

## **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Attitudes among Postgraduate Students in Southwestern Nigerian Universities**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

*Academic integrity is central to the credibility of higher education, yet plagiarism remains a widespread challenge, particularly among postgraduate students who are expected to model ethical scholarship. While global research has explored academic integrity extensively, limited empirical evidence exists on postgraduate students' attitudes toward plagiarism in Nigeria. This study investigates the relationship between academic integrity and attitudes toward plagiarism among postgraduate students in universities in South-western Nigeria, a region that hosts some of the country's most research-intensive institutions. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with data collected from postgraduate students across selected universities in the region. Standardised questionnaires measured students' understanding of academic integrity, their attitudes toward plagiarism, and their adherence to integrity values. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to establish patterns and relationships. Preliminary results indicate that while postgraduate students recognise the importance of honesty, responsibility, and respect in academic work, a significant proportion display permissive attitudes toward plagiarism. Weak enforcement of integrity policies, coupled with pressure to publish and limited awareness of ethical standards, were identified as contributing factors. The study highlights the urgent need for Nigerian universities to strengthen academic integrity policies, integrate integrity training into postgraduate curricula, and foster cultures of accountability and ethical scholarship. Beyond the Nigerian context, the findings contribute to global debates on sustaining academic integrity in an era shaped by digital technologies and artificial intelligence.*

**Keyword:** Academic integrity, academic attitude, plagiarism, master degree, postgraduate students

### **Introduction**

Academic integrity has become a pressing concern in higher education worldwide, reflecting the growing emphasis on ethical standards in teaching, learning, and research. As universities broaden

their roles in knowledge creation and innovation, the credibility of their outputs depends on the consistent observance of integrity in scholarly practices. Breaches such as plagiarism and related forms of academic dishonesty not only damage institutional reputation but also undermine the validity of qualifications and erode public trust in postgraduate education systems. These concerns are not limited to the global arena; recent evidence from Nigeria highlights similar challenges. Orok, Adeniyi, Williams, and Udo-Affah (2023) found that university students' knowledge, perceptions, and behaviours toward academic dishonesty, particularly plagiarism, pose significant risks to institutional credibility and demand proactive mitigation strategies. Such findings reinforce the urgent need for policies and interventions that strengthen cultures of integrity across diverse academic contexts.

Academic integrity is broadly defined as compliance with ethical and professional principles, standards, and practices that guide academic decision-making and scholarly conduct (Anohina-Naumeca, Birzniece, and Odineca, 2020). Higher education institutions regard academic integrity as central to their mission and treat breaches with seriousness (Harrad, Keasley, and Jefferies, 2024). In research and teaching contexts, academic integrity reflects a commitment to honesty, fairness, accountability, respect, and courage in the use and dissemination of information resources (Lee, 2023).

The fundamental values of academic integrity which are: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage serve as benchmarks for moral conduct in academic life. These values translate into concrete practices such as refraining from plagiarism, properly acknowledging sources of information, completing assignments without recourse to unfair methods, adhering to institutional rules, and treating fellow scholars with dignity and respect. Integrity, which may be described as honesty and strong moral principles, bridges ethics and morality. Its four core pillars are conscious communication, sound responsibility, emotional intelligence, and reliable agreements. When academic integrity is upheld, knowledge creation proceeds on foundations of trust and accountability; when it is compromised, the credibility of institutions and qualifications is undermined.

The importance of these values has become more pronounced in the era of artificial intelligence and other digital technologies, which have simultaneously advanced scholarship and made misconduct easier to commit (Khalaf, 2024). To maintain integrity in this context, academic communities must consistently observe and apply these fundamental values. When embraced, they become the touchstones of scholarly communities of integrity.

Each of the values contributes to sustaining ethical scholarship. Honesty involves adherence to facts, sincerity, and fairness (Merriam-Webster, 2024). Honest postgraduate students comply with institutional policies, complete their work independently, and resist unauthorised assistance (Kestler, 2021). Trust, defined as reliance on the character, strength, or truth of someone or something (Merriam-Webster, 2024), enables collaboration, open exchange of ideas, and mutual confidence among students, faculty, and the broader academic community (Kestler, 2021). Respect entails valuing oneself and others, acknowledging diverse perspectives, and contributing meaningfully to academic discourse (Kestler, 2021). Responsibility is a dual obligation—personal

and communal—requiring members of the academic community to safeguard intellectual property, lead by example, and hold one another accountable (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024; Kestler, 2021). Courage, finally, is the ability to uphold academic standards even when doing so carries risks; it empowers postgraduate students to resist misconduct and advocate for integrity (Kestler, 2021).

Despite this strong conceptual grounding, academic integrity remains a persistent challenge in higher education, with plagiarism being one of the most prevalent forms of misconduct. Postgraduate students are particularly vulnerable because of the pressures to publish, meet deadlines, and produce original research. These pressures can shape their attitudes toward plagiarism and academic integrity more generally.

In Nigeria, and particularly in the South-western region where several of the nation's leading universities are located, concerns about plagiarism among postgraduate students have become increasingly relevant. The region is a hub for academic research and postgraduate training, producing a significant share of Nigeria's scholarly output. Yet, empirical studies exploring postgraduate students' attitudes toward academic integrity in this setting remain limited.

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining postgraduate students' attitudes toward academic integrity in South-western Nigeria, with specific attention to their views on plagiarism. By situating the inquiry in a region of high academic productivity, the research provides insights that can inform institutional policies, strengthen cultures of integrity, and reduce misconduct. Ultimately, this study contributes to the global discourse on academic integrity by linking postgraduate students' attitudes with the sustainability of ethical scholarship in the face of emerging challenges such as digitalisation and artificial intelligence.

### **Statement of the problem**

Despite the central role of academic integrity in postgraduate education, plagiarism remains a persistent challenge, with many students displaying tolerant or even positive attitudes toward the practice (Kestler, 2021). Such attitudes undermine honesty, fairness, responsibility, respect and values that are essential for credible scholarship. While research on academic integrity and plagiarism has expanded globally, there is limited empirical evidence addressing how postgraduate students in Nigeria, who are expected to be role models of scholarly conduct, perceive and practice these values. This gap is particularly significant in South-western Nigeria, home to some of the nation's oldest and most research-intensive universities that contribute substantially to Nigeria's scholarly output. Yet little is known about the attitudes of postgraduate students in this academic hub toward plagiarism and how these attitudes intersect with broader issues of integrity. Without such insights, institutions may struggle to design effective policies and interventions to strengthen a culture of integrity. This study, therefore, investigates academic integrity and attitudes toward plagiarism among postgraduate students in South-western Nigerian universities, addressing a critical gap in both the literature and practice.

### **Objectives of the study**

The aim of the study is to investigate academic integrity and attitude towards plagiarism among postgraduate students in universities in south-western, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

- 1) ascertain the attitude of postgraduate students towards plagiarism in the selected universities in South-western Nigeria;
- 2) examine the level of academic integrity of postgraduate students in universities in the selected universities;
- 3) ascertain the relationship between academic integrity and attitude towards plagiarism among postgraduate students in the selected universities;

Academic integrity has long been recognized as a cornerstone of higher education, ensuring not only the quality of learning but also the credibility of scholarship. However, how institutions foster and enforce integrity varies widely across contexts. Sefcik, Striepe, and Yorke (2020), in their study of 44 institutions in Australia and New Zealand, found that while academic integrity programs exist, many are shallow, focusing primarily on plagiarism and referencing skills. These initiatives often neglect deeper values such as honesty, responsibility, and fairness, which are crucial for long-term ethical development. Their findings indicate that centrally managed programs with compliance mechanisms are more effective than decentralized efforts, highlighting the importance of strong institutional structures in shaping students' engagement with integrity practices.

Building on this, Guerrero-Dib, Portales, and Heredia-Escorza (2020) argued that academic integrity serves a dual function: it equips students with the competencies required for professional practice while also cultivating ethical perspectives that extend beyond university life. This perspective suggests that integrity is not merely a technical requirement but a holistic value system that shapes both academic and professional identity. Yet, as Željana, Ivana, Jerković, Buljan, and Marušić (2019) discovered in a survey of 388 students at the University of Split, favorable attitudes toward integrity do not always translate into strong knowledge or practice. Students expressed willingness to avoid plagiarism but struggled with both theoretical and practical aspects of citation, and no correlation was found between attendance at plagiarism courses and improved competence. These findings reveal a critical gap between institutional efforts to teach integrity and students' actual ability to internalize and apply it.

This gap becomes even more apparent when shifting the focus to the Nigerian context. Atunde (2016) examined online plagiarism among students at the University of Lagos and found that, while awareness of plagiarism was widespread, many students—both undergraduate and postgraduate—still held positive attitudes toward its practice. The study further revealed a strong correlation between awareness and favourable opinions of plagiarism, suggesting that knowledge alone does not prevent misconduct. Importantly, the findings showed significant differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students' awareness, pointing to the need for integrity interventions that are sensitive to academic level. This contrasts with foreign studies where postgraduate students are often assumed to possess stronger ethical dispositions, thereby

highlighting a gap in understanding the specific challenges faced by Nigerian postgraduate students.

Other international studies confirm that knowledge and awareness do not necessarily discourage academic dishonesty. Hosny and Fatima (2014), for instance, investigated female students at King Saud University and reported a contradiction: although students acknowledged plagiarism and cheating as immoral and contrary to religious values, these behaviours remained widespread. The ease of access to online resources and digital tools facilitated such misconduct, underscoring how technological opportunities often outweigh moral convictions. Similarly, Bozok (2023) found that in Turkish online English classes, students engaged in practices such as using translation services or attending classes without participation, showing how digital learning environments create new avenues for misconduct. Madaan and Chakarvarty (2017) echoed these concerns in India, reporting that 76% of postgraduate students admitted to copying from the internet due to the difficulty of proper citation, further demonstrating how even advanced students often rationalize academic dishonesty. Together, these studies reinforce the need to examine integrity not only as an ethical issue but also as a behavioural response to systemic, technological, and institutional factors.

When viewed collectively, the literature underscores two key insights. First, much of the existing research, particularly from Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and Asia, focuses on describing prevalence and institutional practices, but little has been done to critically examine postgraduate students' attitudes in Nigeria. Second, findings across contexts consistently reveal a dissonance between knowledge and practice: students may understand that plagiarism is unethical yet still engage in it, often facilitated by weak enforcement or the convenience of digital tools. This suggests that academic dishonesty is shaped by a combination of personal attitudes, cultural norms, and institutional environments rather than by lack of knowledge alone.

To interpret these patterns, the **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)** provides a useful framework. According to TPB, behaviour is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the context of plagiarism, students' attitudes often reflect rationalizations for dishonesty—such as convenience or academic pressure—even when they recognize it as unethical (Hosny and Fatima, 2014; Atunde, 2016). Subjective norms, reinforced by peer acceptance and weak institutional enforcement, normalize misconduct (Sefcik et al., 2020), while perceived behavioural control, enabled by digital tools and limited monitoring, makes dishonesty easier to commit (Bozok, 2023; Madaan and Chakarvarty, 2017). This theoretical framing highlights why integrity challenges persist among postgraduate students: misconduct is not only a matter of ignorance but the outcome of complex interactions between beliefs, social expectations, and institutional systems. Consequently, applying TPB to the Nigerian postgraduate context offers a strong rationale for this study, which seeks to investigate academic integrity and attitudes toward plagiarism in South-western universities.

## Hypotheses

The null hypothesis was measured at 0.05 significance level in this study.

There is no significant relationship between academic integrity and attitude to plagiarism among postgraduate students in the selected universities in Southwestern Nigeria.

## Methodology

This study adopted a **descriptive survey design of the correlational type** which allows for both the description of a phenomenon and the determination of the degree of association between variables. A descriptive survey is useful for systematically collecting data from a defined population to describe prevailing attitudes and behaviours, while correlation studies facilitate the identification of relationships among variables and the prediction of outcomes based on observed patterns (Oladejo, Alonge, and Oyewole, 2023). This design was considered appropriate for the present study because it aligns with the objectives of examining postgraduate students' attitudes toward plagiarism, assessing their level of academic integrity, and determining the relationship between these two variables.

The population comprised **17,298 postgraduate students** enrolled in master's degree programmes across six selected universities in South-western Nigeria. The universities were purposively chosen based on two criteria: (i) they represent the three categories of universities in Nigeria (federal, state, and private); and (ii) they are first-generation institutions currently running postgraduate programmes. A **multi-stage sampling procedure** was adopted. At the first stage, **stratified random sampling** was used to select at least one university from each of the six states in South-western Nigeria (Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Osun, and Ekiti), with each state serving as a stratum. At the second stage, **convenience sampling** was applied to select individual postgraduate students. Convenience sampling was adopted to ensure accessibility and willingness of participants, which is particularly relevant in studies involving postgraduate students with diverse schedules and commitments (Golzar, Jawad, Noor, and Tajik, 2022). A **2% sampling fraction** of the total postgraduate student population was used, resulting in a sample size of **346 postgraduate students**. Out of the 346 questionnaires administered, **336 were duly completed and returned**, yielding a **response rate of 97.1%**, which is considered highly adequate for survey research.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers, drawing from an extensive review of literature on academic integrity and plagiarism (Hosny and Fatima, 2014; Željana, Ivana, Jerković, Buljan, and Marušić, 2019; Anohina-Naumecca, Birzniece, and Odineca, 2020). The questionnaire was carefully organized into three major sections. The first section elicited demographic information of the respondents in order to provide context for interpreting the findings. The second section measured attitudes towards plagiarism, and it was adapted from established plagiarism awareness scales used in previous empirical studies. The third section assessed academic integrity using five recognized dimensions, namely honesty, fairness, respect, trust, and responsibility.

The instrument underwent **expert validation** by three senior lecturers in library and information science, who reviewed the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study

objectives. A **pilot test** was conducted on 30 postgraduate students from a university outside the sample frame. The pilot test results were used to refine ambiguous items and improve reliability. Reliability was established using **Cronbach’s alpha coefficient**, which produced values of 0.81 for the plagiarism scale and 0.86 for the academic integrity scale, indicating high internal consistency. Construct validity was also supported through alignment with established theoretical frameworks on academic integrity (Sefcik, Striepe, and Yorke, 2020).

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Research and Ethics Committee of one of the selected universities. Participation was voluntary, and **informed consent** was obtained from all respondents before questionnaire administration. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, assured anonymity, and guaranteed confidentiality of responses. Students were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences.

**Results**

**Table 4: demographics of the respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Year of study</b>		
Year one	164	48.8
Year two	172	51.2
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	114	33.9
Female	222	66.1
<b>Age</b>		
20-29	254	75.6
30-39	72	21.4
40 and above	10	3

**N= 336**

Table 4: displays the demographic characteristics of Postgraduate students in the universities in South-western, Nigeria. The data obtained showed that more than average respondents 172 (51.2%) were in the year two of their master degree programme while 164 (48.8%) of the respondents which is below average were in the year one of their master degree programme. There are more female postgraduate students 222 (66.1%) than their male counterparts. Higher

percentage of postgraduate students were between 20-29 years of age, while only 10 (3%) were 40 years and above older.

**Research question one: What is the attitude towards plagiarism among postgraduate students in universities in South-western Nigeria?**

In order to ascertain the attitude of postgraduate students toward plagiarism. It was necessary to examine the perceptions and behaviours regarding the use of others’ intellectual work. Understanding students’ attitudes toward plagiarism provides insight into how they interpret academic honesty, the extent of their awareness of ethical scholarship, and the factors that may predispose them to engage in or refrain from dishonest practices. Table 5 presented attitude towards plagiarism among postgraduate students in universities in Southwestern Nigeria.

**Table 5:** Attitude towards plagiarism among postgraduate students in universities in South-western Nigeria

S/N	Statements	SA F %	A F %	D F %	SD F %	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev
1.	There are too much assignments to contend with and using artificial intelligence generative tools is inevitable	134 39.9	154 45.8	40 11.9	8 2.4	3.23	0.74
2.	At times, purchasing already completed term papers and completed projects cannot be ignored as there is little time given for submission.	32 9.5	136 40.5	125 37.2	43 12.8	2.46	0.83
3.	Some of the assignments and term paper topics are similar and I could use my past submitted works for the current assignments	23 6.8	152 45.2	118 35.1	43 12.8	2.46	0.80
4.	I do not think if I use other peoples’ work, I have committed any infraction since the works still belongs to them.	35 10.4	84 25.0	150 44.6	67 19.9	2.25	0.89
5.	I have used my friends’ work before for my own assignment because I was given permission by my friend.	29 8.6	120 35.7	112 33.3	75 22.3	2.03	0.91
6.	Sometimes, one can copy one or two sentences from other people’s original work word for word just to get creativity for further writing	70 20.8	134 39.9	97 28.9	35 10.4	2.71	0.91
7.	There are some circumstances when using another person’s work is permissible.	57 17.0	190 56.5	64 19.0	25 7.4	2.83	0.79

8.	I see no reason why anyone should be punished for using another person's work without permission because you are even helping them propagating the work	23 6.8	61 18.2	145 43.2	107 31.8	2.00	0.88
9.	I might use another person's work for my assignments and project since my university does not have any punishment on ground.	19 5.7	38 11.3	180 53.6	99 29.5	1.93	0.79
10.	I do not regard using another person's work as bad as stealing	20 6.0	60 17.9	157 46.7	99 29.5	2.00	0.84
11.	Even in some cases when people are scolded for using another person's work, the punishment is bearable to me.	15 4.5	67 19.9	159 47.3	95 28.3	2.00	0.81
12.	People who use other people's work do so not because they are lazy but because they are too busy.	26 7.7	96 28.6	161 47.9	53 15.8	2.28	0.82
13.	Once I mention the name of the person, I used his/her work in my write up, I do not regard it as plagiarism even if I do not change the wordings.	75 22.3	145 43.2	73 21.7	43 12.8	2.75	0.94
14.	People who think using other person's work as my won as an ethical value are missing things up.	45 13.4	104 31.0	142 42.3	45 13.4	2.44	0.88
15.	Once I paraphrase the original work using paraphrasing tools, I do not regard the outcome as plagiarism.	53 15.8	169 50.3	85 25.3	29 8.6	2.73	0.82
	<b>Weighted mean</b>					<b>2.41</b>	

Table 5: identify the attitude of postgraduate students towards plagiarism in universities in Southwestern Nigeria. In order to provide answer to this research question, respondents were asked to indicate their attitude towards plagiarism in their respective universities from the list of library services itemised. The results of their responses are presented in Tables 5: A high proportion of respondents (85.7%) agree that the burden of assignments makes using AI generative tools inevitable ( $\bar{x} = 3.23$ ) suggesting that the students may be turning to AI to cope with academic workload, potentially leading to issues of academic integrity. Equally, there were 50% of respondents (SA+A) who acknowledged that purchasing already completed term papers and projects due to time constraints ( $\bar{x} = 2.46$ ) is right. Similarly, 52% agreed that they reuse past submitted works for current assignments ( $\bar{x} = 2.46$ ) showing that a level of normalization of self-plagiarism and the purchase of academic materials could significantly be associated to the perspective of the students regarding plagiarism.

Table 5: also showed that a significant proportion (64.5%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that using other people's work without permission is acceptable ( $\bar{x} = 2.25$ ). Likewise, 75% of

respondents disagreed that there should be no punishment for using another person's work ( $\bar{x} = 2.00$ ). It, therefore, could be interpreted that some students engage in plagiarism even when they recognize it as an unethical practice. There were 52.6% of the respondents who believed that copying a few sentences word-for-word for creativity is acceptable ( $\bar{x} = 2.71$ ), while 73.5% agreed that there are circumstances where using another person's work is permissible ( $\bar{x} = 2.83$ ). This is an indication that the postgraduate students may justify certain forms of plagiarism based on context.

As far as institutional deterrence is concerned, 83.1% of respondents disagreed that they engage in plagiarism due to the absence of punishment from their university ( $\bar{x} = 1.93$ ) which means that there is institutional deterrence. However, 52.7% agreed that paraphrasing using paraphrasing tools does not constitute plagiarism ( $\bar{x} = 2.73$ ) which translates to the fact that that some students believed that modifying text sufficiently removes ethical concerns related to plagiarism. The overall weighted mean of 2.41 suggested a moderate tendency toward justifying or rationalizing plagiarism. Thus, many postgraduate students in South-western Nigerian universities recognize plagiarism as unethical, though an appreciable number still engages in it.

**Research question two: What is the level of academic integrity of postgraduate students in universities in South-western Nigeria?**

This question examined the extent to which students uphold the core values of academic integrity, including honesty, fairness, respect, trust, and responsibility, in their scholarly activities. Table 6 therefore shows the level of academic integrity of postgraduate students in universities in Southwestern Nigeria.

**Tale 6:** Level of academic integrity of postgraduate students in universities in South-western Nigeria

S/N	Level of academic integrity	SA %	A %	D %	SD %	$\bar{x}$	Std.Dev
<b>A</b>	<b>Honesty</b>						
1.	I have no one watching me using information and as such I could use information any how I like.	56 6.7	63 18.8	160 47.6	57 17.0	2.35	.95
2.	I have the ability to ensure that I use information in a good manner (such as not generating and presenting false data).	183 54.5	133 39.6	14 4.2	6 1.8	3.46	.66
3.	Whichever way I am able to get my assignment done is acceptable to me. If I do not see genue information, I could use anyone within reach in order to beat time.	62 18.5	100 29.8	127 37.8	47 14.0	2.52	.94
4.	No matter how I use any means to complete my academic tasks, the result is always satisfactory, and I do not have problem with that.	45 13.4	115 34.2	146 43.5	30 8.9	2.52	.83

5.	The originality of ideas is an important thing to have when writing for academic purposes.	212 63.1	113 33.6	9 2.7	2 0.6	3.59	.57
	<b>Weighted mean</b>					<b>2.88</b>	
<b>B</b>	<b>Fairness</b>						
6.	I have equal opportunity to get involved in campus activities as other students	161 47.9	136 40.5	37 11.0	2 0.6	3.35	.69
7.	Friends can ask me to give them ideas on any given assignment.	173 51.5	159 47.3	4 1.2	-	3.50	.52
8.	Regular review of my academic performance will aid my learning process	212 63.1	120 35.7	4 1.2		3.61	.51
9	I have equal access to electronic resources as other students	161 47.9	145 43.2	29 8.6	1 0.3	3.38	.65
10.	In my opinion, students' academic performance should be assessed equally	184 54.8	128 38.1	22 6.5	2 0.6	3.47	.64
	<b>Weighted mean</b>					<b>3.46</b>	
<b>C</b>	<b>Respect</b>						
11.	When my friend needs the course materials, I am pleased to give it to them.	241 71.7	95 28.3	-		3.71	.45
12	I believe others' opinions matter and should be considered	208 61.9	126 37.5	2 0.6		3.61	.50
13.	I listen to suggestions and opinions of others on my work	203 60.4	131 39.0	2 0.6		3.59	.50
14.	I am open to corrective criticisms from other colleagues	200 59.5	132 39.3	4 1.2		3.58	.51
15	I believe that there is something to be gained from other colleagues	219 65.2	113 33.6	3 0.9	1 0.3	3.63	.51
	<b>Weighted mean</b>					<b>3.62</b>	
<b>D</b>	<b>Trust</b>						
16	Trusting each other's friends is a solid foundation for collaboration on campus.	171 50.9	153 45.5	9 2.7	3 0.9	3.46	.597
17	I do not love studying other people's research results unless permitted.	98 29.2	161 47.9	67 19.9	10 3.0	3.03	.782
18.	I like to discuss how to cite the reference sources that lecturers present in the classroom.	128 38.1	186 55.4	22 6.5		3.31	.590
19.	I do not discuss my colleagues' academic secrets with others	155 46.1	158 47.0	17 5.1	6 1.8	3.37	.666

20.	I do not enjoy discussing other students' assignments with friends.	129 38.4	163 48.5	43 12.8	1 0.3	3.25	.680
	<b>Weighted mean</b>					<b>3.28</b>	
<b>E</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>						
21.	Getting a scholarship is like having a responsibility to serve the nation.	140 41.7	136 40.5	55 16.4	5 1.5	3.22	.76
22	I am always ready to contribute my quota to the development of the university	162 48.2	162 48.2	5 1.5	7 2.1	3.42	.63
23	I am active to participate in academic activities inside and outside the campus.	133 39.6	181 53.9	18 5.4	4 1.2	3.31	.63
24	I believe academic integrity should be everyone's responsibility	208 61.9	120 35.7	8 2.4		3.59	.53
25.	It is my responsibility to ensure the good image of the university is upheld.	214 63.7	111 33.0	8 2.4	3 0.9	3.59	.58
	<b>Weighted mean</b>					<b>3.42</b>	
	<b>Overall mean</b>					<b>3.33</b>	
	<b>Grand mean</b>					<b>83.42</b>	

Table 6: answers the question that focuses on the level of academic integrity of postgraduate students in universities in South-western Nigeria. It was measured by five key dimensions: Honesty, Fairness, Respect, Trust, and Responsibility.

Finding reveals that postgraduate students in South-western Nigerian universities demonstrate a high level of academic honesty, with a weighted mean of 2.88, exceeding the mean threshold of 2.5. Many respondents disagreed with dishonest practices such as misusing information without oversight (Mean = 2.35) and indiscriminately using available data to complete assignments (Mean = 2.52). Conversely, the strong agreement on maintaining originality in academic writing (Mean = 3.59) indicates that while students value academic integrity, some may still resort to questionable practices, possibly due to academic pressure.

Regarding fairness, the overall mean score of 3.46 highlights strong adherence to equitable academic practices. Students affirmed the importance of equal opportunities in campus activities (Mean = 3.35), equal access to electronic resources (Mean = 3.38), and fairness in performance assessment (Mean = 3.47). Similarly, respect emerged as a core value, with a mean score of 3.62. Students reported high levels of respect in sharing course materials with peers (Mean = 3.71), listening to others' opinions (Mean = 3.61), and being receptive to constructive criticism (Mean = 3.58), suggesting that postgraduate learning environments are collaborative and inclusive.

The findings also show that trust is highly valued (Weighted Mean = 3.28). Respondents emphasized the role of trust in collaboration (Mean = 3.46) and respect for academic confidentiality (Mean = 3.37). However, the relatively lower mean score of 3.03 for refraining

from studying others’ research without permission suggests that informal access to research materials still persists among some students.

Academic responsibility was equally prominent, with a weighted mean of 3.42. Students strongly agreed that upholding academic integrity is a collective responsibility (Mean = 3.59), that maintaining the university’s good image is crucial (Mean = 3.59), and that they are personally committed to contributing to the institution’s development (Mean = 3.42).

Taken together, these findings suggest that postgraduate students in the selected universities exhibit a generally high level of academic integrity across the five dimensions assessed. With an overall mean score of 3.33, the results align with the established measurement scale, which categorizes academic integrity as low (0–33.3), moderate (33.4–66.6), or high (66.7–100). The positioning of the students within the high category demonstrates that academic honesty, fairness, respect, trust, and responsibility are well embedded in their academic practices, although certain areas, particularly avoidance of informal use of others’ research, still require reinforcement.

**Table 7:** shows the test of norm table on the level of academic integrity among postgraduate students in South-western Nigeria

**Table 7: Test of norm table on level of academic integrity among postgraduate students**

Interval	Range	Level
0 -21.3		Low
21.4 – 42.6		Moderate
42.7 – 64.0	83.42	High

Table 7: Findings shows that the total mean index for academic integrity of the respondents is 83.42 which falls between the scale of 66.7 – 100.0, indicating that the level of academic integrity of postgraduate students in the selected universities in South-western Nigeria is high.

**Research question 3: What is the relationship between academic integrity and attitude to plagiarism among postgraduate students in the selected universities?**

To further deepen the understanding of students’ ethical conduct, it is essential to examine how their overall level of academic integrity relates to their attitude toward plagiarism. While academic integrity embodies values such as honesty, fairness, trust, respect, and responsibility, plagiarism represents a direct violation of these values. Table 8: Shows relationship between academic integrity and attitude to plagiarism among postgraduate students in the selected universities

**Table 8:** Relationship between academic integrity and attitude to plagiarism among postgraduate students in the selected universities

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	R	P Value	Remarks
Academic integrity	83.5387	7.38605	336	0.086**	.116	Not Sig.
Attitude towards plagiarism	36.4167	7.27081				

*\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 (2-tailed)*

Table 8: showed a strong positive but not significant correlation ( $r = 0.086$ ) between academic integrity and attitude towards plagiarism. The correlation ( $r = 0.086$ ) is positive, weak and had a P value (0.116) exceeding 0.05, this suggests that as academic integrity increases, so does the negative attitude towards plagiarism which is the ideal attitude style required. Since the P-value (0.116) is greater than the significance level (0.05), the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant relationship between academic integrity and attitude to plagiarism among postgraduate students.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The findings indicate that postgraduate students largely exhibited a negative attitude toward plagiarism, recognizing it as an unethical practice. Nonetheless, a notable proportion still displayed ambivalent tendencies by justifying practices such as reusing prior work or adopting others' content under certain conditions. This highlights the persistence of inconsistent attitudes, which may reflect gaps in understanding or internalization of academic ethics. These results are consistent with Fatimah and Wulandari (2018), who reported that students generally possess a foundational awareness of plagiarism and the importance of proper citation to avoid misconduct, although misconceptions, particularly about self-plagiarism remain prevalent. Similarly, Babalola (2014) emphasized the need for academic institutions to implement value reorientation programs that foster honesty, diligence, fairness, and integrity. His work further suggests that effective enforcement of plagiarism policies, complemented by training in paraphrasing, summarizing, citation, and referencing, is essential to curtailing the persistence of positive attitudes toward plagiarism among students, including those at the postgraduate level.

The study examined five core dimensions of academic integrity; honesty, fairness, respect, trust and responsibility which revealed that postgraduate students demonstrated positive orientations toward these values. Honesty emerged as the most highly rated attribute, while respect recorded the lowest mean score. Students strongly affirmed the importance of originality in their academic work and the role of regular academic evaluations in sustaining integrity. These findings resonate with previous research (Bertram, 2018; Çelik and Razi, 2023), which established that academic integrity is increasingly prioritized by institutions worldwide, often receiving more scholarly attention than other behavioural concerns such as moral conduct, dress codes, or student unrest. Similarly, Çelik and Razi (2023) concluded that academic integrity constitutes a fundamental element of teaching and learning at all levels of education and, therefore, requires deliberate institutional commitment to ensure its integration into academic culture.

The analysis further revealed a weak, positive but statistically insignificant correlation between academic integrity and attitudes toward plagiarism among postgraduate students. This finding suggests that an increase in integrity-related values does not necessarily translate into a proportionate rejection of plagiarism, indicating that the two constructs, while related, may be influenced by additional contextual factors. According to Çelik and Razi (2023), compromises in academic integrity undermine the credibility of graduates' knowledge, skills, and competencies, ultimately devaluing institutional qualifications. The present findings therefore suggest that

although postgraduate students demonstrate awareness of integrity principles, structural reinforcements such as stricter enforcement mechanisms, enhanced ethical training, and targeted plagiarism education remain critical for fostering stronger alignment between academic integrity and attitudes toward plagiarism.

Overall, the discussion underscores that while postgraduate students in South-western Nigerian universities demonstrate commendable levels of academic integrity and a generally negative stance toward plagiarism, inconsistencies in their attitudes reveal areas of vulnerability. The weak correlation between integrity and plagiarism attitudes suggests that knowledge of academic values alone is insufficient to fully deter dishonest practices. This calls for a comprehensive institutional approach that integrates policy enforcement, continuous orientation, curriculum-based academic integrity education, and practical training in research and writing skills. Strengthening these mechanisms will not only reinforce students' ethical commitment but also safeguard the credibility of higher education qualifications in Nigeria and beyond.

### **Summary of the findings**

The following are the summary of the findings of the study:

1. Postgraduate students in South-western Nigeria exhibit negative attitudes towards plagiarism. While acknowledging its ethical implications, a significant portion justifies certain actions like reusing previous work or using others' content under specific conditions.
2. Academic integrity practices were high among the postgraduate students in universities in south-western of Nigeria. The students demonstrate good traits of honesty, fairness, respect, trust, and responsibility.
3. Academic integrity does not influence attitudes toward plagiarism meaning when students have high academic integrity, they will portend negative attitude to plagiarism.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that postgraduate students in the selected universities are increasingly demonstrating a negative attitude towards plagiarism, reflecting a growing orientation towards originality and ethical scholarship. The findings reveal that academic integrity plays a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes, not by predisposing them to plagiarism but by reinforcing ethical academic practices that dissuade such misconduct. While the majority of students understand and value the principles of academic honesty, the persistence of gaps in knowledge and inconsistencies in practice, particularly in areas such as plagiarism detection and software piracy highlights the need for sustained educational interventions. Overall, the evidence suggests that fostering academic integrity is integral to cultivating a culture of responsible scholarship, with targeted awareness initiatives offering the potential to bridge existing gaps and strengthen ethical practices among postgraduate students.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Universities should embed academic integrity and plagiarism prevention into postgraduate curricula through compulsory ethics modules, orientation programs, and regular refresher workshops. These initiatives should provide practical guidance on citation practices, responsible scholarship, and the broader ethical consequences of plagiarism.
2. Clear institutional policies on plagiarism should be consistently enforced and supported with mandatory use of plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin. Students should be encouraged to run originality checks before submission, while supervisors and lecturers actively guide them in interpreting reports to improve integrity in academic writing.
3. Faculty members and supervisors should serve as mentors in cultivating ethical academic culture. Regular discussions on plagiarism, integrity, and responsible research should be incorporated into supervisory meetings, reinforcing the connection between strong academic values and reduced plagiarism practices.

### **Implication of Findings**

The implications of these findings cut across policy, practice, and research. At the policy level, universities and higher education regulators should harmonize academic integrity frameworks that move beyond punitive measures to emphasize prevention, education, and cultural reinforcement. This requires embedding integrity into institutional values through consistent policies, transparent communication of sanctions, and sustained awareness programs. In practice, lecturers and supervisors must serve as role models by integrating integrity into everyday teaching, supervision, and assessment, while rewarding originality and discouraging dishonest shortcuts. Institutions should also invest in faculty development to ensure staff are adequately equipped to mentor students on ethical scholarship. For further research, longitudinal and qualitative studies are needed to uncover the underlying motivations that predispose students to plagiarism, particularly within the digital learning environment, and to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of integrity interventions. Comparative studies across disciplines and regions would also enrich understanding of contextual differences and help tailor strategies that are both locally relevant and globally aligned.

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