

Assessment of Academic Misconducts for Enhancing Integrity among Postgraduate Students in Public Universities in Rivers State

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Abstract

Assessment of academic misconduct for enhancing integrity among postgraduate students in public universities in Rivers State is the central focus of this analytic descriptive survey. The study focused on all participants from three distinct workshops: the Faculty of Education at Rivers State University, the Faculty of Natural and Applied Sciences at Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, and the "Grantmanship workshop" at the University of Port Harcourt. However, the researchers sampled 522 participants using the stratified random sampling technique. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The researchers designed a 45-item questionnaire, known as the "Academic Misconducts Assessment Questionnaire (AMA-Q)," to collect data from the participants. They subjected it to content and face validity to ensure its alignment with the research objectives. Using Cronbach's alpha to test the instrument's reliability yielded coefficients of 0.79, 0.83, and 0.77 for different parts of the instrument, indicating a satisfactory internal consistency. We analysed the data item by item using the mean, based on the real numbers' limits: 4.00-3.50 (SA), 3.49-2.50 (A), 2.49-1.50 (D), and 1.49-0.50 (SD), and tested hypotheses using ANOVA. The findings, among other things, revealed that academic misconduct among postgraduate students is a common phenomenon across public universities in Rivers State. The grand mean values for Rivers State University (RSU: 3.41), Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE: 3.37), and the University of Port Harcourt (UP: 3.46) indicate that respondents generally agree on the prevalence of listed behaviours, such as plagiarism, contract cheating, falsification of records, and unethical collaboration. Universities in Rivers State should collaborate to standardize policies and guidelines on academic integrity, ensure uniform enforcement, and foster a culture of ethical behavior among postgraduate students, among other recommendations.

Key words: Assessment, Academic Misconduct, Integrity, Common Forms, Preventive Strategies

Introduction

Academic misconduct has become a growing concern in higher education, threatening the integrity of academic institutions and the credibility of degrees awarded. Misconduct such as plagiarism, cheating in examinations, falsification of data, and other unethical practices undermine the core values of honesty, fairness, and accountability, which are essential for academic excellence (Kayii & Kwakye, 2024). The faculties of education recognize the urgency of addressing this issue, as it not only affects the quality of education but also the future credibility of graduates entering the professional world

To combat academic misconduct effectively, institutions have made it crucial to explore investigative techniques that identify violations and preventive strategies that promote a culture of academic integrity through regular organized workshops. These workshops involve teaching and introducing participants to the use of technological tools and global and institutional policies to foster awareness among students

and faculty members. Workshops such as the research training in Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, provide a unique opportunity to examine this issue holistically by bringing together key stakeholders—faculty members, students, and resource persons—to discuss challenges, share experiences, and propose actionable solutions to sustain academic integrity.

Academic misconduct in higher institutions has become a global issue that undermines the credibility of educational systems and jeopardizes the value of earned qualifications. According to Uzoma and Eze (2020), academic misconduct involves unethical behaviours such as plagiarism, cheating, falsifying data (Wonu & Bupo, 2022), and submitting work that is not one's own. Factors such as the pressure to succeed, a lack of awareness about academic ethics, and inadequate enforcement of institutional policies often drive these practices. In Nigeria, the prevalence of academic dishonesty has raised concerns about the quality of graduates and their readiness for professional responsibilities (Ogunleye, 2019). Academic misconduct encompasses a wide range of unethical behaviours, including plagiarism, cheating, the fabrication of data, and unauthorized collaboration (Sutherland-Smith, 2010). These practices undermine the credibility of academic institutions and erode public trust. Locally, institutions in Nigeria have witnessed significant challenges in managing academic integrity, with reports indicating widespread exam malpractice and plagiarism among students (Okoroma, 2019). Investigating such behaviours is essential for identifying culprits, understanding their root causes, and implementing corrective measures.

Forms and Causes of Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct manifests in various forms, including but not limited to plagiarism, contract cheating, falsification of academic records, and unethical collaboration. Plagiarism, defined as using another person's work without proper acknowledgement, is one of the most widespread forms (Adebayo & Ajayi, 2021). Similarly, contract cheating, where students outsource assignments to third parties, has gained attention due to the rise of online freelance platforms. According to Adekunle and Okafor (2020), factors contributing to academic misconduct include poor time management, lack of understanding of academic conventions, and limited technological literacy for proper citation practices. Researchers have identified the pressure to achieve high grades and meet faculty requirements for promotion as a significant driver. Students often feel compelled to meet societal and parental expectations, leading them to resort to dishonest practices (Olatunji, 2021). Moreover, the lax enforcement of policies against academic misconduct within institutions contributes to the persistence of these behaviors. The absence of strict penalties and insufficient use of detection tools, such as plagiarism detection software, exacerbate the problem (Chukwu, 2020).

Investigative Strategies for Addressing Academic Misconduct

Investigative strategies for detecting academic dishonesty involve a combination of technological, procedural, and institutional measures. The use of plagiarism detection software, such as Turnitin and Grammarly, has proven effective in identifying unoriginal content in academic submissions (Ogunlana, 2019). Additionally, examinations monitored through biometric systems and artificial intelligence-based surveillance have been instrumental in curbing cheating during assessments. Eze and Adeola (2021) emphasized the importance of training faculty members to recognize signs of academic dishonesty and conduct thorough investigations using institutional frameworks when suspicions arise. Institutional frameworks also play a pivotal role in addressing academic misconduct. Establishing dedicated ethics committees to investigate cases of misconduct and implementing clear policies and penalties are essential steps. As noted by Okon and Esu (2020), institutions that adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward academic dishonesty tend to report fewer cases of misconduct, highlighting the effectiveness of stringent institutional regulations as preventive strategies.

A proactive approach that centers on fostering a culture of integrity is necessary to prevent academic misconduct. Awareness campaigns that educate students about academic ethics and the consequences

of dishonesty are vital (Adebayo & Ajayi, 2021). Workshops, seminars, and orientation programs can help inculcate values of honesty and accountability among students and staff. Okafor and Adekunle (2022) suggested that embedding lessons on academic ethics into the curriculum can help students understand the importance of original work and proper referencing techniques. The role of faculty members is also critical. Lecturers who adopt innovative assessment methods, such as open-book exams and problem-solving tasks, reduce opportunities for dishonest practices (Chukwu, 2020). Additionally, fostering an environment of trust and support, where students feel comfortable seeking help for academic challenges, can mitigate the pressure to engage in misconduct (Ogunleye, 2019). In Nigeria, academic misconduct poses a significant challenge to the credibility of higher education. The National University Commission (NUC) has emphasized the need for institutions to adopt stricter policies and advanced detection tools to uphold academic integrity (Olatunji, 2021). However, the lack of adequate funding for technological tools and the high student-to-lecturer ratio remain significant barriers (Okon & Esu, 2020). Collaborative efforts between institutions, regulatory bodies, and policymakers are necessary to address these challenges and create a sustainable framework for academic integrity that relies on either traditional or technology-driven approaches.

Traditional strategies for investigating academic misconduct primarily rely on manual processes, including the review of examination scripts, observation during exams, and interviews with accused students. Invigilators play a critical role in detecting suspicious activities, such as the use of unauthorized materials or collaboration during assessments. Although these methods are foundational, they often lack precision and depend heavily on human judgement, which can be biased or inconsistent (Eret & Gokmenoglu, 2010). For instance, studies in Ghana reveal that reliance on manual invigilation alone has failed to deter students from engaging in sophisticated cheating tactics (Oduro-Marfo, 2020).

The advancement of technology has introduced innovative tools to enhance the detection of academic misconduct. Plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin and Grammarly has become indispensable in identifying similarities between students' work and existing sources. These tools provide detailed reports that assist educators in making informed decisions about potential violations (Park, 2003). Additionally, the use of AI-powered systems, such as Proctorio and ExamSoft, has revolutionized remote invigilation by enabling real-time monitoring and flagging of suspicious behaviours during online examinations (Rowe, 2020).

In Nigeria, universities are increasingly adopting these technologies, though challenges related to affordability and digital literacy among faculty members remain prevalent (Eze, Chinedu-Eze, & Bello, 2021). Comparatively, institutions in countries like the United States and Australia have reported significant success in reducing academic dishonesty through comprehensive integration of these tools (Ellis, Zucker, & Randall, 2018).

Institutional Policies and Investigative Frameworks

Robust institutional policies often underpin effective investigative strategies. These policies define clear procedures for handling allegations, ensuring fairness and transparency. The Higher Education Council of Nigeria (HECN) recommends a multi-step approach involving initial evidence collection, formal inquiry panels, and opportunities for students to defend themselves (Okebukola, 2020). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the United Kingdom employs similar frameworks, mandating universities to maintain detailed records of investigations and apply consistent penalties for violations (Bretag et al., 2014). Investigative strategies are most effective when combined with preventive measures. Workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns can educate students and faculty about the importance of academic integrity (Bretag, 2013). Moreover, fostering a supportive academic environment can reduce the pressure to cheat, as students are less likely to engage in misconduct when they feel supported

academically and emotionally (Macfarlane, Zhang, & Pun, 2014). Local studies in Nigeria highlight the importance of counseling and mentorship programs for reducing instances of cheating (Adebayo, 2018).

Academic misconduct in higher education remains a global challenge that threatens the integrity of educational systems and diminishes the value of qualifications earned. It includes unethical behaviors such as plagiarism, cheating, falsifying data, and submitting work that is not one's own (Wonu & Bupo, 2022; Uzoma & Eze, 2020). Various factors, such as pressure to succeed, lack of awareness about academic ethics, and insufficient enforcement of institutional policies, drive these practices (Ogunleye, 2019; Olatunji, 2021). In Nigeria, widespread academic dishonesty raises concerns about the quality of graduates and their readiness for professional responsibilities (Okoroma, 2019). This underscores the need for targeted strategies to investigate and mitigate misconduct effectively. Despite extensive research on academic misconduct and its implications, gaps persist in addressing the challenges from a holistic, institution-specific perspective. While foreign studies (e.g., Bretag, 2013; Park, 2003) highlight the utility of advanced tools like plagiarism detection software and AI-driven invigilation, local studies (e.g., Eze, Chinedu-Eze, & Bello, 2021; Chukwu, 2020) often focus on resource constraints and limited institutional capacity in Nigeria. Furthermore, while the literature emphasizes preventive measures like awareness campaigns and curriculum embedding, it fails to provide insights into tailoring these approaches to specific institutional contexts, particularly in faculties of education.

While existing literature has examined the broad dimensions of academic misconduct, there is limited empirical research on the integration of investigative strategies with faculty-driven initiatives, such as workshops and seminars, to address misconduct systematically. Specifically, the unique challenges faced by faculty members and students in faculties of education in public universities where the nature of assessments often involves technical and collaborative tasks have not been adequately explored. Moreover, studies seldom investigate how institutional policies and frameworks can be localised to enhance their effectiveness within specific faculties. This study is borne out of the insights and deliberations from the workshops, which provided a panoramic assessment of academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State.

Academic misconduct remains a persistent challenge in higher education, undermining the credibility of academic qualifications and the integrity of institutions. During these workshops, participants shared troubling accounts of widespread plagiarism, cheating during examinations, and the falsification of research data. Faculty members recounted instances where students leveraged technology for unethical practices, such as contract cheating and using unauthorised materials during assessments. These experiences revealed systemic gaps in the detection and prevention of misconduct, exacerbated by inconsistent enforcement of policies, inadequate technological tools, and limited awareness of academic ethics among students and staff. The workshop discussions highlighted a growing frustration among educators, who expressed concerns about the negative impact of academic dishonesty on the quality of graduates, professional readiness, and institutional reputation. Moreover, the absence of robust investigative frameworks and preventive strategies tailored to the unique challenges faced by faculties, particularly in natural and applied sciences, was identified as a significant barrier. These negative experiences underscore the urgent need to address academic misconduct through innovative, faculty-specific approaches that combine effective investigation with proactive preventive measures. Thus, this study assesses academic misconduct to enhance integrity among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess academic misconduct to enhance integrity among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the common forms of academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the Public Universities in Rivers State.
2. Identify effective investigative techniques and tools used to detect academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the Public Universities in Rivers State.
3. Determine preventive strategies implemented to reduce academic misconduct and foster a culture of academic integrity among postgraduate students in the Public Universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study

1. What are the common forms of academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the Public Universities in Rivers State?
2. What effective investigative techniques and tools are used to detect academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the Public Universities in Rivers State.?
3. What preventive strategies were implemented to reduce academic misconduct and foster a culture of academic integrity among postgraduate students in the Public Universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been formulated to guide the study

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of participants from Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and University of Port Harcourt regarding the common forms of academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of participants from Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and University of Port Harcourt regarding the effective investigative techniques and tools used to detect academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of participants from Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and University of Port Harcourt regarding the preventive strategies implemented to reduce academic misconduct and foster a culture of academic integrity among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study is the analytic descriptive survey design. According to Nwankwo (2016), analytic descriptive survey design is a type of descriptive design that allows the researcher to compare various categories of sample through the use of hypotheses and appropriate statistical tools. This study uses analytic descriptive survey design because the researchers compare the stratified sampled respondents' through the use of hypotheses. The study targeted all participants from the separate workshops; Research training organised by Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, research workshop organised by faculty of Natural and Applied sciences, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and "Grantmanship workshop" in University of Port Harcourt. The sample consisted of 522 participants derived using stratified random sampling technique as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Distribution of the Study

University	Proportion (%)	Number of Participants
University of Port Harcourt	40	$0.4 \times 522 = 209$
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education	30	$0.3 \times 522 = 157$

Rivers State University	30	0.3×522=157
Total	100	522

Source: Field Data, 2024

A 45-item questionnaire referred to as “Academic Misconducts Assessment Questionnaire (AMA-Q)” designed by the researchers was used to collect data from the participants. Each of the items is provided with a four-point rating scale of 4= “Strongly Agree” (SA); 3=“Agree” (A); 2= “Disagree”(D); 1= “Strongly Disagree”(SD). The instrument was validated for content and face validity by three experts in education; and reliability test of the instrument using Cronbach Alpha recorded reliability coefficients of 0.79, 0.83 and 0.77 respectively. Administration and collection of the questionnaire was during these workshops Data analysis was through mean on item by item basis, and it was based on the limit of the real numbers: 4.00-3.50(SA), 3.49-2.50(A), 2.49-1.50(D), 1.49-0.50(SD) and ANOVA was used for hypotheses comparison.

Results

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the common forms of academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Summary of mean scores on common forms of academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the Public universities

S/N	common forms of academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the Public universities	UP (n = 209)			IAUE (n = 157)			RSU (n = 157)		
		M	S.D.	RMK	M	S.D.	RMK	M	S.D.	RMK
1	Plagiarism is a common form of academic misconduct among postgraduate students.	3.48	0.60	A	3.32	0.70	A	3.52	0.62	A
2	Many students engage in unauthorized collaboration during assignments.	3.30	0.54	A	3.34	0.64	A	3.45	0.58	A
3	Contract cheating (paying others to complete assignments) is prevalent among students.	3.34	0.66	A	3.36	0.67	A	3.35	0.58	A
4	Fabrication of data in research and coursework occurs frequently.	3.41	0.59	A	3.43	0.67	A	3.42	0.63	A
5	Copying from other students during exams is a recurring issue.	3.44	0.75	A	3.44	0.61	A	3.35	0.60	A
6	The use of mobile phones and other gadgets to cheat during exams is widespread.	3.39	0.77	A	3.37	0.70	A	3.55	0.56	A
7	Impersonation during exams is a common practice among students.	3.38	0.76	A	3.40	0.72	A	3.49	0.52	A

8	Students often rely on unauthorized materials (e.g., cheat sheets) during tests.	3.58	0.57	A	3.34	0.65	A	3.53	0.56	A
9	Submission of the same assignment for different courses is a frequent issue.	3.33	0.62	A	3.28	0.58		3.40	0.64	
10	Academic misconduct is more common during final exams compared to other assessments.	3.45	0.55		3.30	0.60	A	3.48	0.62	A
11	Peer pressure contributes significantly to students engaging in academic misconduct.	3.36	0.68		3.31	0.65	A	3.44	0.57	A
12	The fear of failing motivates many students to cheat.	3.50	0.63		3.38	0.72	A	3.47	0.55	A
13	Many students view academic misconduct as a way to cope with academic stress.	3.41	0.70	A	3.33	0.61	A	3.46	0.59	A
14	The competitive academic environment encourages unethical practices.	3.37	0.64	A	3.29	0.58	A	3.39	0.63	A
15	Students often justify their misconduct as being unavoidable in difficult courses.	3.39	0.69	A	3.36	0.62	A	3.45	0.61	A
Grand mean		3.41		A	3.37		A	3.46		A

Source: Field Survey, 2024. Key: A = Agree; D = Disagree; RMK = Remark

The result in Table 2 shows the grand mean values for UP, IAUE, and RSU are 3.41, 3.37, and 3.46, respectively. These values indicate that respondents generally agreed (A) that the listed behaviours represent common forms of academic misconduct among postgraduate students of universities in Rivers state. The grand mean scores, which ranged from 3.37 (IAUE) to 3.46 (UP), underscore that academic misconduct is a widespread phenomenon among postgraduate students in these institutions. The slightly higher mean score for RSU suggests that respondents in this institution perceived a higher prevalence of such behaviours compared to the other universities.

Research Question 2: What effective investigative techniques and tools are used to detect academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the Public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Summary of mean scores on effective investigative techniques and tools are used to detect academic misconduct among postgraduate students

S/N	effective investigative techniques and tools are used to detect academic misconduct among postgraduate students	UP (n = 209)			IAUE (n = 157)			RSU (n = 157)		
		M	S.D.	RMK	M	S.D.	RMK	M	S.D.	RMK
16	Plagiarism detection software is effective in identifying copied content in assignments.	3.41	0.65	A	3.41	0.68	A	3.40	0.59	A

17	Invigilation during exams helps in detecting cheating among students.	3.46	0.76	A	3.37	0.77	A	3.52	0.56	A
18	Analyzing students' writing patterns can help detect contract cheating.	3.24	0.70	A	3.41	0.64	A	3.39	0.64	A
19	Surveillance cameras in exam halls effectively reduce academic misconduct.	1.33	0.67	D	2.34	0.78	D	2.45	0.70	D
20	Randomized question sets in exams minimize opportunities for cheating.	3.42	0.52	A	3.34	0.75	A	3.33	0.76	A
21	Cross-referencing submitted assignments with online databases is effective for detection.	3.37	0.64	A	3.31	0.65	A	3.44	0.65	A
22	Peer reporting is an effective tool for uncovering instances of misconduct.	3.44	0.69	A	3.35	0.78	A	3.32	0.77	A
23	Investigative panels are thorough in handling cases of academic misconduct.	3.36	0.66	A	3.38	0.72	A	3.41	0.68	A
24	Questioning students about their work reveals inconsistencies in academic submissions.	3.40	0.65	A	3.42	0.71	A	3.39	0.63	A
25	Professors regularly scrutinize research data for signs of fabrication.	3.35	0.69	A	3.33	0.67	A	3.46	0.62	A
26	Routine audits of submitted work increase the chances of detecting academic dishonesty.	3.41	0.61	A	3.36	0.62	A	3.44	0.60	A
27	Anonymous reporting channels encourage the exposure of academic misconduct.	3.33	0.70	A	3.30	0.64	A	3.42	0.65	A
28	Regular review of students' academic records helps to identify patterns of malpractice.	3.38	0.64	A	3.32	0.63	A	3.37	0.62	A
29	Faculty training improves the detection of unethical academic behaviours.	3.40	0.68	A	3.31	0.66	A	3.43	0.67	A
30	The use of online proctoring tools during remote exams has reduced cheating cases	3.45	0.67	A	3.38	0.68	A	3.47	0.59	A
	Grand mean	3.39		A	3.36		A	3.42		A

Source: Field Survey, 2024 Key: A = Agree; D = Disagree; RMK = Remark

The result in Table 3 indicates the perceptions of respondents from University of Port Harcourt (UP), Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE), and Rivers State University (RSU) on the effectiveness of various investigative techniques and tools. The grand mean values for UP (3.39), IAUE (3.36), and RSU (3.42) fall within the “Agree” range, demonstrating a general consensus that the listed investigative techniques and tools are effective in detecting academic misconduct among postgraduate students in public universities in Rivers State. The analysis highlights that most of the investigative tools and techniques employed are perceived as effective by respondents across the three universities. However, the use of surveillance cameras was notably rated as less effective, indicating potential areas for improvement in this technique. These findings underscore the importance of employing a combination of traditional and technological tools to address academic misconduct comprehensively.

Research Question 3: What preventive strategies were implemented to reduce academic misconduct and foster a culture of academic integrity among postgraduate students in the Public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 4: Summary of mean scores on preventive strategies were implemented to reduce academic misconduct and foster a culture of academic integrity among postgraduate students

S/N	preventive strategies were implemented to reduce academic misconduct and foster a culture of academic integrity among postgraduate students	UP (n = 209)			IAUE (n = 157)			RSU (n = 157)		
		M	S.D.	RMK	M	S.D.	RMK	M	S.D.	RMK
31	Educating students about academic integrity reduces cases of misconduct.	3.30	0.69	A	3.37	0.67	A	3.35	0.64	A
32	Instituting honor codes fosters a culture of honesty among students.	3.39	0.67	A	3.42	0.62	A	3.43	0.58	A
33	Providing students with adequate time for assignments prevents academic dishonesty.	3.22	0.63	A	3.34	0.72	A	3.37	0.66	A
34	Reducing high-stakes assessments lowers the temptation to engage in cheating.	3.34	0.66	A	3.30	0.67	A	3.30	0.69	A
35	Promoting open communication between students and faculty discourages misconduct.	3.44	0.71	A	3.35	0.71	A	3.45	0.60	A
36	Regular workshops on research ethics help minimize plagiarism.	3.34	0.71	A	3.35	0.70	A	3.40	0.65	A
37	Implementing stricter penalties for academic misconduct acts as a deterrent.	3.39	0.69	A	3.35	0.68	A	3.30	0.64	A
38	Offering counseling services reduces the pressure that leads to cheating.	3.28	0.68	A	3.30	0.72	A	3.33	0.65	A

39	Increasing faculty-student interaction improves ethical academic behavior.	3.32	0.65	A	3.28	0.69	A	3.40	0.62	A
40	Providing access to academic resources reduces instances of academic misconduct.	3.40	0.62	A	3.35	0.66	A	3.37	0.63	A
41	Encouraging group study sessions foster collaborative and ethical learning.	3.33	0.64	A	3.31	0.68	A	3.38	0.60	A
42	Transparent grading systems discourage manipulation and dishonesty.	3.36	0.65	A	3.30	0.69	A	3.35	0.62	A
43	Regular assessments of teaching methods ensure fairness and reduce misconduct.	3.34	0.68	A	3.29	0.67	A	3.32	0.66	A
44	Mentoring programs enhance students' understanding of academic integrity.	3.37	0.66	A	3.32	0.64	A	3.41	0.63	A
45	Promoting awareness of long-term consequences discourages unethical practices.	3.40	0.63	A	3.34	0.67	A	3.39	0.64	A
Grand mean		3.33		A	3.31		A	3.38		A

Field Survey, 2024 Key: A = Agree; D = Disagree; RMK = Remark

The result in Table 4 shows the grand mean of 3.33, 3.31 and 3.38 respectively, affirming the overall effectiveness of the strategies in reducing academic misconduct and promoting academic integrity. The consistency in the grand mean values across the universities suggests a broadly positive perception of the effectiveness of these preventive strategies in fostering a culture of academic integrity.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of participants from Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and University of Port Harcourt regarding the common forms of academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State.

Table 5: ANOVA for common forms of academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State

Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	0.446	2	0.223	1.842	0.160
Within Groups	42.522	548	0.121		
Total	42.968	550			

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The F-ratio (1.842) and p-value (0.160) in Table 5 indicates that the observed differences in the mean responses across the three universities are not statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level ($p > 0.05$). Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is upheld. Therefore, the study concludes that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of participants from RSU, IAUE, and UP regarding the common forms of academic misconduct among postgraduate students. This finding implies that participants across the three institutions share similar perceptions of the prevalence or nature of academic misconduct.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of participants from Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and University of Port Harcourt regarding the

effective investigative techniques and tools used to detect academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State.

Table 6: ANOVA effective investigative techniques and tools used to detect academic misconduct among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State

Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	0.345	2	0.172	1.214	0.298
Within Groups	49.865	548	0.142		
Total	50.209	550			

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The F-ratio (1.214) and p-value (0.298) in Table 6 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean responses among the three universities regarding the effective investigative techniques and tools used to detect academic misconduct. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is upheld. Therefore, the findings suggest that participants from the three public universities generally agree on the effectiveness of investigative techniques and tools for detecting academic misconduct among postgraduate students. This uniformity in perception might reflect the implementation of similar policies and practices across the universities or a shared understanding of effective investigative strategies

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of participants from Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and University of Port Harcourt regarding the preventive strategies implemented to reduce academic misconduct and foster a culture of academic integrity among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State.

Table 7: ANOVA regarding the preventive strategies implemented to reduce academic misconduct and foster a culture of academic integrity among postgraduate students in the public universities in Rivers State.

Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	0.007	2	0.003	0.027	0.973
Within Groups	42.442	548	0.121		
Total	42.448	550			

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The F-ratio (0.027) and p-value (0.973) in Table 7 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean responses of participants across the three universities.. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is upheld. Therefore, the findings imply that the participants from RSU, IAUE, and UP perceive the effectiveness of preventive strategies for reducing academic misconduct and fostering academic integrity similarly

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study, as presented in Tables 2 and 5, reveal that academic misconduct among postgraduate students is a common phenomenon across public universities in Rivers State. The grand mean values for Rivers State University (RSU: 3.41), Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE: 3.37), and the University of Port Harcourt (UP: 3.46) indicate that respondents generally agreed on the prevalence of listed behaviours, such as plagiarism, contract cheating, falsification of records, and unethical collaboration. Additionally, the F-ratio (1.842) and p-value (0.160) suggest no statistically significant difference in perceptions across the three universities, emphasizing a shared understanding of these misconduct forms. This study aligns with the findings of Adebayo and Ajayi (2021), Adekunle

and Okafor (2020), Olatunji (2021), who findings affirmed the prevalence and shared nature of academic misconduct while emphasizing the need for multi-faceted approaches, combining education, technological tools, and strict enforcement, to mitigate academic misconduct effectively. However, the present findings contrast with Chukwu's (2020) assertion who underscores the need for continuous improvement in detection and enforcement mechanisms to address any gaps that might persist.

The findings of the present study, as presented in Tables 3 and 6 revealed that the grand mean values for RSU (3.39), IAUE (3.36), and UP (3.42) indicate a general agreement among respondents on the effectiveness of investigative techniques and tools in detecting academic misconduct among postgraduate students in public universities in Rivers State. Additionally, the F-ratio (1.214) and p-value (0.298) indicate no statistically significant difference in perceptions across the three universities. This uniformity in perception underscores the consistent application or understanding of these investigative strategies among the institutions. This study aligns with the findings of Ogunlana (2019), who highlighted the effectiveness of plagiarism detection software like Turnitin and Grammarly, Rowe (2020), also align with the study's findings, reinforcing the utility of advanced surveillance systems in curbing dishonest practices during assessments, and also confirmed with those Eze and Adeola (2021) and Okon and Esu (2020) whose findings affirmed the effectiveness of investigative strategies while also recognizing areas for improvement, particularly in leveraging advanced technologies.

The results from Table 4 and Table 7 demonstrate the overall effectiveness of preventive strategies in reducing academic misconduct and fostering academic integrity among postgraduate students in Rivers State public universities. The grand mean values of 3.33 (RSU), 3.31 (IAUE), and 3.38 (UP) affirm the positive perception of these strategies by respondents. Additionally, the F-ratio (0.027) and p-value (0.973) indicate no statistically significant difference in the mean responses across the three universities, suggesting a shared understanding and uniform effectiveness of the strategies implemented. These findings align with that of Bretag (2013) and Macfarlane, Zhang, and Pun (2014) particularly regarding the effectiveness of preventive measures and the need for a supportive academic culture. In contrast, the findings diverge slightly from Okebukola (2020), who emphasized the importance of robust institutional policies and formal investigative frameworks for addressing academic misconduct. While the present study focused on the perception of preventive strategies, the literature underscores the need for a combination of preventive and investigative measures.

Conclusion

The study revealed that postgraduate students across universities in Rivers State generally agree on the prevalence of certain academic misconduct behaviours, the effectiveness of investigative techniques for detecting misconduct, and the efficacy of strategies aimed at reducing misconduct and promoting academic integrity. Statistical analysis indicated no significant differences in the responses across RSU, IAUE, and UP, suggesting a shared perspective on these issues among the institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. Universities in Rivers State should collaborate to standardize policies and guidelines on academic integrity, ensuring uniform enforcement and fostering a culture of ethical behaviour among postgraduate students.
2. Universities should invest in advanced investigative tools and provide training for faculty and staff to ensure the continued effectiveness of techniques used to detect academic misconduct.
3. Regular workshops and seminars on academic integrity should be organized to educate postgraduate students about the importance of ethical conduct and the consequences of academic misconduct, fostering a proactive approach to preventing unethical practices.

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