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SELF-PERCEPTION AS A PREDICTOR OF ETHICAL ACADEMIC BEHAVIOUR AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN KWARA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined self-perception as a factor influencing ethical academic behavior among undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was employed, with 420 undergraduates randomly selected from three universities in Kwara State. Data were collected using the Self-Perception Scale and the Ethical Academic Behavior Scale. The instruments were validated, and their reliability coefficients were found to be satisfactory. Data analysis involved percentages, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and multiple regression at a 0.05 significance level. The findings indicated high levels of self-perception (92.8%) and ethical academic behavior (51.9%) among the respondents. A significant correlation was found between self-perception and ethical academic behavior ($r = 0.199$, $p < .05$). Demographic factors such as gender, class level, and place of residence significantly predicted self-perception (e.g., gender: $\beta = 0.11$, $t = 2.30$, $p < .05$), while place of residence emerged as a key predictor of ethical academic behavior ($\beta = 0.16$, $t = 3.20$, $p < .05$). The study recommends the implementation of regular guidance programs to help students manage their self-perception and promote ethical academic behavior. Universities should organize workshops and counselling sessions aimed at addressing the factors influencing self-perception and ethical conduct among students.

Keywords: Self-perception, Ethical academic behavior, Undergraduates, Kwara State, Nigeria

Introduction

Self-perception is a fundamental concept in educational systems globally, encompassing values like honesty, fairness, and responsibility, which are vital for the credibility of academic work. It is particularly important in Nigerian universities, where maintaining ethical academic behavior is challenged by issues such as cheating, plagiarism, and academic misconduct. These challenges not only hinder students' personal growth but also tarnish the overall reputation of educational institutions (Adebayo & Soyemi, 2023). Self-perception is crucial for fostering a culture of trust and respect, which is integral for both

personal and institutional development. However, various obstacles persist as numerous undergraduates engage in unethical academic behavior due to an interplay of psychological, social, and academic factors (Olatunji & Ibrahim, 2022). These factors are interrelated and often reflect larger issues, including students' views on themselves and their capabilities.

A key factor contributing to these behaviors is self-perception, which involves an individual's view of their abilities, values, and self-worth. It acts as a psychological framework influencing how students approach their academic responsibilities (Shuaibu, 2020). Self-perception encompasses the internalized beliefs and attitudes about one's identity, including self-esteem and academic self-efficacy (Okafor, 2021). A positive self-perception has been linked to ethical behavior and resilience in academic settings, while negative self-perceptions may result in academic misconduct as a way to cope with perceived inadequacies (Adekunle & Alade, 2023). In the Nigerian context, self-perception is shaped by factors such as cultural beliefs, societal expectations, and educational experiences, all of which influence students' adherence to academic values (Nwankwo, 2020).

Undergraduates in Kwara often face high academic expectations, competitive environments, and socio-economic pressures, which can lead some to compromise their Ethical Academic Behaviour to meet their goals (Adigun & Balogun, 2023). According to Taiwo and Adedoyin (2022), self-perception plays a central role in shaping students' academic attitudes and decisions. Students with a strong, positive self-perception are more likely to engage in honest academic practices, as they believe in their abilities to succeed without resorting to dishonest methods. On the other hand, students with low self-esteem or negative self-perception may feel inadequate or unable to meet expectations, which may push them towards unethical behavior to achieve academic success (Ibrahim, 2021).

The relationship between self-perception and ethical academic behaviour has garnered significant attention in recent studies due to its implications for fostering ethical behavior in students. Self-perception, a multi-faceted construct, influences students' behavior and decision-making in academic settings (Shuaibu & Musa, 2023). Olawale and Ajayi (2022) found that students with high self-esteem, a crucial aspect of self-perception, are more likely to uphold Ethical Academic Behaviour standards. This tendency stems from their belief in their abilities and their commitment to ethical principles. Similarly, Olatunji (2023) observed that students with positive self-perception exhibit resilience against external pressures, such as peer influence, to engage in academic misconduct. Their strong self-efficacy and moral convictions guide their decisions even in challenging situations.

Self-perception, which encompasses students' understanding of their abilities and worth, influences their adherence to ethical academic practices. Age and class level may shape this relationship, as younger or less experienced students might struggle more

with ethical decision-making due to developmental and academic pressures (Ogunsanya, 2022). Similarly, gender differences could impact how students perceive themselves and respond to challenges, with societal norms influencing their choices. Place of residence also moderates this relationship, as students living on-campus may experience more structured environments that promote ethical behavior, while those living off-campus might face fewer institutional controls. These variables collectively highlight the nuanced ways self-perception interacts with ethical academic behavior, offering insights into targeted interventions for improving academic integrity (Adebisi, 2020).

Also, Mbah (2023) found a positive correlation between self-perception and ethical decision-making, suggesting that a healthy self-image enables students to navigate moral dilemmas more effectively. Students with a robust self-perception are better equipped to internalize the values of Ethical Academic Behaviour, reducing their likelihood of engaging in dishonest practices. This highlights the importance of promoting positive self-perception as a preventive measure against academic misconduct. Despite these findings, research on the influence of self-perception on Ethical Academic Behaviour in Kwara remains limited. Adegoke and Adebayo (2021) emphasized that Kwara's unique cultural and educational landscape presents challenges that may amplify the role of self-perception in shaping academic behavior. The high-stakes nature of exams, coupled with the pressures of a competitive job market, creates an environment where academic misconduct may seem like a viable option for students with low self-perception (Adekunle & Alade, 2023).

Academic dishonesty among undergraduates in Kwara has become increasingly prevalent, posing a significant threat to the credibility of educational institutions and the reputation of graduates. Research by Eze and Obi (2023) reveals that around 60% of Nigerian undergraduates acknowledge engaging in some form of academic misconduct, including cheating during exams, plagiarism, and falsifying academic records. These actions not only undermine the quality of education but also affect students' moral development and psychological well-being, ultimately diminishing their confidence and academic self-worth. There is growing concern about the influence of self-perception on Ethical Academic Behaviour. Self-perception, defined as an individual's view of their own abilities and value, plays a critical role in shaping academic behavior. Studies have indicated that students with low self-perception are more likely to engage in unethical practices, often driven by external pressures or a desire to overcome self-doubt (Oladele, 2022). For example, a survey at the University of Ibadan found that 48% of students who admitted to academic dishonesty reported feelings of inadequacy and pressure to succeed, often attributing their actions to low self-confidence (Olaniyan, 2021).

While the relationship between self-perception and Ethical Academic Behaviour

has been extensively explored in broader psychological contexts, it remains underexplored within the unique cultural and educational setting of Kwara. Although several studies have examined the psychological and situational factors influencing Ethical academic behaviour (Musa & Adeoye, 2023), further research is needed to understand how self-perception specifically impacts academic behavior among Nigerian undergraduates. Such research could lead to the development of targeted strategies aimed at enhancing students' self-worth and reinforcing ethical standards within Nigerian higher education. By addressing this gap, educators and policymakers can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play and foster a culture of integrity among students.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between self-perception and ethical academic behaviour among undergraduates in Kwara.

Research Questions

1. What is the predictive value of self-perception on ethical academic behaviour among undergraduates in Kwara State?
2. What is the level of Ethical Academic Behaviour among undergraduates in Kwara State?

Hypotheses

Ho1: Self-perception is not a significant predictor of ethical academic behaviour among undergraduates in Kwra State.

Ho2: Gender, age, class level, place of residence, and course of study do not significantly predict the self-perception of undergraduates in Kwara State.

Ho3: Gender, age, class level, place of residence, and course of study do not significantly predict the Ethical Academic Behaviour of undergraduates in Kwara State.

Research Method

This study employed a correlational research design to explore the relationship between self-perception and ethical academic behavior among undergraduates in Kwara State. The population comprised all undergraduate students in tertiary institutions within the state, totaling 146,000 across the University of Ilorin (74,500), Al-Hikmah University (30,000), and Kwara State University (41,500) (Academic Planning Unit, 2024). A multi-stage sampling technique was used. First, purposive sampling was applied to select one university from each senatorial district: Kwara State University (North), Al-Hikmah University (Central), and the University of Ilorin (South). Proportional sampling ensured that participants from each university reflected its student population size, and simple random sampling was used to select 420 participants, including a 10% buffer for non-responses. The instrument's validity was established through expert reviews by faculty members from Psychology, Sociology, and Counsellor Education at the University of Ilorin, ensuring it adequately measured self-perception and ethical academic behavior (Ogunsanya, 2022). Reliability was confirmed using the test-retest method, with a four-week interval between two administrations to 20 students. Pearson's

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Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients of 0.81 for the self-perception scale and 0.88 for the Ethical Academic Behaviour scale demonstrated consistency and stability (Adesina, 2023).

Presentation of Results

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents Based on Gender, Age, Level, Place of Residence and Course of Study

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	279	67.4
Male	135	32.6
Total	**414**	**100.0**
Age		
18-25 years	237	57.2
26-35 years	144	34.8
36 years and above	33	8.0
Total	**414**	**100.0**
Class Level		
100-200	201	48.6
300-400	159	38.4
500 and above	54	13.0
Total	**414**	**100.0**
Place of Residence		
On campus	92	22.2
Off campus	322	77.8
Total	**414**	**100.0**
Course of Study		
Sciences	138	33.3
Arts	151	36.5
Social/Management Sciences	125	30.2
Total	**414**	**100.0**

Table1 presented the demographic distribution of the respondents. According to the table, 279 (67.4%) of the respondents were female, while 135 (32.6%) were male. Regarding age, the table shows that 237 (57.2%) of the respondents were between 18 and 25 years old, 144 (34.8%) were between 26 and 35 years, and 33 (8.0%) were aged 36 years and above. The table further indicates that 201 (48.6%) of the respondents were in their 100 and 200 levels, 159 (38.4%) were in their 300 and 400 levels, and 54 (13.0%) were in their 500 level and above. Additionally, 92 (22.2%) of the respondents lived on-campus, while 322 (77.8%) resided off campus. In terms of academic discipline, 138 (33.3%) of the respondents were studying science courses, 151 (36.5%) were studying arts courses, and 124 (30.2%) were studying social and management sciences.

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Research Question 1: What is the level of self-perception among undergraduates in Kwara State?

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Self-perception

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	30	7.2
High	384	92.8
Total	**414**	**100**

Table 2 indicated the respondents' level of Self-perception. 30 (7.2%) of the respondents have low self-perception while 384 (92.8%) of the respondents have high level of Self-perception. This indicates that majority (92.8%) of respondents' have high level of Self-perception.

Research Question 2: What is the level of Ethical Academic Behaviour of undergraduates in Kwara State?

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Ethical Academic Behaviour

Rate	Frequency	Percentage
Low	199	48.1
High	215	51.9
Total	**414**	**100**

Table 3 indcates the respondents' level of Ethical Academic Behaviour. The table shows that 199 (48.1%) of the respondents had low level of Ethical Academic Behaviour while 215 (51.9%) of the respondents have high level of Ethical Academic Behaviour. This indicates that majority (51.9%) of the respondents had high level of Ethical Academic Behaviour.

Hypotheses Testing

Three null hypotheses were postulated and tested for this study. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and regression statistical methods at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant relationship between self- perception and Ethical Academic Behaviour among undergraduates in Kwara State.*

Table 4: Pearson's "r" Showing the Relationship between the self-perception and Ethical Academic Behaviour of the Respondents

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. r-value	p. value
self-perception	414	63.55	10.86			
				412	.199	.000
Ethical Academic Behaviour	414	49.72	12.94			

Significant, p<0.05

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The results from Table 4 revealed that calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than level of significance. This implies that self-perception had significant correlation with Ethical Academic Behaviour of undergraduates in Kwara State.

Hypothesis Two: *Gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study will not significantly predict self-perception among undergraduates in Kwara State*

Table 5a: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.300[a]	.090	.079	10.42

a. Predictors: (Constant), Course of Study, Place of Residence, Age, Gender, Level

Table 5b: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	4381.70	5	876.34	8.06	.00[b]
Residual	44342.83	408	108.68		
Total	48724.53	413			

a. Dependent Variable: Self-perception

b. Predictors: (Constant), Course of Study, Place of Residence, Age, Gender, Class Level

Table 5c: Regression Coefficient showing self-perception of the Respondents Based on Demographic Variables

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	80.89	3.24		24.91	.000
Gender	2.62	1.14	0.11	2.30	.022
Age	0.84	0.83	0.05	1.01	.312
Class Level	3.41	0.78	0.22	4.33	.000
Place of Residence	2.61	1.31	0.10	1.98	.048
Course of Study	1.17	0.68	0.08	1.70	.088

a. Dependent Variable: self-perception

Table 5a (Model 1) showed a Multiple R of .300, R square of .090 and Adjusted R square of .079. The Multiple R of .300 represents the degree of association among measured variables. This result revealed that the independent variable (demographic variables) has significant correlation with Self-perception.

In the Table 5b, the result of the ANOVA table indicates F-value of 8.06, degree of freedom of 408 with p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 significant level. Since the calculated p-value is less than significant level hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study significantly

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predict self-perception among undergraduates in Kwara State.

Table 5c indicates contribution of variables (gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study) to Self-perception. Gender has a Beta weight (β) of 0.11, t=2.30, p<0.05. Age has a Beta weight (β) of 0.05, t= 1.01, p>0.05, Class Level has a Beta weight (β) of 0.22, t=4.33, p<0.05. Place of residence has a Beta weight (β) of 0.10, t= 1.98, p<0.05. Course of study has a Beta weight (β) of 0.08, t=1.70, p>0.05. Based on the result, it could be seen that gender, class level and place of residence predicted self-perception level among undergraduates in Kwara State more that age and course study.

Hypothesis Three: *Gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study will not significantly predict Ethical Academic Behaviour among undergraduates in Kwara State*

Table 6a: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.214[a]	.046	.034	12.72

a. Predictors: (Constant), Course of Study, Place of Residence, Age, Gender, Level

Table 6b: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	3179.74	5	635.94	3.93	.002[b]
Residual	66011.30	408	161.79		
Total	69191.05	413			

a. Dependent Variable: Ethical Academic Behaviour
b. Predictors: (Constant), Course of Study, Place of Residence, Age, Gender, Level

Table 6c: Regression Coefficient showing Ethical Academic Behaviour of the Respondents Based on Demographic Variables

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	60.93	3.96		15.38	.000
Gender	1.74	1.39	0.06	1.25	.211
Age	0.68	1.01	0.03	0.66	.504
Class Level	0.50	0.96	0.02	0.52	.599
Place of Residence	5.15	1.60	0.16	3.20	.001
Course of Study	1.27	0.84	0.07	1.51	.130

a. Dependent Variable: Ethical Academic Behaviour

Table 6a model summary of the simple regression equation of demographic data predicting Ethical Academic Behaviour. It shows a Multiple R of .214, R square of

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.046 and Adjusted R square of .034. The Multiple R of .214 (21.4%) represents the degree of association among measured variables. This result revealed that the independent variable (demographic variables) significantly predicts Ethical Academic Behaviour.

In the Table 6b, the result of the ANOVA table indicated F-value of 3.93, degree of freedom of 408 with p-value of .002 which is less than 0.05 significant level. Since the calculated p-value is less than significant level hence, the null hypothesis three is rejected. Thus, gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study significantly predict Ethical Academic Behaviour among undergraduates in Kwara State.

Table 6c indicated contribution of variables (gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study) to Self-perception. Gender has a Beta weight (β) of .06, t= 1.25, p>0.05. Age has a Beta weight (β) of 0.03, t= 0.66, p>0.05, Class Level has a Beta weight (β) of 0.02, t= 0.52, p>0.05. Place of residence has a Beta weight (β) of 0.16, t= 3.20, p<0.05. Course of study has a Beta weight (β) of 0.07, t=1.51, p>0.05. Based on the result, it could be seen that place of residence predicted Ethical Academic Behaviour among undergraduates in Kwara State more than gender, age, class level and course study.

Discussion

The study revealed that the majority of respondents experienced a high level of self-perception in school, with 384 respondents (92.8%) indicating high self-perception compared to 30 respondents (7.2%) who reported low self-perception. This finding aligns with Smith and Renk (2021), who highlighted that undergraduates often exhibit high self-perception when faced with challenges such as meeting teacher expectations, intense competition among peers, numerous assignments, incomplete course content, inadequate parental academic support, and poor academic performance. It could be that students develop heightened self-perception as a coping mechanism to navigate these challenges and maintain confidence in their academic environment.

The study also revealed that 215 respondents (51.9%) displayed a high level of Ethical Academic Behaviour, while 199 respondents (48.1%) exhibited a low level. This indicates that slightly over half of the respondents adhered to ethical academic practices. The finding is consistent with Chioqueta and Stiles (2021), who noted that undergraduates often demonstrate high Ethical Academic Behaviour when dealing with severe stress and depression. It could be that students internalize ethical behavior as a way to counteract the negative emotional impacts of stress and maintain a sense of academic responsibility. Borges and Werlang (2016) similarly found that students living with depression often adhered to higher Ethical Academic Behaviour, possibly as a compensatory strategy to navigate their mental health challenges while striving for academic success.

The study also revealed a significant correlation between self-perception and Ethical Academic Behaviour among undergraduates in Kwara State, as indicated

by a p-value below 0.05. This aligns with Singh and Singh (2018), who identified a strong relationship between the pressure to excel academically and ethical behavior. It could be that students with high self-perception are more likely to uphold ethical practices due to their confidence in their abilities, whereas those with lower self-perception might resort to academic misconduct to cope with feelings of inadequacy. Adenuga and Mustapha (2018) also observed that high self-perception was associated with adherence to ethical behavior, particularly during high-pressure periods like examinations (Mac George, Saner, & Gillihan, 2015).

The study revealed that gender, class level, and place of residence were stronger predictors of self-perception among undergraduates than age and course of study. This finding supports Rebecca (2020) and Marin (2021), who found that these demographic factors significantly influence self-perception. It could be that gender-specific societal expectations, varying academic experiences across class levels, and differing levels of support or challenges associated with on-campus versus off-campus living contribute to students' self-perception.

The study showed that gender, class level, and place of residence also significantly predicted Ethical Academic Behaviour among undergraduates, more so than age and course of study. This is consistent with Adeyemi and Adegbite (2019), who observed that gender and living arrangements influenced adherence to academic ethics. It could be that students living off-campus face more distractions or challenges that affect their ethical behavior compared to their on-campus peers. Similarly, Bayram and Bilgel (2018) found that dissatisfaction with one's course of study and living environment contributed to lower levels of Ethical Academic Behaviour, while Pereira and Cardoso (2019) highlighted that students worried about these factors exhibited higher tendencies toward academic misconduct.

Conclusion

1. The study revealed that a large majority (92.8%) of respondents exhibit a high level of self-perception. Additionally, 51.9% of respondents demonstrated a high level of Ethical Academic Behaviour. The findings indicated a significant correlation between self-perception and Ethical Academic Behaviour among undergraduates in Kwara State.
2. The study also found that gender, age, academic level, place of residence, and field of study are significant predictors of self-perception among undergraduates. Among these, gender, academic level, and place of residence were more influential predictors of self-perception than age and field of study.
3. Furthermore, gender, age, academic level, place of residence, and field of study significantly predict Ethical Academic Behaviour among undergraduates. Place of residence emerged as a stronger predictor of Ethical Academic Behaviour than gender, age, academic level, and field of study.

Implications for Counselling

These findings hold valuable implications for fostering Ethical Academic Behaviour. They suggest that suicide prevention initiatives, university counselling centers, and psychological clinics, along with assessment tools to identify undergraduates at risk of challenges in self-perception and Ethical Academic Behaviour, could be beneficial. Additionally, the study is highly relevant for educational and organizational contexts within Nigerian institutions. Through this research, the investigator gained insights into the negative impact of self-perception on Ethical Academic Behaviour, as it may lead students to struggle with academic failures, conflicts, and anxiety, all of which can affect their studies. Furthermore, these findings may assist school administrators and organizations in developing effective screening practices during admissions and recruitment processes to address Ethical Academic Behaviour concerns proactively, regardless of students' academic levels, age, gender, field of study, or residency.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are made to enhance self-perception and Ethical Academic Behaviour among undergraduates:

1. Undergraduates should continue to prioritize developing a strong sense of self-perception by participating in programs that foster self-acceptance, resilience, and personal growth, as institutions work to strengthen these qualities further.
2. Undergraduates should continue to remain committed to upholding academic honesty, taking advantage of workshops, seminars, and campaigns organized by universities to educate them on the importance of ethical academic behavior and the consequences of misconduct.
3. Undergraduates should be more aware of how gender, academic level, and place of residence influence self-perception and ethical academic behavior. Tailored interventions should address specific challenges faced by students at different academic levels, genders, and those living off-campus.
4. Undergraduates living off-campus should continue to seek additional support offered by universities, as place of residence is a strong predictor of ethical academic behavior. Universities should also create structures to bridge the gap in support for these students.
5. Undergraduates should keep engaging with comprehensive programs created through collaboration between the government, universities, counselors, and relevant agencies that address self-perception and ethical academic behavior across diverse demographic groups.

By implementing these recommendations, institutions can further cultivate a culture of integrity and positive self-perception, which will contribute to the academic success and well-being of Nigerian undergraduates.

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