# INDIVIDUAL FACTORS AS PREDICTORS OF PERSONAL DISHONESTY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

#### BY

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#### Abstract

The goal of educational institutions to bring forth graduates who have satisfied requirements both in conduct and academic, has made the concept of dishonesty of utmost concern. The fact that dishonesty has become prevalent and destructive of the reputation of educational institutions also makes it a matter of interest. As a psychological construct, personal dishonesty has been revealed as a pervasive problem that continues to plague academic institutions and distort the values of learning. The present study exudes the predicting impact of self-control, self-surveillance and planned behaviour on personal dishonesty among university postgraduate students in south-western Nigeria. Responses were elicited using validated instruments and the influence of these factors on the prediction of personal dishonesty has been established. Implications and recommendations for possible intervention are also explained.

Keywords: Individual factors, Personal dishonesty, University postgraduate and Students

#### Introduction

As an educational institution, the University plays a very important role in birthing graduates with well-balanced education who have been found worthy both in character and learning. This infers that educational institutions are not only committed to transfer of knowledge but also play vital role in character formation of students thereby preparing them to becoming responsible citizens who are capable of contributing to the development of the society. Considering this purpose, several educational institutions are giving strong attention to dishonesty. This is in a bid to achieve the purpose of educational institutions which is not only to produce knowledgeable graduates, but also individuals with noble character and personal integrity. Apart from this, the fact that dishonesty has become endemic and destructive of the reputation of educational institutions makes it an issue of concern. Not only does it have negative effect on educational institutions, it also affects the capability to properly assess students' knowledge and learning. It is a fundamental component in determining the majority of unethical behaviours and offences which are defined in social norms and criminal law.

Aremu, Adeyemi and Ozurumba (2019) defined dishonesty as an avowed way of condemning any socially and culturally unapproved way of life. On the other hand, personal dishonesty is found to be unethical behaviour in higher educational institutions and permeate the community. It has been seen to have devastating effects not only on the lives of individuals involved but also on the welfare of the society. As a socially unapproved behaviour, dishonesty has always attracted sanctions, be it in the social, cultural or legal perspective. These obvious reasons make educational institutions frown at it and take exception to acts of dishonesty among students. Therefore, emphasis of this study is on personal dishonesty among university postgraduate students.

Oftentimes, learning activities in some educational institutions are narrowed down by just focusing on grades, while honesty and integrity seems to be no longer important. Consequently, students no longer pay attention to the process of learning; rather they do anything in order to get good grades. By this, they get involved in various acts of personal dishonesty such as cheating, plagiarism, falsification of information, absenteeism from class, and other fraudulent/deceptive acts. Studies have revealed that students who consider dishonest acts as justified will easily engage in such acts. Laduke (2013) showed that dishonest behaviours of student nurses in the classroom or clinical setting may depend on how they perceive dishonesty as an unethical behaviour and how strongly they disapprove it. This explains that students who believe fraudulent or dishonest acts are acceptable are more likely to act in dishonest behaviours.

The foundation for manpower development has been attributed to the quality of education which higher institutions of learning provide, particularly postgraduate education. However, there are obvious indications that attainment of such quality education for manpower development could be marred with unethical behaviours such as personal dishonesty. There have been attempts to explain personal dishonesty and its prevalence. Personal dishonesty describes various forms of unethical behaviours prevalent in the academia, businesses, workplace, relationships e.t.c. It is regarded as the violation of established standards of behaviour. According to Zimny, Robertson and Bartoszek (2008), the definition of personal dishonesty encompass a variety of concrete behaviours which have in common, the violation of established standards of behaviour. Apart from some of the examples and acts of personal dishonesty exhibited by students in academic institutions, other common interpretations of personal dishonesty that are usually found in the society include lying, embezzlement, corruption, stealing, cheating on one's partner (infidelity), fraud, amongst others. It has been shown that moral lapses during an individual's education do have future occurrence. For instance, Morris and Killian (2006) in survey onsome undergraduates found a significant number of students who admitted to cheating in college also admitted to cheating in high school.

On the whole, the rate of moral decline in the present generation has led to the conclusion that personal dishonesty has reached its epidemic state. Particularly, personal dishonesty among university students is a common incidence considering the number of disciplinary cases which are related to gross misconduct, such as unruly behaviour, examination malpractice, indecent/immoral behaviour, pilfering, stealing and so on. Most times, Management of educational institutions are seen to mete out appropriate sanctions to offenders ranging from expulsion, rustication and reprimand, depending on the gravity of the offence. Empirical findings have also revealed high rate of misconduct and dishonest behaviours among students. Harding, Mayhew, Finelli and Carpenter (2007) found out that 54% of students in a particular school committed fraud in doing exams and assignments. Similarly, Adeniyi and Taiwo (2011) revealed that dishonesty among Nigerian college of education students is rampant and that more than 70% of the respondents confirmed incidences of cheating. Relatively, these show high occurrence rates for a variety of personal dishonest behaviours among students. The prevalence of stealing among students also appears comparatively high. An epidemiological study of adult students found that 11.3% of the general population admitted to having shoplifted in their lifetimes (Blanco, Grant, Petry, Simpson, Alegria, Liu & Hasin, 2008). Same study reported that stealing appears to start generally in childhood or adolescence, with approximately 66% of individuals having reported

lifetime stealing before they were 15 years of age. This will have adverse effects on the individuals involved with the likelihood of manifestations even in the future.

By and large, dishonesty pervades all facets of life, from the learning environment to the workplace. Explicitly, Laduke (2013) reported that students who engage in dishonest activities in the academic context, particularly undergraduate students, are more likely to demonstrate inappropriate behaviours during their professional life. Heibutzki (2012) revealed that most workplace dishonesty arises through lying, stealing, or unethical behaviour. These acts definitely have implications on how organizations function, such as, loss of valuable time and resources. Dishonesty also affects the focal person and other significant persons around the individual. Apart from the devastating effects on the lives of those involved, personal dishonesty can also engender the welfare of the society. For instance, Laduke (2013) further showed that a nurse's dishonest and unethical behaviour as a health-care provider can have negative repercussions on a patient's life.

There are several reasons why students engage in personal dishonesty. Some of these include inability to manage the demands of student life and lack of understanding about consequences (Whitley and Keith-Spiegel, 2002), lack of social norms and self-deception (Mazar and Ariely, 2006), financial pressure (Malgwi and Rakovski, 2009), peer influence (Starovoytova and Namango, 2016) and lack of self-control (Isakov, 2017). Since this list is not exhaustive, this paper examines three other factors that could predispose students to personal dishonesty. These are self-control, self-surveillance and planned behaviour.

It has been revealed that the willpower that conquers the desire for impulsive behaviours is premised on self-controlled individuals. Arnekley, Grasmick, Tittle and Bursik (1993) asserted that people who lack self-control have personalities that predispose them to commit deviant acts. The implication of this is that students who are unable to exercise control over their emotions or actions are likely to engage in dishonest and socially unacceptable behaviours such as personal 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 simply means that self-control is the ability of postgraduate students to regulate or conform to socially acceptable behaviours. Hence, predicting the success of university objectives and goals.

The predicting influence of self-surveillance on students' personal dishonesty was also looked at in the study. It is described as the individual monitoring and understanding of one's behaviours. According to Yau and Schneider (2009), self-surveillance is essentially collecting data about your personal behaviours and surroundings to gain a better understanding of how you live and what goes on around you. Covey, Saladinand Killen (2010) identified self-monitoring as one of the factors influencing dishonest behaviour. Results of their study indicated that surveillance reduced dishonesty and that low self-monitors' as well as comparative lack of concern regarding self-presentation increased dishonesty. By implication, dishonest behaviours could be influenced by self-surveillance and students who are high in self-monitoring would look for pointers around them to help manage their behaviours and conform to acceptable standards without violation.

Again, one other factor that is considered as a predictor of personal dishonesty is planned behaviour. In psychology, dishonest behaviours could be explained with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Postulations of the theory submit that human behaviour is directed by three considerations which affect the intention and then influence one's behaviour. Simply put, the assumptions of planned behaviour suggest that a person's behaviour is determined by his/her intention to perform the behaviour and this intention, in turn, is a function of attitude towards the behaviour. This describes that perceived intention towards a particular act or behaviour will determine the rate of success of the behaviour. Alleyne and Phillips (2011) adopted a modified model of TPB developed by Beck and Ajzen and discovered that this significantly influenced students' intention to cheat and lie. Also, Harding et al (2007) supported the use of the model of planned behaviour in predicting ethical decision-making regarding cheating. The model demonstrated that certain variables and moral constructs are related to the intention to cheat.

Following the aforementioned, it is revealed that personal dishonesty is a socially unapproved behaviour that permeates the educational system and various aspects of life. It has also been expressed that individual factors have association with personal dishonesty (McCabe, Feghali & Abdallah, 2008; Starovoytova & Namango, 2016). Its prevalence among postgraduate students and apparent implications on individuals and the society have showed that there is need to carry out a research of this nature. Also, the obvious dearth of literature and less research on the constructs make it imperative to conduct this research. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the predictive impact of individual factors on personal dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-western Nigeria. To this end, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1: Would there be significant relationship between each of the individual factors and personal dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-western Nigeria?
- 2: Would there be significant joint contribution of the individual factors to the prediction of personal dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-western Nigeria?
- 3: Would there be relative contribution of each of the individual factors to the prediction of personal dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-western Nigeria?

# Methodology

The study adopted correlational survey design to establish the degree of relationship of the independent variables on the criterion measure (personal dishonesty) with no attempt of manipulation. The population for the study consists of university postgraduate students from three federal universities in south-western Nigeria. The Universities are, University of Ibadan, University of Lagos and Federal University of Technology, Abeokuta. Multistage sampling technique was used to select the three hundred university postgraduate students that participated in this study: the three federal universities were purposively selected in the study area. Thereafter, the selected universities were divided into faculties using convenient sampling, while participants who were willing to participate were involved in the administration of the questionnaires.

The instrument for the collection of data consists of two sections: Section A comprises biodemographic information, while Section B consists of five sub-scales on the independent variables and the criterion measure (personal dishonesty). Personal Ethical Scale (r= 0.75) was

adapted from Zimny et al (2008) devised PCHEAT and a Deviant Behaviour scale from Aquino, Lewis and Bradfield (1999) which was used by Shaiful, Kasmol, Mohammad, Ahmad, Norshimah and Rozihana (2009).Others are: Postgraduate Students' Self Control Scale(Grasmick, Tittle, Bursik, and Arneklev, 1993) with reliability coefficient of 0.76, Postgraduate Students' Self-monitoring Scale(Snyder, 1974)with reliability coefficient of 0.66 and Postgraduate Students' Planned Behaviour Scale (Harding et al, 2007) with reliability coefficient of 0.61, respectively. Each of these scaleshad items which were measured using 5-point likert format. The Personal Ethical Scale had responses ranging from "always (5)" to "never (1)", while others ranged from "strongly agree (1)" to "strongly disagree (5)".

Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple regression analysis were used to analyse the data generated. PPMC was used to establish the relationship between each of the independent variables and the criterion measure. Multiple regression analysis was also used in estimating the joint and relative contribution of the individual factors (self-control, self-surveillance and planned behaviour) to the prediction of personal dishonestyof university postgraduate students in southwestern Nigeria.

## **Results**

## **Research Question One**

Would there be significant relationship between each of the individual factors and personal dishonesty of selected university postgraduate students in south-westernNigeria?

Table 1
P.P.M.C. Scores of each of the Independent Variables and the Dependent Variable

Independent Remarks	Dependent	r.cal.	Df	P								
Variables	Variable											
	Personal Dishonesty											
Self-control	•	0.03	298	> 0.05	NS							
Self-surveillance		0.22	298	< 0.05	Sig.							
Planned Behaviour		0.14	298	< 0.05	Sig.							

Table 1 shows that there was no significant relationship between self-control and personal dishonesty (r. calculate = 0.03, df = 298 P> 0.05); there was significant relationship between self-surveillance and personal dishonesty (r. calculate = 0.22, df = 298 P < 0.05); and there was significant relationship between planned behaviour and personal dishonesty (r. calculate = 0.14, df = 298 P < 0.05).

#### **Research Ouestion Two**

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

**Table 2: Regression Table** 

# Regression = 0.24

Regression Sq	uare = 0.06					
Adjusted Regr	ression Square = $0.05$					
Error of Estimate = $7.42$						
Model	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F. RatioS.		
Regression	997.67	3	332.56	6.04	0.00	
Residual	16313.57	296	55.11			
Total	17311.24	299				

<sup>\*\*(</sup>Significant at 0.05 critical region)

Table 2 shows results that multiple R is 0.24, multiple R square is 0.06, adjusted multiple R square is 0.05 and standard error of estimate is 7.42. This results shows that the independent variable jointly contributed 5% to the variance in the personal dishonesty of the respondents. The anova table also shows F ratio value of 6.04 which is found to be significant at 0.05 critical region.

# **Research Question Three**

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

Table 3: Relative Contribution of the Independent Variables to the Prediction of the Dependent Variable

Model	Standardized Coeffi.			Unstandardized t. Val.		S		
		В	Stand.	Err.	Beta			
Constant		18.65	1.94				9.62	0.00
Self-control	-0.08	0.05		-0.1		-1.55	0.12	
Self-surveillance		0.23	0.07		0.23		3.41	0.00
Planned Behaviour		0.06	0.06		0.07		0.95	0.34

Result from table 3shows that B values range from -0.08 to 18.65, standard error values range from 0.05 to 1.94, Beta values range from -0.1 to 0.23 and t. values range from-1.55 to 9.62. With these figures, self-surveillance ( $\beta=0.23$ ) had significant relative contribution at 0.05 critical region to the prediction of personal dishonesty of the participants. On the other hand, self-control ( $\beta=-0.1$ ) and planned behaviour ( $\beta=0.07$ ) did not have significant relative contribution to the prediction of personal dishonesty of the participants.

#### **Discussion**

Personal dishonesty has been revealed as a pervasive problem that continues to plague academic institutions and distort the values of learning. This study shows the predicting impact of self-control, self-surveillance and planned behaviour on personal dishonesty among university postgraduate students in south-western Nigeria. Therefore, the study accentuates the benefits of

personal integrity and the role of academic institutions as major stakeholder in combating the culture of acceptance of personal dishonesty also referred to as cheating.

The result from the first research question confirms that there was no significant relationship between self-control and personal dishonesty among the postgraduate students. This finding supports the results of Williams and Williams (2012) which reveal that the overall ability of self-control variable to explain dishonesty was not strong but suggested that a general criminological theory may be of use in its explanation. Williams and Williams (2012) stated further that the finding is also consistent with previous study by Smith (2004). This however, is not consistent with the research findings of Nicole, Baumeister, Gino, Schweitzerand Ariely (2009) which revealed that honesty may depend on self-control given that self-control is the capacity that enables people to override antisocial selfish responses in favour of socially desirable responses. The result indicated that dishonesty increases when people's capacity to exert self-control is impaired. Relatively, result from the current study exposes a significant but moderate capacity of self-control variable to explain personal dishonesty. This implies that self-control may influence disposition to personal dishonesty and having control over self does not seem adequate in explaining reasons why some students do not engage in personal dishonesty as this may be in their interest. In effect, improvement in self-control could change attitudes to personal dishonesty.

Findings from this study also show that there is significant relationship between self-surveillance and personal dishonesty. Invariably, this implies that self-surveillance has significant relationship to the prediction of personal dishonest behaviours. This supports the findings of Covey, Saladin and Killen (2010) that cheating (dishonesty) occurred less frequently at higher versus lower levels of surveillance. In other words, cheating is reduced where there is high surveillance. On the other hand, Thomas (2017) found that mind-set and individualism had a negative relationship with dishonesty in the academic setting.

There was also a significant relationship shown between planned behaviour and personal dishonesty. This corroborated the findings of Lin and Chen (2011) which revealed that the variables in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provided significant evidence in intentions of workplace dishonest behaviours. It also supports Alleyne and Phillips (2011) who found that components of the theory of planned behaviour (attitudes, perceived behavioural control and moral obligation) are significant predictors of students' intentions to engage in cheating and lying. These findings however, contradict the investigation of Smith, Terry, Manstead, Louis, Kotterman and Wolfs (2008) which found no effect of perceived behavioural control (TPB variable) on intentions of participants in a study of consumer products.

On the other hand, result of the second research question shows that all the three predictor variables jointly contributed to the variance on the criterion measure. This implies that self-control, self-surveillance and planned behaviour have significant joint effect on the prediction of personal dishonesty among postgraduate students. This finding supports previous report of McCabe, Feghali and Abdallah (2008) that contextual and individual factors play a role in the behaviour of students. This also validates the study of Zimny et al (2008) where it was reported that situational and personal factors were explored as correlates of dishonesty in personal relationships among college students. Comparatively, these findings reveal that individual factors

play a role in influencing the behaviour of students. This forecloses that individual factors to a greater extent, could determine the involvement of students in dishonest behaviours or personal dishonesty as used in this study.

Given this outcome, understanding students' behaviour which are related to cheating will be beneficialto academic institutionsand of immense assistance in conducting evaluation of the learning process in the academic community. It is also worthy to note that this study has contributed to the body of knowledge and research on dishonesty and bridged the gap in literature, particularly on personal dishonesty where there has been limited research studies.

Having established that the three variables jointly predicted personal dishonesty, it is also important to establish their relative prediction on the criterion measure, personal dishonesty. Therefore, findings from the third research question reveal a relative contribution of the variables to the prediction of personal dishonesty and self-surveillance made a high relative contribution. This supports the findings of Shon (2006)that the possibility of detection and surveillance play a role in students' decision to cheat. Similarly, the study of Saana, Ablordeppey, Mensah and Karikari (2016) reported that students' self-reported awareness and understanding of institutional regulations were effective in controlling unethical behaviours among students in higher education. The minimal influence of self-control and planned behaviour to the criterion measure cannot be ignored given their relative contributions. Occasionally, inability to control self and perceived intention towards behaviour could determine the involvement or level of success of the behaviour.

Consequently, the findingsof the current study being supported by previous studies implies that there is need to pay attention on the variables, as they made relative contributions to the prediction of personal dishonesty. While considering measures of curbing personal dishonesty among students, attention should be devoted to effective monitoring/supervision of students, whether behavioural conduct or academic/examination. Students should also be taught positive values, exposed to self-awareness abilities and understanding of one's actions, with provision of enabling environment for teaching, learning and research. If adequate attention is paid on these, there is the likelihood of decline in university postgraduate students' involvement in personal dishonesty.

## Conclusion

As reported in the findings from this study, it is shown that personal dishonesty, particularly among university postgraduate students is one of the major challenges threatening the university system and the influence of individual factors on its prediction has been established. It has also been revealed that it has adverse effects on academic institutions and on students as it questions reputation such institutions and affects the capability of to assessstudents'knowledge and learning. Of great concern is the fact that students who engage in dishonest acts while studying in the university are more likely to act dishonestly in the workplace. Therefore, the quality of university graduates and integrity of academic institutions can be improved if satisfactory attention is paid on personal dishonesty and its occurrence among students. Also, this study has distinct implication for educational institutions, researchers, counselling psychologists, criminal justice experts, educationists, university administrators and other professional stakeholders as findings therein would be useful for possible interventions.

#### Recommendations

It is suggested that:

- 1. Academic institutions should ensureadequate measures that would address unethical behaviours, such as personal dishonesty are put in place.
- 2. Attention should also be on exposing students to life enhancing values on personal integrity. This helps in moulding their character apart from the acquisition of knowledge which addresses the aspect of learning.
- 3. In addition, students should be exposed to self-awareness programmes which improve the ability to accomplish specific goals and various forms of counselling support interventions, while learning environment should be devoid of every opportunity of perceived behavioural intentions for students' to cheat. This will to a large extent facilitate the achievement of both learning and university objectives.

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