

Original Article

Institutional Integrity and Quality Assurance in Teaching and Learning Practices at Public Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examined the causes and types of academic misconduct and their relationship with institutional integrity in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. A total of 450 academic staff, non-academic staff, and students from three selected public universities were recruited using purposive, stratified, and disproportionate sampling techniques. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlation. The findings identified examination malpractice, plagiarism, and academic dishonesty as the most prevalent forms of misconduct, while weak accountability and governance transparency emerged as the primary contributing factors. The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.84, 0.81 and 0.88 for perception, types of academic misconduct and institutional integrity and academic misconduct respectively. The survey found among sampled students and staff, inadequate accountability mechanisms (84.7%, mean = 4.24) and governance transparency deficits (80.0%, mean = 4.12) significantly contributed to academic misconduct. The study also found moderate negative relationship between academic misconduct and institutional integrity ($r = -0.482$, $p < 0.01$). The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.232$) showed that institutional integrity explained 23.2% of academic misconduct variance, indicating a moderate-to-large effect. The study concluded that institutional integrity requires stronger accountability and transparency, but findings may be affected by social desirability bias in self-reported data.

Keywords :

Academic misconduct; Higher education; Governance transparency; Institutional integrity; Quality assurance.




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INTRODUCTION

Universities worldwide are acknowledged as hubs for the generation of knowledge, the acquisition of skills, and the cultivation of values essential for the transformation of nations. Public universities in Nigeria, especially those in the Southwest, are essential for

producing graduates who support political, social, and economic advancement. However, like many countries worldwide, Nigeria faces growing concerns about institutional integrity and the prevalence of academic misconduct that threaten the effectiveness of universities in providing accessible, equitable, and high-quality higher education that advances knowledge through teaching, research, and community service, develops skilled manpower, fosters innovation and ethical values, and contributes to national and socio-economic development. Institutional integrity refers to the extent to which universities uphold ethical principles, transparency, accountability, and fairness in their governance and academic processes. When these values are compromised, the credibility of academic outcomes and the reputation of the institutions are undermined. Academic integrity has become a fundamental pillar for ensuring the credibility, quality, and sustainability of higher education institutions, particularly in maintaining ethical standards in teaching, learning, and research activities (Bretag et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2022; Ogunode et al. 2020). The authors address various dimensions of institutional integrity, particularly ethical conduct, transparency in governance, accountability mechanisms, fairness in administrative and academic practices, and their implications for Nigerian universities. However, limited empirical research has examined the relationship between institutional integrity and specific academic misconducts in Southwest Nigerian public universities.

In addition, public universities in Southwest Nigeria face a variety of academic misconduct, including deteriorating graduate quality, malpractice in examinations, a weak research culture, a poorly executed curriculum, and suspension of lectures, examinations, research activities, and academic calendars, resulting in delayed graduation and extended study periods for students occasioned by industrial strikes (Orok et al., 2023; Angrist, et al. 2022). The sustainability of the university system and its ability to deliver quality education are adversely affected by these issues, especially when combined with compromised institutional integrity. According to Ajayi & Ayobi, (2022), Orok et al (2023), Ofem et al (2025), and Bandekaji (2024) academic misconduct in Nigerian universities is driven by factors such as weak assessment integrity, poor enforcement of ethical standards, and emerging digital cheating practices, while institutional integrity is framed around quality assurance, ethical governance, and academic accountability. In a similar vein, Sulphey, et al. (2018) and Lopez and Lent (2019) stress that academic misconducts worsen and universities fall short of their goals in the absence of robust institutional integrity. Therefore, it is important to critically examine how academic misconduct and institutional integrity interact, especially in Southwest Nigeria. Institutional integrity and effective quality assurance systems are closely associated with improved university governance, accountability, and educational effectiveness, thereby strengthening institutional performance in higher education (Asiyai, 2022; Mireku & Bervell, 2023).

Although university governance and reform have received attention in Nigeria, most existing literature treats academic misconduct and institutional integrity as separate concerns. Studies by Sadiq (2024), Yunusa and Usman (2023), and Chan (2023) generally treat academic misconduct as a behavioural or technological issue and institutional integrity as a governance or compliance concern, rather than examining both as mutually

reinforcing phenomena. While Sadiq (2024) emphasizes cultivating academic integrity cultures, Yunusa and Usman (2023) focus on punitive and corrective mechanisms, and Chan (2023) explores emerging forms of misconduct driven by technology. Collectively, these perspectives reveal a conceptual fragmentation in which institutional structures and student misconduct are analysed independently. This creates a critical gap in understanding how institutional integrity systems may shape, enable, or constrain academic misconduct, particularly within Nigerian universities. Addressing this gap is essential for developing integrated frameworks that link governance practices with behavioural outcomes in higher education. Academic misconduct remains a global concern because it undermines fairness in assessment, weakens learning outcomes, and threatens institutional credibility in higher education (Bretag et al., 2018; Orok et al., 2023).

Research by Mireku and Bervell (2023) found that accreditation, monitoring, and continuous evaluation are vital for improving teaching, research, institutional integrity, and higher education goal attainment in Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, Lawal, et al (2022) identified quality assurance as a key mechanism for promoting quality inputs, processes, outputs, accountability, equity, and integrity in tertiary institutions. Both studies concluded that effective quality assurance enhances institutional integrity and goal achievement, although its effectiveness is constrained by inadequate capacity, funding shortages, and weak implementation. Despite the presence of internal quality assurance mechanisms in the 23 public universities in Southwest Nigeria (11 federal and 12 state universities) (National Universities Commission, 2025), their contribution to the development of graduate employability competencies remains inadequately understood. This is particularly important as the effectiveness of quality assurance systems is often constrained by disjointed processes, limited feedback mechanisms, and capacity challenges, which impede continuous improvement, accountability, and the achievement of institutional goals. The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence has transformed academic practices while simultaneously creating new ethical challenges related to plagiarism, authorship, and assessment integrity (Chan, 2023; Imhonopi et al., 2023).

As a result, academic misconducts are more than routine administrative challenges; they are structural barriers that limit universities' ability to fulfill their missions of developing skilled graduates, expanding knowledge, promoting national growth, and retaining the integrity of the university. Addressing these concerns demands a strong foundation of institutional integrity. Only universities that maintain openness, accountability, and fairness can sustainably manage academic misconduct and improve graduate quality. Quality assurance mechanisms are essential for improving educational standards, institutional accountability, and sustainable development in Nigerian universities (Ofem et al., 2024; Ogunode et al., 2021). Students who actively participate in academic and institutional activities tend to demonstrate stronger academic achievement, persistence, and commitment to ethical learning practices (Astin, 1999; Torres Castro, 2024). Developing a culture of academic integrity requires institutional commitment, transparent governance, ethical leadership, and continuous awareness among students and faculty members (Fishman, 2014; Sadiq, 2024). Fair and transparent assessment practices

are critical components of institutional quality assurance because they reinforce students' trust in educational systems and promote academic honesty (Harrad et al., 2024; Ofem et al., 2024). Consequently, this study examined the types and causes of academic misconduct and determined the relationship between institutional integrity and academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. Transparent governance contributes significantly to institutional effectiveness by strengthening accountability, ethical decision-making, and stakeholder confidence in higher education institutions (Mireku & Bervell, 2023; Ntshoe & Faller, 2025).

THEORETICAL SUPPORT

Academic Misconducts in the University

Academic misconducts within the university system are multifaceted challenges that encompass structural, cultural, and ethical dimensions, influencing research, teaching, learning, and assessment practices while affecting both individual students and institutional effectiveness. Examination malpractice, plagiarism, deteriorating academic standards, ineffective teaching practices, lectures boycotts by students, and violations of research integrity are some common ways that these problems show up (Academic integrity has become a fundamental pillar for ensuring the credibility, quality, and sustainability of higher education institutions, particularly in maintaining ethical standards in teaching, learning, and research activities (Bretag et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2022). According to Ibijola (2014), academic misconducts are essentially not limited to the classroom; they also represent structural flaws such as inadequate funding for academic resources or unclear policies on examination conduct in institutional policy frameworks, governance, and resource distribution. Recent empirical evidence from Southwest Nigeria has highlighted the persistence of academic misconduct in higher education institutions. For instance, Erhun et al. (2023) investigated cheating among undergraduate pharmacy students in Southwest Nigeria and found that various forms of academic dishonesty remained prevalent among students, with several individual and institutional factors predicting engagement in unethical academic practices. Similarly, Oyewole and Adetimirin (2025) examined attitudes toward plagiarism among Library and Information Science undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria and reported that a substantial proportion of students exhibited positive attitudes toward plagiarism, indicating continued challenges to academic integrity within the region's universities. These structural flaws often intersect with weaknesses in institutional integrity, including lack of accountability and transparency.

Academic misconduct refers to behaviours that violate the ethical principles and standards governing teaching, learning, assessment, and research within educational institutions. According to Harrad et al. (2024), academic misconduct encompasses actions through which students seek illegitimate academic advantage, including plagiarism, examination malpractice, falsification of information, and other forms of unethical academic behaviour that undermine fairness and credibility in higher education. This perspective emphasizes that academic misconduct represents a breach of the fundamental values that sustain academic integrity. Similarly, Mejía and Garcés-Flórez (2025) defined

academic misconduct as the deliberate violation of academic integrity principles that support honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and accountability in scholarly activities. The authors argued that academic integrity extends beyond compliance with institutional regulations and involves the protection of ethical standards in knowledge creation, teaching, learning, and research. From this viewpoint, academic misconduct weakens the moral foundation upon which higher education institutions operate. These conceptualizations suggest that academic misconduct and institutional integrity are closely interconnected. While academic misconduct reflects violations of ethical and academic standards by individuals, institutional integrity refers to the extent to which universities uphold accountability, transparency, ethical leadership, and policy enforcement. Consequently, institutions characterized by strong institutional integrity are more likely to discourage academic misconduct, whereas weaknesses in governance and ethical oversight may create conditions that facilitate misconduct academic practices.

As a result, academic misconduct can be categorized into two dimensions: student-related challenges, and institutional/systemic issues. Issues pertaining to students include dishonesty, poor academic preparation, and diminishing performance. Dishonesty is measured through behaviours such as plagiarism, examination malpractice, falsification of records, and other forms of cheating. Poor academic preparation is reflected in inadequate study skills, weak content mastery, and insufficient readiness for academic tasks. Diminishing performance is indicated by low grades, poor completion rates, reduced research quality, and frequent examination failures. While dishonesty directly reflects academic misconduct, poor preparation and diminishing performance often signify weaknesses in institutional integrity, including inadequate support systems and ineffective quality assurance mechanisms. Conversely, weak governance structures, unethical practices, inadequate quality assurance mechanisms, and policy implementation challenges are examples of institutional problems. The ability of institutions to provide reliable, quality, and trustworthy education is inversely related to academic misconduct and directly related to positive academic outcomes, highlighting the central role of institutional integrity in shaping educational effectiveness.

Institutional Integrity

While institutional integrity may be conceptualized differently across cultural and national contexts, it is commonly characterized by key dimensions such as honesty, transparency, accountability, and fairness in university governance and academic operations in their administrative and academic operations. Ntshoe and Faller (2025), and Shokunbi et al. (2026) collectively conceptualized institutional integrity as the adherence to accountability, responsible governance, regulatory compliance, honesty, openness, fairness, academic freedom, and ethical institutional practices that sustain public trust and enhance university effectiveness. While broadly applicable across higher education systems, these dimensions are particularly relevant to the governance realities of African and Nigerian universities. By promoting trustworthy admissions procedures, equitable evaluations, and trustworthy research results, strong institutional integrity correlates with

reduced academic misconducts. On the other hand, a lack of integrity leads to higher frequency of academic misconduct, such as: examination malpractice, plagiarism, decline in quality assurance, weak research supervision and bias in grading students. Academic corruption weakens institutional integrity by reducing public trust, compromising educational quality, and encouraging unethical behaviour among university stakeholders (Isabu, 2025; Yunusa & Usman, 2023).

Institutional integrity in higher education refers to the extent to which a university consistently upholds ethical principles, accountability, honesty, fairness, transparency, and compliance with established rules in its academic and administrative operations. Drawing on the perspectives of Tinto (1993) and Astin (1999), institutional integrity is embedded within a supportive institutional culture that promotes student involvement, academic and social integration, ethical conduct, and adherence to institutional values. These theories suggest that students' behaviours and educational outcomes are shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the quality and integrity of the institutional environment in which they learn. Recent reviews by Samoila and Vrabie (2023) and Torres Castro (2024) reaffirm the continued relevance of these perspectives, emphasizing that supportive institutional environments and active student engagement are essential for student development, retention, and institutional effectiveness.

When institutional integrity is compromised, academic misconduct is more likely to emerge and persist. Violations of integrity in key university functions such as admissions, assessment, employment, promotion, procurement, and research management weaken ethical standards and undermine institutional credibility. In Nigeria, corrupt admission and examination practices have been reported to erode public confidence in universities, while weak quality assurance systems adversely affect the quality of graduates produced by these institutions (Ibijola, 2014; Academic integrity has become a fundamental pillar for ensuring the credibility, quality, and sustainability of higher education institutions, particularly in maintaining ethical standards in teaching, learning, and research activities (Bretag et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2022). Consequently, institutional integrity extends beyond a set of values to encompass a practical capacity demonstrated through credible governance, ethical leadership, accountability mechanisms, regulatory compliance, and the consistent implementation of fair and transparent academic and administrative processes. As such, it serves as a foundation for building trust and confidence among students, staff, employers, regulators, and the wider public (Khan et al., 2022). Admission policies should balance equity and merit to improve access while maintaining academic standards and institutional effectiveness (Angrist et al., 2022; Mohamad et al., 2019). Effective research governance promotes responsible research practices, strengthens institutional integrity, and enhances the societal impact of university research outputs (Ogunode et al., 2020).

Public universities in Southwest Nigeria play a vital role in promoting national development, but they suffer from systematic governance issues and integrity problems that compromise academic quality. According to Ogunode, et al. (2021), insufficient funding, poor policy implementation, infrastructure deficiencies, and corrupt practices jeopardize quality assurance processes, which are intended to protect institutional quality.

Frequent disruptions to academic schedules, deteriorating staff morale, deteriorating facilities, and decreased research outputs are all signs of this institutional integrity degradation, which lowers student learning and academic achievement (Ukozor, et al. 2023). Students in public institutions of higher learning, including universities throughout Southwest Nigeria, continue to face significant academic misconducts, with performance levels falling below expected standards, despite the implementation of policy frameworks aimed at improving academic performance, according to empirical evidence.

Studies on Academic Issues and Institutional Integrity

Extending the concerns raised by Altbach (2007) in Atte and Imam (2024), Olaniyan (2025), observed that quota-based admission policies in Nigeria continue to generate debates about the balance between equity and merit. While such policies are intended to promote inclusive access and regional representation, concerns persist that they may undermine meritocratic principles and affect perceptions of academic standards within the university system. Similar to this, Obasi and Ugwu (2020) emphasized that admission practices that undermine meritocracy produce inadequately prepared graduates and reinforce educational inequalities in access to quality higher education. Thus, inclusion policies implemented without integrity can inadvertently undermine academic quality. Numerous studies conducted in Nigeria have demonstrated that the main causes of academic misconducts in public universities include lack of funds, governance deficits, and corruption (Ojukwu & Esere, 2019). According to Ibijola (2014), institutional corruption directly compromises quality assurance procedures, resulting in graduates who might not have the competencies needed for the advancement of the country. A more recent regional source is Mireku and Bervell (2023), who reviewed quality assurance in Sub-Saharan African higher education and found that although access to higher education has expanded significantly, persistent quality challenges remain due to weak implementation of quality assurance mechanisms, capacity constraints, and institutional inefficiencies. Collectively, these studies suggest that weaknesses in accountability, transparency, merit-based practices, and quality assurance undermine institutional integrity, underscoring the need to examine its relationship with academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Studies in several countries also support the connection between academic misconducts and institutional integrity. While Mohamad et al. (2019) discovered that merit-based admission improved student results in Indonesian public institutions, Sulphey et al. (2018) demonstrated a substantial correlation between admission scores and graduation quality in Saudi universities. Similarly, within Nigeria context, Ogunode et al. (2020) found that merit-based admission significantly improved educational quality in Cross River State ($\beta = 0.025$, $t = 2.437$, $p = .032$), with admission variables jointly accounting for 68% of the variance in educational quality ($R^2 = .68$), supporting the idea that open and accountable admissions practices improve institutional integrity. Together, these results support the claim that institutional integrity and academic concerns are inextricably linked. Reducing malpractices, enhancing academic achievement, and

promoting graduate employability are associated with strong, open, and accountable governance frameworks. However, no study has specifically examined this relationship across multiple stakeholder groups (students, academic staff, and non-academic staff) in Southwest Nigerian public universities.

Problem

In Nigeria, especially in the Southwest universities, the efficacy and legitimacy of these universities are largely determined by their institutional integrity. Scholars, policymakers, and accreditation bodies have expressed concerns, meanwhile, regarding the deterioration of institutional principles, the lax enforcement of academic standards, and dubious administrative and governance procedures. The legitimacy of these institutions is increasingly challenged by shortcomings in governance and the management of academic processes. Universities' ability to fulfill their mission of producing qualified graduates and advancing knowledge is jeopardized when institutional integrity is compromised.

Public universities in Southwest Nigeria continue to face serious academic misconducts, such as examination malpractice, plagiarism and academic dishonesty, decline in quality assurance, bias in grading, uneven enforcement of policies, a weak research integrity culture, and governance-related challenges (Orok et al., 2023; Ofem et al., 2024). Conflicts between staff and students, recurrent industrial actions, and inadequate curriculum implementation often reflect weaknesses in institutional integrity, particularly in governance, accountability, communication, and resource management, thereby disrupting academic schedules and compromising educational standards (Mireku & Bervell, 2023; Ofem et al., 2024). The quality of university education in the region is called into question by the convergence of academic misconducts and institutional integrity challenges. If these concerns are not adequately addressed, public universities may struggle to maintain academic standards, meet global expectations, and produce graduates equipped to contribute effectively to national development. Therefore, this study empirically examines the relationship between institutional integrity and this academic misconduct to identify pathways for intervention

METHOD

The research design used in this study was a descriptive survey, which is appropriate for examining attitudes, experiences, and difficulties regarding academic problems and institutional integrity at higher education institutions. In order to identify trends, connections, and the effects of governance practices on academic results, the design made it possible to systematically gather quantitative from a sizable population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All academic staff, non-academic staff, and students from the 23 public universities in Southwest Nigeria made up the study's population. This demographic was selected because issues of institutional integrity, such as accountability, openness, adherence to academic standards, and ethical practices in university governance, directly affect and include these groups.

The total sample for this study comprised 450 participants selected through multistage procedure. The sample size was arrived at using Research Advisor. In order to

guarantee equitable participation across federal and state universities, two federal (Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and University of Lagos) and one state universities (Ladoke Akintola University of Technology – LAUTECH, Ogbomosho) were firstly purposefully selected from the six states in Southwest Nigeria. The two federal universities chosen are among the first-generation universities among federal government owned universities and LAUTECH is equally among the first generation of state universities within the zone. Secondly, stratified sampling was utilized to classify respondents by role (students, administrators, and academic staff). Thirdly, the disproportional stratified sampling was utilized to select 50 academic staff, 50 administrators and 50 students each from the selected institutions, which is considered adequate for survey-based educational research (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

The research tool was a structured questionnaire with two sections in addition to the section on respondents' demographic data: one on perceived contributing factors to academic misconduct and types of academic misconduct with 10 items while the other on academic misconduct (plagiarism, academic performance, examination malpractice, and the quality of research output) and institutional integrity (transparency, accountability, adherence to regulations, and ethical practices) also has 10 items. The items were created using adapted instrument from research on the integrity of higher education (Ogunode et al., 2023). To ensure ease of analysis and comparability across respondents, responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Three experts in higher education management and educational administration evaluated the tool to determine its clarity, relevance, and content validity.

The Institutional Integrity and Academic Misconduct Questionnaire (IIAMQ) was validated through face and content validation by three experts, comprising two Professors of Educational Management with specializations in Higher Education Administration and Quality Assurance and one Senior Lecturer in Measurement and Evaluation. They evaluated the instrument for clarity, relevance, language, content coverage, and alignment with the study objectives, leading to the revision and refinement of some items. The final version was adjudged suitable for the study. To establish reliability, a pilot study was conducted with 50 respondents drawn from a public university outside the study sample, and the data obtained were analysed using Cronbach's alpha. The instrument yielded reliability coefficients of 0.84 for perception, 0.81 for types of academic misconduct, and 0.88 for institutional integrity and academic misconduct, indicating satisfactory internal consistency as all values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The researcher sought permission from the administration of each university to administer questionnaires. The researcher distributed and collected the questionnaires in four weeks with the help of qualified research assistants. Of the 450 questionnaires distributed, 435 were duly filled, returned and found useful. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to respondents in order to promote truthful answers. Mean and percentage of the descriptive statistic was used to answer the two research questions.

While, the Pearson Moment Correlation Co-efficient of the inferential statistics was used to test the hypothesis formulated

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results relating to the research questions were analysed using descriptive statistics and are presented in the tables below. Table 1 presents the respondents' perceptions of the factors contributing to academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria, while Table 2 shows the various types of academic misconduct prevalent in public universities in the region. The presentation and interpretation of the results provide insight into the underlying causes and manifestations of academic misconduct within the universities studied.

Table 1. Types of Academic Misconduct in Public Universities in Southwest Nigeria (N = 450)

Factors contributing to Academic Misconduct	% Agree	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Interpretation
Examination malpractice	86.0%	4.31	0.74	Very significant
Plagiarism and academic dishonesty	78.7%	4.05	0.82	Significant Issue
Decline in quality assurance mechanism	74.0%	3.89	0.88	Significant Issue
Weak research supervision	69.3%	3.71	0.93	Moderate to Significant
Unfair grading practices	64.7%	3.58	0.97	Moderate issue
Uneven enforcement of policies	61.3%	3.46	1.01	Moderate Issue
Deficient research integrity culture	59.3%	3.42	1.04	Moderate Issue
Governance-related challenges	56.0%	3.36	1.08	Moderate Issue

The findings in Table 1 reveal that examination malpractice (86.0%, $\bar{x} = 4.31$, $SD = 0.74$), plagiarism and academic dishonesty (78.7%, $\bar{x} = 4.05$, $SD = 0.82$), and declining quality assurance mechanisms (74.0%, $\bar{x} = 3.89$, $SD = 0.88$) are the most prevalent forms of academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. These findings align with global concerns regarding academic integrity and the challenges posed by technological and institutional developments (Avello & Aranguren Zurita, 2025; Bretag, 2016; Coates, Croucher, & Calderon, 2025; Eaton, 2021). The results corroborate earlier Nigerian studies that identified weak monitoring systems and inconsistent policy implementation as key contributors to declining academic quality (Odukoya et al., 2018). Additionally, weak research supervision (69.3%, $\bar{x} = 3.71$, $SD = 0.93$) was identified as a notable issue, reflecting challenges associated with high student-to-supervisor ratios and inadequate faculty mentoring resources, consistent with the observations of Imhonopi et al. (2023).

In contrast, moderately rated issues such as unfair grading practices (64.7%, $\bar{x} = 3.58$, $SD = 0.97$), uneven policy enforcement (61.3%, $\bar{x} = 3.46$, $SD = 1.01$), deficient research integrity culture (59.3%, $\bar{x} = 3.42$, $SD = 1.04$), and governance-related challenges (56.0%, $\bar{x} = 3.36$, $SD = 1.04$) suggest that governance failures, while less immediately apparent to students and staff than examination cheating, remain significant indirect threats to academic integrity. These findings align with broader literature emphasizing the critical role of institutional governance, accountability, transparency, and ethical leadership in

reducing academic misconduct and sustaining educational quality (Avello & Aranguren Zurita, 2025; Bretag, 2016; Coates, Croucher, & Calderon, 2025; Eaton, 2021; Ibijola, 2017; Macfarlane, Zhang, & Pun, 2014; Quality Matters, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). The significant negative correlation between institutional integrity and academic misconduct ($r = -0.482, p < 0.01$) further reinforces the argument that universities with stronger governance structures and integrity systems experience lower levels of academic dishonesty.

The prevalence of examination malpractice and plagiarism reported in this study is consistent with global patterns. According to McCabe, et al (2012), plagiarism and examination malpractice are worldwide problems that impact both developed and developing countries. However, Bretag et al. (2018) discovered that academic dishonesty frequently takes the form of contract cheating in developed systems like Australia, while in Nigeria, it is more evident in examinations and plagiarism as suggested by the weak enforcement reported by respondents. Thus, the Nigerian context is defined by a confluence of deeply ingrained collectivist norms that prioritize group loyalty over individual merit and systemic flaws that contribute to the continuation of academic misconduct. This underscores the need for strengthened institutional integrity frameworks, consistent enforcement of academic regulations, and value reorientation programmes aimed at fostering a culture of ethical behaviour and accountability within Nigerian universities. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised when making international comparisons, as differences in detection methods, reporting systems, institutional policies, and definitions of academic misconduct across countries may influence the prevalence rates reported in different studies.

In conclusion, the conversation indicates that although student-related misconduct is the most obvious and pressing academic misconduct, problems with governance and enforcement continue to be important underlying reasons. Therefore, tackling the issue calls for a two-pronged strategy: enhancing institutional monitoring and integrity frameworks and fostering an ethical culture among employees and students.

Table 2. Perceived Causes of Academic Misconduct in Public Universities in Southwest Nigeria (N = 450)

Causes of Academic Misconduct	% Agree	Mean (\bar{x})	SD
Inadequate accountability	84.7%	4.24	0.76
Lack of openness in governance	80.0%	4.12	0.81
Inadequate policy execution	75.3%	3.98	0.87
Inadequate funding	72.0%	3.91	0.90
Unethical leadership	69.3%	3.76	0.95
Institutional corruption and favouritism	65.3%	3.64	0.99
Non-reporting of examination malpractice	61.3%	3.52	1.03
High student enrollment relative to staff capacity	58.0%	3.41	1.08

The results presented in Table 2 answer Research Question 2. The Table shows that 84.7% of respondents agreed that inadequate accountability systems ($\bar{x} = 4.24; SD = 0.76$), 80.0% of respondents agreed that lack of openness in governance ($\bar{x} = 4.12; SD = 0.81$), and 75% of the respondents agreed that inadequate policy implementation ($\bar{x} = 3.98; SD = 0.87$), and 69.3% of respondents agreed that unethical leadership practices ($\bar{x} = 3.76; SD = 0.95$)

are the major factors contributing to academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. The high levels of agreement and mean ratings across these four variables indicate that weaknesses in institutional governance and integrity mechanisms constitute key drivers of academic misconduct within the universities studied.

This section presents multi-level factors (institutional, structural, and cultural) contributing to academic misconduct. Systemic issues that foster academic misconduct and institutional performance standards are reflected in institutional and structural factors, 72% of respondents agreed that insufficient financing and resources ($\bar{x}=3.91$; $SD=0.90$) and 58% of respondents agreed that high student enrollment relative to staff capacity ($\bar{x}=3.41$; $SD=1.08$) contribute to academic misconduct. Furthermore, 65.3% of respondents agreed that academic misconduct is reinforced by cultural characteristics including institutional corruption and favoritism ($\bar{x}=3.64$; $SD=0.99$), and 61.3% of respondents agreed that non-reporting of examination malpractice ($\bar{x}=3.52$; $SD=1.03$), underscores the significance of larger socio-cultural norms. These findings suggest interventions must address not only be institutional policies but also cultural attitudes.

The results show that governance-related issues were identified as the most prevalent contributing factors to academic misconduct in universities in Southwest Nigeria, with inadequate accountability and lack of openness in governance identified as the most frequently reported governance-related factors contributing to academic misconduct. The findings supports evidence spanning more than a decade, identified inadequate governance frameworks as a threat to quality assurance in Nigerian academic institutions, Oredein and Akintayo (2008) emphasized the need for strong institutional regulations and comprehensive quality management practices to uphold academic integrity, and Imhonopi et al. (2023) similarly concluded that governance deficiencies, including uneven policy enforcement and leadership shortcomings, are key factors associated with academic decline. However, unlike previous studies that focused primarily on student-level misconduct, the present study demonstrates that governance deficiencies affect academic misconduct across multiple stakeholder perspectives.

These findings show both contextual differences and similarities with evidence from other countries. In North American universities, dishonesty is more prevalent in institutions with governance weaknesses and uneven application of academic integrity regulations, according to McCabe et al (2012). In a similar vein, Bretag et al. (2018) found that insufficient oversight facilitates contract cheating in Australian universities. The present findings also support this pattern, as inadequate accountability, lack of transparency, poor policy implementation, and unethical leadership emerged as important contributors to academic misconduct. However, a key contextual difference is the role of sociocultural factors. In this study, non-reporting of examination malpractice was identified as a contributing factor to academic misconduct ($\bar{x}=3.52$; $SD=1.03$), suggesting that unethical practices may be reinforced by broader social norms and attitudes. This influence appears to be more pronounced in the Nigerian context than in studies from North America and Australia, where governance and policy enforcement issues are emphasized more strongly than societal acceptance of malpractice. The effects of systemic underfunding and societal tolerance of malpractice are more pronounced in institutions

characterized by weak governance structures. This finding aligns with Isabu (2025), who identified weak accountability, poor oversight, and corruption as major drivers of declining integrity in Nigerian universities, and with Okafor and Juma (2026), who found that corruption within the leadership and management of higher education institutions reflects broader societal challenges that often permeate academic institutions. Thus, while governance flaws are a common factor across countries, the combined effects of underfunding and socio-cultural tolerance of malpractice distinguish the Nigerian experience and may intensify the prevalence of academic misconduct. These contextual differences suggest that interventions in Nigeria must address not only institutional governance but also broader societal norms and resource constraints.

Institutional issues like high student enrollments and staffing shortages have also been observed in other African countries. In Ethiopia, Tadesse and Getachew (2010) noted that universities with inadequate funding and congestion are more likely to experience academic misconduct. This implies that although problems with academic integrity are common throughout the world, sociocultural factors and resource limitations may also exacerbate them in Nigeria. Beyond the Nigerian context, similar patterns emerge regionally. These regional patterns reinforce the present study's conclusion that addressing academic problems requires both resource allocation and cultural change.

In conclusion, multiple factors contribute to academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria, prominent among the contributing factors is poor governance, followed by institutional shortcomings and sociocultural norms, followed by weak quality assurance mechanisms, and sociocultural tolerance of malpractice as reinforcing factors. The findings suggest that addressing the identified contributors to academic misconduct requires targeted institutional reforms. Specifically, stronger accountability and transparency mechanisms would help mitigate inadequate accountability and lack of openness in governance; consistent policy enforcement would address weak policy implementation and unethical leadership practices; improved funding and staffing would reduce the pressures associated with inadequate funding and high enrolment-to-staff ratios; while the development of an integrity-based culture would help counter societal tolerance of malpractice, corruption, and favouritism. Collectively, these measures could strengthen institutional integrity and reduce the prevalence of academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. The principal statistical finding is that governance deficiencies constitute the most significant perceived causes of academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria, with inadequate accountability ($\bar{x} = 4.24$, $SD = 0.76$), lack of openness in governance ($\bar{x} = 4.12$, $SD = 0.81$), and inadequate policy execution ($\bar{x} = 3.98$, $SD = 0.87$) recording the highest mean scores and levels of agreement among respondents. One limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported data, which may be affected by social desirability bias. Due to the sensitive nature of academic misconduct and institutional integrity issues, some respondents may have under-reported unethical behaviours or provided socially acceptable responses, thereby influencing the accuracy of the findings.

The following recommendations are proposed to guide institutional and policy interventions, public universities in Southwest Nigeria should enhance accountability and

transparency, ensure consistent implementation of academic policies, improve funding and staff recruitment, promote ethical leadership, combat corruption and favouritism, encourage the reporting of misconduct, and institutionalize integrity-based values through continuous ethics education, quality assurance, and effective governance practices.

Hypothesis Testing

To test the research hypothesis, Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was performed to assess the relationship between institutional integrity and academic misconduct among respondents. The analysis examined whether higher levels of institutional integrity were associated with lower levels of academic misconduct. Table 3 summarizes the descriptive statistics and the correlation results used to evaluate the proposed hypothesis.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Test between Institutional Integrity and Academic Misconduct (N = 450)

Variables	Mean	SD	R	p-value	Decision
Institutional Integrity (X)	3.92	0.64			
Academic Misconduct (Y)	3.78	0.71	-0.482	0.000***	Reject Ho

Note: *p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

Table 3 presents the results of the hypothesis tested. It shows that, based on a sample of 450 respondents (df = 448), the correlation coefficient between institutional integrity and academic misconduct is $r = -0.482$. The 95% confidence interval for the correlation coefficient ranges from -0.550 to -0.408, indicating that the true population correlation is likely to fall within this range and providing further evidence of a stable negative relationship between the variables. The correlation yields an r^2 value of 0.232, indicating that institutional integrity accounts for approximately 23.2% of the variance in academic misconduct, while about 76.8% remains explained by other factors. The negative correlation suggests that the prevalence of academic misconduct, such as plagiarism and academic dishonesty, examination malpractice, and declining quality assurance, decreases as institutional integrity, reflected in accountability, transparency, ethical leadership, and effective policy enforcement, increases. The magnitude of $r = -0.482$ indicates a moderate inverse relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, the relationship is statistically significant ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$); therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) that state that there is no relationship between institutional integrity and academic issues is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. This demonstrates that institutional integrity is significantly related to academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Globally, the finding that institutional integrity is negatively associated with academic misconduct is consistent with those of McCabe et al. (2012), who reported that academic dishonesty is less prevalent in universities with strong integrity systems and more common in institutions characterized by weak governance mechanisms. Similarly, Bretag et al. (2018) found that quality assurance procedures and integrity frameworks serve as effective deterrents to contract cheating in Australian universities. The findings of the present study confirm and partially align with these global patterns, as a significant

negative relationship was found between institutional integrity and academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria ($r = -0.482$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that stronger institutional integrity is associated with lower levels of academic misconduct. However, the moderate coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.232$) suggests that institutional integrity explains only part of the variation in academic misconduct, implying that additional contextual factors such as resource constraints, inconsistent policy enforcement, governance challenges, and limited quality assurance capacity may also influence academic behaviour in Nigerian universities. Thus, while the deterrent role of institutional integrity observed in Australia and other contexts is supported, its effectiveness in Southwest Nigerian public universities appears to be moderated by local institutional realities.

The moderate but significant negative association ($r = -0.482$) in Nigeria, indicate that institutional integrity is an influential variable of academic misconduct, although its influence operates alongside other factors such as resource constraints, weak accountability systems, limited transparency, and cultural tolerance of malpractice within the university system. Governance approaches may interact with broader systemic conditions such as underfunding, high student enrolment, and societal acceptance of malpractice, which were not measured as separate variables in this study but may have contributed to the observed levels of academic misconduct. Building on these findings, addressing academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria requires a comprehensive and coordinated strategy that combines governance reforms, resource investment, and cultural transformation. Priority should be given to strengthening governance structures and accountability mechanisms, as effective governance provides the foundation for transparent resource allocation and the successful implementation of integrity-enhancing initiatives. Once robust governance systems are established, increased investment in institutional resources and digital monitoring tools can be more effectively deployed, while sustained cultural reorientation programmes can reinforce ethical values and promote long-term adherence to institutional integrity standards. The following section presents specific recommendations derived from these findings. A limitation of this study is that broader systemic factors such as underfunding, enrolment pressure, and societal tolerance of malpractice were not examined as separate variables, which may restrict the extent to which causal inferences can be made about their influence on academic misconduct.

The study revealed a moderate but statistically significant negative relationship between institutional integrity and academic misconduct ($r = -0.482$), indicating that higher levels of institutional integrity are associated with lower levels of academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. This finding underscores the importance of institutional integrity as a key determinant of academic behaviour within the university system. However, institutional integrity does not operate in isolation. Its influence is shaped by other contextual factors such as resource constraints, weak accountability mechanisms, limited transparency, and cultural tolerance of malpractice. Similarly, governance practices may interact with broader systemic challenges, including inadequate

funding, increasing student enrolment, and societal acceptance of unethical practices, to influence the prevalence of academic misconduct (Imhonopi et al., 2023).

The findings suggest that efforts to reduce academic misconduct should extend beyond policy declarations to include strengthening accountability systems, promoting transparency in admissions, examinations, and assessment processes, and investing in digital monitoring and quality assurance tools capable of detecting and deterring unethical practices. In addition, resource investment, cultural reorientation, and governance reforms are essential for sustaining institutional integrity and fostering ethical academic environments. Given the significant negative correlation observed, enhancing institutional integrity remains a viable pathway for reducing academic misconduct in universities. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to determine whether improvements in institutional integrity led to measurable reductions in academic misconduct over time and to better understand the causal mechanisms underlying this relationship.

The Universities ought to specify transparent and publicly documented procedures for admissions, research supervision, and grading. To ensure adherence to administrative and academic rules, independent integrity units could be set up to complement the quality assurance unit. Leadership development programmes should be institutionalized." for academic administrators to ensure that university governance is rooted in ethics, fairness, and accountability. Based on the findings of this study, a multi-level approach involving regulatory agencies, governments, and university authorities is required to strengthen institutional integrity and reduce academic misconduct in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. First, university governing councils and management should strengthen governance and accountability mechanisms by ensuring the consistent application of sanctions for plagiarism, examination malpractice, and other forms of academic misconduct in accordance with established institutional regulations. Given the limited direct enforcement capacity of the National Universities Commission (NUC) due to institutional autonomy and political considerations, the role of the NUC should focus on policy guidance, monitoring compliance, and promoting best practices across universities.

Furthermore, university management should empower internal quality assurance units by providing them with clearly defined mandates, adequate staffing, and sufficient operational resources to conduct regular monitoring of curriculum implementation, research supervision, examination administration, and assessment practices. Strengthening these units will enhance institutional oversight and support the maintenance of academic standards.

The study also recommends greater transparency in admissions, examinations, grading processes, and staff promotion procedures through the adoption of digital record-management and monitoring systems. Ethical leadership and transparent institutional governance play a crucial role in strengthening university integrity by fostering accountability, promoting ethical decision-making, and minimizing opportunities for academic misconduct. Universities that establish effective governance structures are generally more successful in maintaining quality assurance standards and cultivating trust among stakeholders (Asiyai, 2022; Ntshoe & Faller, 2025). Such measures will strengthen accountability and reduce opportunities for unethical practices. In addition, federal and

state governments, university proprietors, TETFund, private-sector partners, development agencies, and alumni associations should increase investments in higher education infrastructure, human resources, and information and communication technology facilities. Addressing challenges such as inadequate personnel, overcrowded classrooms, and limited ICT resources is critical because overcrowding reduces the effectiveness of examination supervision, while inadequate technological infrastructure limits the capacity to detect and prevent plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct.

The findings further suggest the need for sustained academic integrity awareness programmes targeting students, academic staff, and non-academic staff. Academic integrity should be viewed as a collective responsibility shared among university administrators, academic staff, students, and policymakers. Developing a sustainable culture of integrity requires continuous education, institutional policies, and preventive strategies that encourage ethical behaviour while discouraging plagiarism, contract cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty (Bertram Gallant, 2017; Fishman, 2014; Packalen & Rowbotham, 2024). These programmes should be conducted on a semester basis and should include workshops, orientation activities, ethics training, awareness campaigns, and the promotion of institutional honour codes aimed at reducing social tolerance of academic malpractice and strengthening ethical conduct within the university community. In terms of implementation priority, governance and accountability reforms should be addressed in the short term because they provide the institutional foundation for the effective deployment of resources and enforcement of academic standards. Medium-term efforts should focus on improving infrastructure, staffing, and technological capacity, while long-term interventions should emphasize continuous cultural reorientation and periodic institutional integrity audits to sustain ethical practices and strengthen institutional integrity over time.

CONCLUSION

This study examined academic misconduct and institutional integrity in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. The findings showed that examination malpractice (86.0%), plagiarism and academic dishonesty (78.7%), and declining quality assurance standards (74.0%) were the most frequently reported academic challenges. These findings suggest that academic misconduct remains a significant concern and is accompanied by institutional issues related to accountability, transparency, and governance. Furthermore, the correlation analysis revealed a moderate and statistically significant negative relationship between institutional integrity and academic misconduct ($r = -0.482, p < .01$), indicating that universities with higher perceived levels of institutional integrity tended to report lower levels of academic misconduct. Nevertheless, institutional integrity explained only 23.2% of the variation in academic misconduct, suggesting that other contextual and institutional factors may also contribute to its occurrence. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as demonstrating an association rather than a causal relationship. Overall, the study highlights the importance of strengthening institutional integrity through improved governance, accountability, transparency, and quality assurance as part of broader efforts to foster ethical academic environments. Future research should employ

longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to examine the causal mechanisms underlying this relationship and to investigate additional factors associated with academic misconduct in higher education.

The study was limited by its cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to establish causal relationships among the variables examined. Data were collected through self-report measures, making the findings susceptible to social desirability bias, particularly in relation to sensitive issues such as academic misconduct and integrity violations. In addition, the use of a single data collection method may have introduced common method bias. The data were collected during the 2022–2023 academic session; therefore, the findings reflect the conditions prevailing within that period. Furthermore, the results may not be generalizable beyond public universities in Southwest Nigeria. Although the study focused on three purposively selected first-generation public universities and involved 450 participants, the sample may not adequately represent all 23 public universities in the region. The purposive selection of universities also presents a potential risk of selection bias. Future studies may employ longitudinal designs, multiple data sources, and broader institutional coverage, including other public and private universities, to enhance the generalizability and robustness of findings.

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