# APPLICATION OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY IN PROMOTING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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## **Abstract**

Academic integrity is one of the blueprints that defines effective teaching and learning in any educational system particularly in tertiary institutions. It depicts the level of performance in terms of values and culture expected of staff and students within the school environment. This paper examined the influencing power of academic integrity in the Nigerian higher education system and the challenges that follows. The paper explored the meaning of integrity, academic integrity, tertiary education and academic integrity in Nigerian tertiary education. The paper further delimits academic integrity into two major areas (individual and institutional) and outline the challenges faced by Nigerian educators in maintaining academic integrity in tertiary institutions. The study also presented a model of the application of educational technology in promoting academic integrity in Nigerian tertiary institutions and the need to sustain such. It concluded by presenting an overview of possible ways of establishing a culture of integrity in the Nigerian tertiary system and ways to maintain an environment that supports academic integrity.

Keywords: Integrity; academic integrity; tertiary education; educational technology

## Introduction

Integrity is the quality of character pronounced to be of a high positive moral value in a given context. It can be likened to constructs such as honesty, truthfulness, discipline and the like. Integrity is defined as dealing with everybody with justice, avoiding any form of discrimination or bias, acting with professionalism and objectivity, recognizing and respecting others' rights, not surrendering to the temptations of illegal or unjust benefit, and not misusing information or resources (Khanna & Khanna, 2019). Lee, White and Chapel (2023) construed integrity as the quality of having strong moral principles and uncompromisingly adhering to them. Integrity simply means the practice of doing the right thing all the time. It is doing what is morally right. Integrity is an important factor to consider in the pursuit of academic knowledge in learning institutions. As such, it is a common thing to hear people talk about national integrity, family integrity, personal integrity and even academic integrity.

Academic integrity is the level of performance expected of both students and staff in an organized school environment or educational system. For Sbaffi and Zhao (2022), academic integrity is the commitment and demonstration of honest and moral behaviour in an academic setting and it is applicable to both students and academic staff. This places strong expectation on all members of the educational system to act honestly in all situations relating to the goals of educational system. Betram (2017) defined academic integrity as following laid down rules and regulations, guiding academic matters without compromise. It means applying these values in academic works, and also engaging them with the work and contributions of others. These values are expected of both staff and students. Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TESQSA, 2021) posits that academic integrity is a set of values and practices that expect us to act with honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. The authors further stressed that academic integrity is the expectation that teachers, students, researchers and all members of the academic community act with honesty,

trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. Davis (2023) sees the concept as encompassing values, behaviour and conduct that embrace sound academic standards and educational principles. Operationally defined, academic integrity means acting in a way that is honest, fair, respectful and responsible in academic works and activities. In recent times, the educational system has lots of reported and unreported cases of violations of academic integrity at every level of educational system. (Birks, Mills, Allen & Tee, 2020; Harris, et al., 2020). This study is concerned with tertiary institutions in the federation as a whole.

Tertiary education is the highest level of education in Nigeria. It includes the colleges of education, polytechnics and universities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Tertiary institutions are academic-oriented environments meant to engage in standard teaching and learning. The first goal of the teaching and learning approach to academic integrity is to foster a learning-oriented environment, that is, one that is mastery rather than performance oriented (Gallant, 2017). As students engage in mastering their learning, cheating is reduced since they learn to develop new knowledge on their own. Studies have shown that in tertiary institutions, students study to earn point or marks (Day, Hudson, Dobies, & Waris, 2011; Bretag, et al, 2013). As such, they engage in all manner of cheating such as plagiarism, the use of Artificial Intelligence, phones during examinations just to boost their marks and do not engage in deep learning. Deeper approaches to learning can nurtured by active learning pedagogies that provide students with continual opportunities to master skills through repeated attempts in the presence of instructional guides or coaches who encourage critical thinking (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015; Blasco-Arcas, Buil, Hernandez-Ortega & Sese, 2013). Some lecturers on their part do not encourage critical thinking among students leading to violation of academic principles.

Students and lecturers alike violate academic principles. Such breaches has made it difficult if not impossible to achieve educational goals as stipulated in the institutions. A number of factors have been identified as being responsible for this violations. These factors include the educational system, pedagogy, sociocultural environment, economic environment, infrastructure, technology, institutional policies, and management systems (Orim, 2016). These factors hinge on the academic climate, policies and practices, and their impact on academic integrity-related issues. It is the mission of any tertiary institution to create an academic culture that fosters student integrity both in and out of the classroom. Creation of academic culture starts with the instruction itself. When students perceive instruction to be poor, they are more likely to justify and adopt cheating as an acceptable strategy to accomplish their assigned work. Poor instruction perceived decreases student motivation to learn (Day, et al, 2011). Hence, teachers or lecturers can support a culture of academic integrity by providing students with clear expectations about values, responsibilities and behaviours related to learning and assessment. Again, responding to breaches of academic integrity in a consistent and proportionate way can enhance academic culture in all areas within tertiary institutions.

## **Areas of academic integrity**

Academic integrity within the school falls into two major areas notably: individual and institutional.

**Individual academic integrity:** An individual lecturer in tertiary institution is expected to exhibit a high level of integrity on issues that relate to academic lives of the students. It is appropriate for the lecturer to live above board as he/she carries out his/her duties to the students. The lecturer can make or mar the image of an institution and may as well incur a stigma if he/she did not maintain academic integrity in the discharge of his duties. Traceable areas of individual academic integrity include:

**Lectures:** The quality of time spent by the lecturer in the preparation of lecture material, the cost and actual deliver of such lectures in an intellectually honest manner will point incontrovertibly to the integrity of the lecture. Integrity of lectures is also known by the punctuality and judicious use of lecture time-slot, content competence and assessment derivable from such lectures.

Continuous Assessment: The Continuous Assessment (CA) administered to students must be validated and must be reliable in terms of content, coverage, direction, intensity of treatment, consistency and correctness. CAs equally include the process of supervision and invigilation of the period when such continuous assessment is written. Therefore, the quality of such supervision and the caliber of the lecturers who supervised attest to the integrity of the CA. It is worthy of note that CA is of no integrity if it does not cover the domains of testing notably cognitive, affective and psychomotor. In other words, lecturers must cumulate the cognitive performance, attitude and interest ratings as well as skills and learning-related non-cognitive activities to obtain measures of continuous assessment. Contrary to this, lecturers in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria handle CAs without utmost importance. Ogunode, Audu, & Ahaotu (2020) noted that teachers do not pay good attention to students' academic problems. The authors further observed that the inability of teachers to pay maximum attention to students, affects students' learning in and outside the classroom, students' classroom behavior, interactions and participation and teachers' positive relationship with students leading the lecturers to engage in some form of academic dishonesty such as demanding huge amount of money for marks and sex from female students for high grades. Sex for-marks syndrome is a widespread phenomenon that has seeped into higher education systems all over the world and needs to be stopped or restrained with the proper consequences (Okebukola, 2018). Sex for grades is considered professional misconduct that affects both male and female academic staff members, especially in poor nations (Imanikhe, Aluede, & Idogh, 2012). Perhaps this situation might be as a result of the unparalleled increase in the number of students under the care of each lecturer or by-product of unfavorable interactions, which may have significant ramifications for students, faculty, and the general public (Onoyase, 2019). This is a bane to academic integrity. Continuous assessments require critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis of information which promotes genuine engagement with course material. This approach reduces the temptation for students to resort to dishonest practices (Mueller, 2014). CAs also provides feedback on assignments, highlighting areas for improvement, and commending students for their ethical efforts.

Assignments: Assignments include projects, seminar papers, and the like which tertiary institution students are engaged in to support learning in classroom. Conversely, these assignments are wrongly rated as mere learning palliatives. Projects and seminar papers should be well supervised by the lecturers who also ensure that the corrections are followed to the latter for feedbacks to attain the desired integrity status. Supervisees should be guided by their supervisors to be original in content, design, structure and presentation of their works. Otherwise, the issue of academic integrity is marred. Presentation of works in assessments must align to the learning principles, which include judicious use of diverse assessment, authentic tasks and individualized assignments. It is also important that students' assessment and feedback literacy is supported through activities making use of assignment briefs, marking criteria and peer-review.

Marks or Scores: Marks or scores awarded to students must represent the true performance of the student. Therefore, these marks must be based on well prepared marking guide by the lecturers who also should mark within a given period of time without bias. The integrity of

marks in this digital age is attributed to diverted attentions of some students by parties, social media, or lewd fashion, and their beliefs that marks can be sort for through foul means (Ajogbeje, Boris & Ekiugbo, 2023). Scarcity of lecturers, lack of job satisfaction and population explosion also account for this misery. The authors further state that some lecturers award marks arbitrarily and so the marks have but little evidence of integrity. Although traditional invigilated examinations can be seen as answer to preventing student academic misconduct, but they are not. It is expected that when examinations are properly invigilated, the marks or scores thereof is validated. Evidence points to how under examination conditions, students make use of tools that are not permitted, such as smart watches or hiding notes (Birks et al., 2020). This does not authenticate the marks rather it boils down to lack of academic integrity. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria has a part to play in shaping a culture of academic integrity and ethical conduct.

## **Institutional academic integrity**

In tertiary institutions, institutional integrity is also an area to be considered if truly academic integrity must be upheld. Institutional integrity is in different levels starting from the individual students and lecturers, to the department, to the faculty or school and then to the entire institution (Piascik & Brazeau, 2010). Integrity of the institutions is often on trial when dealing with external bodies such as external examiners, Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) board, National Universities Commission (NUC) and others. On this note, institutional integrity lies on three different levels notably input (admissions, recruitment and policy), processes (semester examinations, committees, computation of results, records, departmental and faculty meetings, senate meetings) and output (certificates, alumni, external ratings). There is need to ensure at each level of institutional integrity the integrity status of such institution.

As stated earlier, inputs can be in form of admissions, recruitments and policies. The integrity of admissions begins from the quality of admission requirements and every process of admission. Universities, polytechnics and colleges of education cannot afford to compromise minimum admission benchmarks under any guise. The process of admission must be monitored at every stage to avoid compromise and admission officers at any level must strictly adhere to the rules guiding admissions under strict supervision. Heads of institutions should equally ensure that staff with integrity are recruited for such services. The quality of academic staff in any institution is determined to a large extent by the methods of recruitment. Recruitment is defined as the process of attracting a large pool of qualified people for employment (Walker, Feild, Giles, Armenakis & Bernerth, 2009). The main purpose of recruitment according to Otoo, Assuming, and Agyei (2018) is to obtain applicants with the required experience, knowledge, skills, qualifications and attitude for a job vacancy. In most cases in Nigerian tertiary institutions, methods of recruitment are often politicized and compromised (Nwachukwu, Tamuno, Pepple, & Nchey-Achukwu, 2019). For instance, recruitment is based on ethnicity, religious background, regionalism and other form of subjective criteria or tendencies (Odor, Martins-Emesom, & Bakwuye, 2019). These authors further emphasized that in recent years, there is hardly any academic or nonacademic staff that is employed in any public Nigerian university or polytechnic just on the basis of merit. This often breeds incompetent, ignorant and unqualified lecturers. Academic integrity of staff is easily measurable by type and class of degrees, proficiency in speech and written English language as well as effectiveness of research skills and other academic credentials.

Process as part of ensuring academic integrity in tertiary institutions has to do with the examinations, results and committees. Internal examinations are part of evaluative methods

organized by any educational institutions and by extension tertiary institutions to guard standards in the school system. According to Vitello and Williamson (2017) internal examination assessment process within the educational institution encompasses a comprehensive framework aimed at ensuring the effective evaluation of students' academic progress. The process involves various stakeholders, and follows structured steps to maintain fairness, transparency and academic integrity. Examinations are usually in semesters. Semester examinations should be arranged and conducted under strict regulations guiding university examinations. Invigilation and supervision should equally be strict. There is need for internal control mechanism to curb cheating of all forms, weak supervision and discipline of invigilators as well as proper coordination of the entire examination process. The goal of any examination and that of the institution conducting the examination is to generate results that could be presented in meaningful form for the purpose of faculty and institutional record and for certification. It also helps to ensure that a student's performance reflect his/her level of understanding of the topic being assessed (validity) and that he/she perform comparably on assessments that test comparable content (reliability) (Vitello & Williamson, 2017). Such performances are presented as scores. Scores from individual lecturers are usually collated and recorded on standard university format and made available to relevant Heads of Departments. Departments and faculties should sit on the results and give due considerations, forward the results to the university senate for final consideration and approval. These processes, if followed meticulously will make for the integrity of such results and better output at the long run.

Output include the certificates/alumni from the institution. The academic integrity of an institution is judged by the worth or quality of certificates issued by the institution. For instance, if the certificate of a university does not correspond with the performance output of her product, the academic integrity of such institution is questionable. Therefore, the certificate must measure up to the output relevant in job market. Again, the job performance of the alumni of a given institution is a direct measure of the academic integrity of such institution (Guerrero-Dib, Portales & Heredia-Escorza, 2020). Clearly, the judgment of any institution is a reflection of the academic integrity values placed on such institution. Szilagyi (2014) state that educational institutions can adopt several strategies in the development of programmes to promote a culture of academic integrity. Such programmes should include designing educational experiences to foster learning, better prepare students to fully meet their academic obligations, highlight the benefits of doing so, prevent the severity and consequences of dishonest actions, discourage cheating and establish clear and efficient processes to sanction those students who are found responsible for academic breaches. These programmes also point to the fact that academic integrity in tertiary institutions face severe challenges.

# Challenges faced by Nigerian tertiary institutions in maintaining academic integrity

In most cases, student behaviours tend to weaken academic integrity in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Sometimes, students mistakenly believe that these behaviours are commonplace or do not have consequences. Some students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria engage in certain negative academic behaviours such as plagiarism, recycling work, cheating, impersonation, fabricating information, lack of understanding of academic integrity norms and the like. The shift to online learning has increased access to information, making plagiarism easier and raising concerns about unauthorized collaboration during remote assessments of students (Bandekaji, 2024). Similarly, inability of lecturers to supervise the students' assessment can mar the academic integrity of a given institution. According to Bandekaji (2024), lack of in-

person supervision in online assessments heightens the risk of cheating and misconduct. The author further states that limited access to advanced plagiarism detection tools and secure online platforms can make it difficult to monitor and prevent academic misconduct. This is compounded by lack of standardization in educational credential in tertiary institutions in Nigeria (BcOnline blog, 2024).

In Nigeria, there is no uniform standard in educational credentials as a measure for admission. For instance, the cut off mark for entry into the universities or other tertiary institutions vary from state to state and from institution to institution. This is most prevalent in those states tagged 'educationally disadvantaged states'. The resultant effect is that the certification is in question when the graduates seeks for employment in the labour market in the society but finds it difficult to be contributive.

Sociocultural norms and economic pressures can influence perceptions of academic integrity. Sociocultural and economic factors, as well as outdated teaching methods, lack of time and other resources contribute to these issues. In Nigerian today, there is rapid expansion of tertiary institutions which is not matched with sufficient time and resource to implement efficient quality assurance and control processes and to strictly monitor academic integrity in universities, which has led to the deterioration of educational standards and teaching quality (Ojogwu, 2008). The author emphasized that examination malpractices (cheating, collusion, selling examination questions in advance) are a widespread phenomenon in Nigerian Universities due to the scarce funding of the educational sector. Practical constraints such as lack of time, resources and funding may contribute to the different interpretations of academic integrity. Again, cultural factors have an impact on the leniency in keeping and monitoring academic integrity. Babalola's study (2012) conducted in an undergraduate private Nigerian university demonstrated that most students do not have a good understanding of plagiarism and aspirations for better grades, poor knowledge of referencing rules, time pressure and easy access to information through web, which developed a 'copy-paste' culture among students, were common factors that increased the likelihood of committing plagiarism. Lack of resources and well-trained lecturers as well as traditional teaching methods may contribute to this outcome.

Likewise, some lecturers engage in practices like "sex-for-marks" and other forms of corruption undermine academic honesty. Institutions of higher learning are faced with the challenges of plagiarism, fraudulent behavior, dishonesty and sexual harassment, sex for grade, cheating and malpractices which have become a culture in our campuses (Osim, Afebende, & Moses, 2020; Ncube, 2019). The authors further stated that students, lecturers and management share responsibility for the determination and preservation of standards of academic integrity. On the part of the lecturers who are at the center of instructional delivery, indolence in academic exercise may weaken academic integrity of the staff. Academic staff may engage in dishonest practices due to factors like excessive workload and poor work ethics and encourage students to follow the new trend which is 'sorting' meaning money-formarks. According to Ajogbeje, Boris and Ekiugbo (2023) at the apex of these institutions, the leaders may also display poor standards in executing their leadership roles. Their lack of commitment and inconsistency goes a long way to dwindle set standards for academic integrity. Inadequate funding and poor infrastructure hinder the effective implementation of measures to prevent academic dishonesty (Ajogbeje, Boris, & Ekiugbo, 2023). Hence, the need to apply technology in ensuring integrity within the spheres of academy.

# **Application of Educational Technology to Enhance Academic Integrity**

Technology is used as a medium for instruction in educational institutions and can as well be seen as an assistant in upholding academic integrity. It is used for improving quality of teaching through the provision of various types of programmes such as the media. Educational technology is a systematic application of relevant technological processes and resources in teaching, with a goal to improve students' performance (Paliwal, 2020). Over the years, both students and teachers in all levels of education have embraced the use of technology in teaaching and learning. But in recent times, technological use has been on the increase as more information and instruction is delivered via the internet. To a very large extent, technological tools has enhanced the knowledge and skills of both teachers and students in academics. Today, the Artificial Intelligenc (AI) is the latest technological breakthrough especially in tertiary institutions. AI enhances the availability of information and can handle complex tasks, analyse large volumes of data and make decisions with minimal human involvement. As such, when applied to teaching and learning, the key question becomes: when does the use of AI or technology become a violation of the teachinglearning process? The use of AI and other technological tools does not essentially hinder learning. The critical factor is how to use the technology while maintaining academic integrity (Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning (2020). However, information generated by AI can be inaccurate or misleading, and so undermine the educational process. In some cases, students and lecturers alike misuse the information by not citing original authors (plagiarism). These limitations notwithstanding, the AI helps to enrich both lecturers' and students' productivity and learning experience by supporting learning activities and, demonstrating potential structures (Smith, 2020). For example, tools like Quillbot and Grammarly go a long way in helping lecturers and students in research, academic writing and improving their expression of language and correct spelling. AI Tools like ChatGPT-3 and GPT-4 can also assist with effective writing.

Therefore, AI becomes a great complement to lecturers and students alike in learning and not a substitute. Therefore, lecturers and students need to be educated not only on the capabilities but also on the limits of AI. Consequently, tertiary institutions will produce a generation of learners who are not only good at harnessing technology but are equally equipped with critical skills for discernment and effective application of internet technologies. This will enhance and support rather than violates the teaching-learning process. Maintaining academic integrity in the teaching-learning process involves school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. It helps to ensure students are assessed fairly and teachers, students and parents/guardians get an accurate understanding of student progress to help guide further teaching and learning. Schools can support a culture of academic integrity by providing students with clear expectations about values, responsibilities and behaviours related to learning and assessment, and by responding to breaches of academic integrity in a consistent and proportionate way. On the part of the school administrators, there should be a review school assessment design approach with teaching staff to define acceptable student use of AI tools in assessments.

Teaching staff on their parts can design assessments with consideration of the appropriate approach for whether and/or how generative AI tools can be used. Teachers are encouraged to identify and respond to academic misconduct using generative AI tools in a consistent manner in line with any local academic integrity policy (Piascik & Brazeau, 2010). These authors' state examples of academic misconduct using generative AI tools to include plagiarism, during tests and quizzes as AI produce already made answers to the questions. It is not easy to use these tools to identify dishonesty by students. Conversely, schools can

reduce the risk of misconduct by designing assessment with consideration of AI tools and authenticating student work where misconduct is possible and then apply the use of plagiarism detection tools like Turnitin and proctoring software to help identify academic dishonesty during assessments (Smith, 2020). Students on their own handle assignments that require critical thinking, collaboration, and unique responses but should not see it as opportunities for cheating using AI. Piascik and Brazeau (2010) opine that students can be educated on the appropriate use of technology while embracing its potential to enhance learning. These students can equally diversify the methods using team or group work reducing reasons to cheat. Interactive online modules and games can educate students about ethical practices, fostering a deeper understanding of integrity principles (Sbaffi & Zhao, 2022). Fostering a deeper understanding of the principles of integrity actually begins with parents who are the first educators of students. Parents/guardians need to act with integrity because children and youth are watching and will be smart enough to detect any shortcoming. For Ward-Seidel and Rimm-Kaufman (2022), modeling is a best practice in education to showcase integrity – that means educators, including parents/guardians have to "walk the walk," not only "talk the talk."

## Conclusion

Maintaining academic integrity is essential as good academic work is underpinned by honesty, trust and respect. It will also go a long way to encourage creativity and innovation in education as knowledge is created by many people and each person's contribution needs to be acknowledge. Educating students and staff about academic integrity requires proactive initiatives that are often lacking in Nigerian institutions. Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach that includes technological solutions, policy reforms, and cultural shifts within educational institutions. Hence, educational technology plays a vital role in promoting academic integrity in Nigerian tertiary institutions by providing tools and strategies to address challenges posed by the digital age, while fostering ethical behavior.

## **Way Forward**

- 1. Stakeholders in education should encourage a learning environment that values hard work, determination, and respect over mere grades as this will help the students prioritize the process of learning.
- 2. Academic integrity education should form a major form of induction during student orientation programs to instill ethical values from the beginning.
- 3. Students at all levels of education should be taught especially in General Studies (GS) proper citation techniques, research skills, and the ethical use of technology to prevent plagiarism.
- 4. Teachers and parents alike should model ethical behavior by observing high standards of proficiency in their teaching and interactions with students.
- 5. Educational administrators should treat incidents of academic dishonesty with utmost firmness so that lecturers and students will learn from such misconduct.

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