variety of factors influence student’s involvement in academically dishonest behavior. The personal factors possessed by individual students, particularly with self-surveillance as the stronger variable have predicting influence on academic dishonesty.

The results are supported by previous empirical findings and show that academic dishonesty; specifically, among postgraduate students is a pervasive problem in university campuses with all its implications on the university system and professional stakeholders, such as, university administrators, educationists, counselling psychologists, amongst others.

In the light of this, there are suggestions that academic institutions should establish realistic measures that will address academically dishonest behaviors. Hence, in the management of academic dishonesty, focus should be on strengthening and exposing students to academic ethics and values that promote academic honesty. Students should be exposed to self-awareness programs and various forms of counselling support interventions. In addition, academic institutions should make learning process more discovery-oriented by promoting positive and supportive environment that help students achieve the learning objectives, while institutional policies guiding students conduct must be put in place. This will boost individual self-confidence among the students and decrease the rate of academic dishonesty.

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## SUGGESTED CITATION

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