



Modeling Societal Norms as Antecedent to Students' Behavioural Intention towards Academic Dishonesty in a Nigerian University

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ABSTRACT

This study set to model societal norms as antecedent to students' behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty in a Nigerian University. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design method to collect the data of the study. The study sample comprise one hundred and eighty-two (182) students. The instrument of the study was adopted and re-subjected for validity and reliability test. The study comprises four variables and the reliability computed on each of these variables with Cronbach Alpha showed a coefficient of .70 to .91 alpha value. The data of the study was subjected to construct, convergent and discriminant validity. Six hypotheses were formulated for the study. Four out of it were tested through structural equation model (SEM) with AMOS software 21 version while the remaining two were subjected to t-Test analysis. The result of the study showed that two variables (Subjective norm; and Group norm) all together statistically influence student behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty. Subjective norm stands to be the strongest factor influencing student behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty. Surprisingly, awareness of consequences revealed a negative and a weak effect on student behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty. The study also revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female student behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty. The result of this study has brought to fore the strength of subjective norm on student ethical behavior. The study therefore suggests a robust curriculum to address course on academic dishonesty behavior at every level of higher education among others.

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INTRODUCTION

"Those students who are dishonest and engage in academic cheating while in school are more likely to engage in fraud and theft on the job when they enter the workplace". Swift and Sarath (2001)

The prevalence of academic dishonesty in higher institution of learning has consistently attracting global discourse, because it was observed as pervasive global phenomenon that can affect the moral compass of any society and

invariably mar the ethical value of future generation, as well compromise the quality of future leaders (Stone, Jawahar & Kisanmora, 2009; Alleyne & Philip, 2011; Imran & Noordin, 2013; Saidin & Isa, 2013; William & Oyesoji 2019). This form of unethical behavior more than ever before is becoming rampant in the present decade among the students at all levels of educational system. In Nigeria higher institution of learning, the rate of academic cheating continued to



increase at alarming rate (Nwoye, Akpom & Hwang, 2019; Ekun & Egba, 2018) The manifestation of academic dishonesty reside in the growing rate of collapse in educational system in the world and Nigeria educational system is not immune for this. Academic dishonesty though not a recent phenomenon in Nigeria as stated by Nwoye et al, (2019), it started way back as 1914 when Senior Cambridge Examination question was leaked. The trend continued till today, with more dimensions being introduced into it. Academic dishonesty is not widespread only in Nigeria but the propensity and occurrence of this unacceptable behavior varies from society to society; from nation to nation and universities to universities across the globe (Rusdi, Hussein, Rahman, Noordin & Abd Aziz, 2019; William & Oyesoji 2019).

Academic dishonesty is a form of behavior that is at variance with acceptable laid down norms, rules and regulation stated in the student handbook and course policy. There are different forms of academic dishonesty that is ubiquitous in the recent time. Among such, as catalogue by Suleiman, Chawinga and Dube (2018), Nwoye et al, (2019) include cheating, copying other people work with or without their knowledge, using other people ideas without crediting the source (Plagiarism), taking into examination hall unauthorized material, and many other unwholesome activities that can mar the integrity of academic examination. The negative impact of this form of behavior is seen in the decline in academic standard and the trust the society place on the validity of certificate and degree conferred on graduates of higher institutions of learning in the country. Among the apathy that Nigerian has for the unemployable of its graduate is located in the fact that most of them cannot defend the certificate they hold (Ekun & Egba, 2018). It is also inferred that if a student engaged in behavior which is unethical while in school, such person may likely continue exhibiting such act after graduation and transfer the behavior to his place of work which invariably affect the moral compass of such society (Mohr, Ingram, Fell & Mabey 2011).

Given the rate of incident of academic fraud being reported in higher institution of learning, it is imperative to provide empirical

evidence to why the student engages in such unethical behaviour through existing theory of planned behavior in order to adequately proffer possible solution to it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evidence abounds about incident of academic dishonesty among student in the contemporary school system. The problem emanating from this behavior had degenerated to a level where graduate found it difficult to defend their certificate. Ekuri and Egba (2018) argue that the incidence of collapse building being witnessed in the country are supervised by supposed qualified civil and building engineers, certified architect and surveyor who have obtained university certificate and qualify in their own right as a trained engineer. In addition, the worst of it is the so call certified teachers who are mediocre and yet, they are supposed to be the gate keepers in our school system, one can imagine the type of knowledge a middling teacher will impact to the student put to his/her care.

The negative effects of academic dishonesty have far reaching implications on the society because the so call professional are train to serve the society. For instance, a dishonest medical graduate will exhibit unwholesome behavior that may lead to death of their client. In fact, the menace of academic dishonesty affects all field of human endeavour and it has brought to near total collapse of Nigerian educational system and by extension the dishonest behavior witness in our working place (Ekuri & Egba, 2018; Titilope & Faleye, 2016).

Researchers have proposed reasons people advanced for behaving in a particular way and a number of studies have empirically constructed a models and theories to explain human behavioural pattern. For cases of academic dishonesty among students, research studies indicated that the behavior could be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated (Shmeleva & Shmeleva 2019). Among the extrinsic reason for engaging in academic dishonesty among the student in Nigerian school system is located in the preference and importance attached to academic certificate. This invariably lead many people to enroll into higher institution of learning to acquire certificate (Ekuri & Egba 2018). Another

extrinsic factor is lack of academic motivation and society disposition which encourage and tolerate corrupt practices. Some students even seen academic cheating as acceptable norm in academic environment (Denisova-Schmidt, Huber, & Leontyewa 2016). Pressure for good grade and social comparison accounted for justification why students engage in dishonest behavior, in fact, McCabe and Trevino (1997) posited that students with lower GPAs are more likely to cheat than those with higher GPAs. This suggest that an attempt by student to remain competitive in performance can lead them to engage in academic dishonesty. Other extrinsic reason includes parental and pressure to get a good job can influence bad behavior exhibit by students. On the other hand, there are intrinsic factors that can influence academic dishonesty among students, this includes; laziness, lack of responsibility, bad characters and poor self-image; as well as lack of personal integrity (Ruto, Kipkoach & Rambaei 2011)

Human behavior is a product of two intertwine factors which is situated in nature and nurture. Thus, human behavior is more influenced by the environment (Nurture) than personality trait or moral obligation (Nature). Hence, the prevalent academic dishonesty may have stemmed from societal disposition to honesty and integrity. The study, therefore, set to unravel the antecedent of societal norm on the behavioural intention of students toward academic integrity. To achieve the objective of the study, a model in (figure 1) was developed from theory of planned behaviour to be tested by the data of the study.

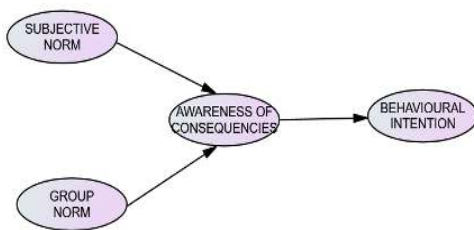


Figure 1: Study Conceptual Model

Empirical evidences suggested that theory of planned behavior adequately predicts student cheating behavior (Harding, Mayhew, Funelli & Carpenter, 2007). Yet, researcher still

continues to extend (TPB) adding some other variables to increase the explanatory strength of predicting and advance reason why students indulge in academic dishonesty. In this study, variables like subjective norm, social norm, behavioural intention from theory of planned behavior (TPB) was used, while awareness of consequences a variable from norms activation theory (NAT) was included to test a predictive model of student academic dishonesty.

Theory of Planned Behavior

Research evidences have proved that Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) has explanatory power to predict behavior. The theory was proposed by Ajzen in 1985. The theory suggested that actual behavior is preceded by behavioural intention, which in turn influenced attitude, subjective norms or perceived behavioural control. Hardling et al. (2007) reported that TPB is a theory that can be used to explain why individual make decision to behave in a specific way based on conviction that the outcome of such behavior is going to be a positive one. According to Ajzen, TPB consisted of three major variables and they are: attitude towards a behavior; subjective norm; and perceived behavioural control. Behavioural intention is a subjective probability of how hard a person is willing to try, how much the required effort the person is planning to use, in order to exhibit a behavior of interest. Similarly, Ajzen defines subjective norm “as individual perception about what other individual who are important to him/her would think if he/she chooses or declines to perform a behavior of interest”. Perceived behavioural control is defined as “perceived ease of performing a behavior based on past experience and expected impediment” (p.132). While attitude towards a behavior is defined as individual disposition to respond favourably or otherwise to an object, people and event. In all, the three components would altogether predict individual intention to perform a behavior (Hardling et al. 2007).

Another important factor in this study is whether awareness of consequences in academic dishonesty will influence student disposition to such act. Finding from literature showed that students engage in cheating because they believe



the full weight of law may not be imposed on those caught cheating and as such they provide justification for their cheating behavior (Faleye, 2005; Titilope & Faleye, 2016)

Cheating and academic fraud and other similar academic misconduct had been examined before. Some of the studies include Crown and Spiller (1998); Smyth and Davis (2004); McCabe, (2006); Stone et al. (2009); Ruto, Kipkoechi, and Semenova, (2018), Ekun and Egbai (2018); Nwoye et al, (2019); William and Oyesoji (2019). Among these studies, some were carried out to ascertain the type of academic misconduct most students engage in. Some studies were used to address ethical decision making, while few studies have sought to examine antecedent to academic dishonesty especially in a similar setting of this study. Nonetheless, there are studies that examine academic cheating behavior through theory of planned behavior, finding from these studies cannot be extrapolated to the present setting of this study. Since it is established that environmental factors contribute majorly to human behavior hence, the need to empirically examine societal norm as antecedent to students' behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty.

RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The research model of the study was developed from TPB and extended with "awareness of consequences" a variable from NAT. TPB is considered as one of the parsimonious model for predicting human behavioural intention. Thus the study employed the theory to explain the continue widespread of academic dishonesty in our school system. In line with the objectives of the study and the model to be tested, the following hypotheses was raised to guide the study.

H₁: Subjective Norms will positively influence students' behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty

H₂: Group Norms will positively influence students' behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty

H₃: Group Norms will positively influence students' awareness of consequences of academic dishonesty

H₄: Awareness of consequences will positively influence students' behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty

H₅: There would be significant different in the behavioural intention of students towards academic dishonesty base on their level of study

H₆: There would be statistical different in the behavioural intention of students towards academic dishonesty base on gender

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional design to examine the antecedent of societal norm on student behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty among postgraduate and undergraduate of a university in Nigeria. To prosecute the study, a model was specified and from the model six hypotheses was raised and tested. The sample of the study was purposively drawn from the population. The sample consisted of one hundred and eighty-one students. Among the sample, 63% were male and 37% were female students. Kline (2010) posited that a sample of 100 to 150 cases is sufficient for a reliable result in SEM analysis. Thus, the objective of the study is to test a specify model using SEM, therefore, the sample used is deemed to be appropriate for the application of structural equation model (SEM). To gather the data of the study, a self-reported questionnaire that contained five likert scale was developed to measure all the variables of the study. The variable has three exogenous variables namely: Group norm, Subjective norm, Awareness of consequences, while the endogenous variable was behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty. Items were developed to measure each construct of the study and the respondents were expected to respond to the items in the questionnaire by ticking the options: "strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)" on each of the indicators.

To ascertain the validity of the instrument of the study, construct, convergent and discriminant validity was computed using factor analysis technique. The result obtained from the analysis showed KMO and Barlett's test of sphericity as shown in table 1 below



Table 1: Show the KMO of The Sample Adequacy and Barlett's Test of Sphericity

KMO & BARTLETT'S TEST	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin of sample adequacy	.816
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	1.836E3
Approx. Chi-Square	
Df	253
Sig	.000

Furthermore, the study assesses the variance explain by each of the construct. The cumulative variance of the variable of the study was 57%, while share variance on each construct showed 24% for awareness of consequences; 18% for group norm; 9% for behavioural intention and 5% for subjective norm. The factor loading on each items range from .677 to .805 for awareness of consequences; .701 to 831 for subjective norm; .601 to .806 for behavioural intention; and .554 to .781 for group norm respectively (see Table 2). Also the descriptive statistic (mean and standard

deviation) of each item was computed in table 2. All mean is above midpoint of 3.00 with exception of one item in subjective norm (SN2). The standard deviation indicates a fairly narrow spread around the mean. The descriptive statistic reflects an acceptable degree of normality for the purpose of SEM analysis (Kline, 2005). The study further assess the average variance explained (AVE); the internal consistence of the instrument as well as the composite reliability was computed to establish the validity of the instrument of the study, the summary is as shown in table 2 &3.

Table 2: Rotated Component Matrix; Factor Loading; Mean & Standard Deviation

	Component				Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4		
AC2	.805				3.88	1.33
AC4	.794				3.92	1.18
AC6	.783				3.79	1.26
AC3	.783				3.98	1.23
AC8	.732				3.88	1.30
AC7	.728				3.95	1.21
AC5	.714				3.73	1.27
AC1	.677				3.75	1.37
GN5		.831			3.35	1.34
GN6		.790			3.09	1.35
GN4		.754			3.01	1.43
GN1		.731			3.39	1.48
GN2		.701			3.30	1.45
BI3			.806		3.40	1.43
BI2			.794		3.57	1.43



BI1	.711	3.30	1.34
BI6	.652	3.03	1.27
BI7	.601	3.43	1.38
SN5	.781	3.29	1.34
SN6	.703	3.72	1.38
SN2	.610	2.92	1.30
SN7	.554	3.36	1.28

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 3: show the Result of the AVE and Reliability test

Variables	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach alpha
AC	0.65	0.93	0.91
BI	0.52	0.83	0.84
SN	0.61	0.89	0.70
GN	0.58	0.87	0.88

Note: Awareness consequences (AC); Behavioural intention (BI); Subjective norm (SN); Group norm (GN); Average Variance Explained (AVE); Composite Reliability and Cronbach's alpha

Table 4: the correlation of construct and AVE showing the discriminant validity

Variables	AC	BI	SN	GN
AC	.80			
BI	.0805	.72		
SN	.504	.584	.78	
GN	.384	.155	.060	.76

Inter-variable correlation and the square root of AVE in the diagonal

Table 2 and 3 above, shows the validity and reliability of the instrument was established and further analysis was carried out on the data of

the study. In line with the objective of the study, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out with SEM as shown in (fig 2) below.

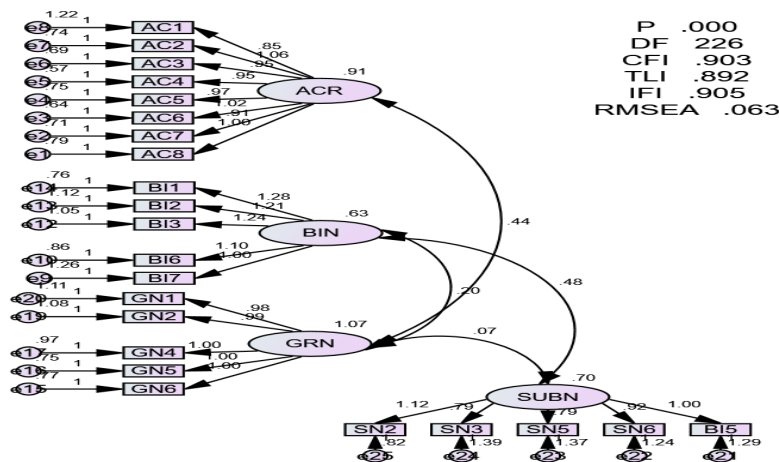


Figure 2: Confirmatory factor analysis of the construct of the study

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The measurement model of the study was checked using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted with AMOS statistic tool. In doing this, maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) procedure was used. The procedure is a robust technique in SEM analysis (Teo & Milutinovic, 2015). All parameter estimate was significant at the $P < .01$ level. In the end, the measurement model fit indices X^2 , df, Tucker lewis index (TLI), Comparative fit indices (CFI), Root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) was used as threshold. A check on the CFA output revealed the adequacy of measurement model. This showed that all items use as indicators were reliable and represent the universe of construct they are meant

to explain. The CFA model in fig 2, revealed a good fit $p = .000$; $df = .22$; $RMSEA = .063$; $CFI = .903$; $TLI = .892$; $IFI = .905$.

Evaluation of Specify Model

Following the assessment of the construct validity, the collinearity issue was assessed before assessing the structural model. In doing this, VIF values for each of the construct was checked. The VIF value in (Table 5) for each of the construct was less than 3.3 with this there is no collinearity issue among the construct (Ali, Danish, Khuwaja, Sajjad & Zahid, 2019).

Table 5: Assessment of Collinearity

	Intention towards academic dishonesty
Awareness consequences	1.187
Subjective Norm	1.015
Group Norm	1.185

Having established the measurement model of the study, the next step was to assess the structured model by checking the path coefficient (β value). The following fit was used to addresses how well the data fit the model, among

the fit indices used are *P-value, degree of freedom, Chi-Square, CMIN, RMSEA, CFI, TLI, IFI*. All these fit indices provided the threshold to determine the acceptable fit.

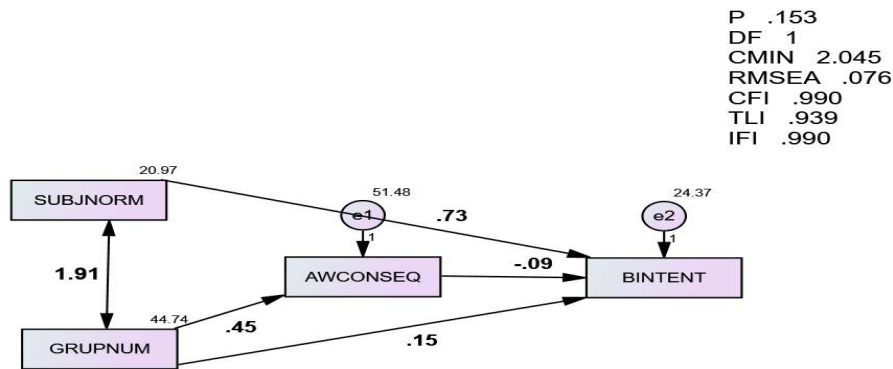


Figure 3: Structured Path coefficients of the model ($P < 0.01$; $P < 0.05$)

RESULT

The test model in figure 3 showed above indicated a fit model which yielded the following threshold: $P = .153$; $RMSEA = .076$; $CMIN = 2.04$; $CFI = .96$; $TLI = .939$; $IFI = .990$. All the fit indices satisfied the critical threshold therefore indicated a fitted model. Having fit the model, the path

coefficient was checked to address the hypotheses earlier formulated. The first hypothesis that stated that subjective norm will positively influence student behavioural intention toward academic dishonesty stand validated with path coefficients of ($\beta = .73$, $p < 0.05$); the second hypothesis that stated that group norm will



positively influence student behavioral intention toward academic dishonesty stand validated though with small effect size of ($\beta = .15, p < 0.01$); the third hypothesis that stated that group norm will positively influence awareness of the consequences stand validated with a medium effect size of ($\beta = .45, p < 0.05$); the fourth hypothesis that stated that subjective norm will positively correlate with group norm indicated a very strong correlation of ($\beta = .1.91, p < 0.05$);

while the hypothesis that stated awareness of consequences will positively influence behavioural intention showed a negative effect size of ($\beta = -.09, p < 0.01$) thus the model revealed that hypothesis (1,2,3 &4) stand validated, while the fifth hypothesis was not supported. The influence of level of study on student behavioural intention and subjective norm towards academic dishonesty was computed.

Table 6: Show the independent t-test analysis of respondents behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty base on level of study (Undergraduate and Postgraduate)

Respondents	N	Df	M	SD	T	P-value
Undergraduate	75	180	12.38	8.02	-2.906	0.04
Postgraduate	107		14.98	5.97		

The finding of this analysis showed that behavioural intention of postgraduate students toward academic dishonesty revealed a higher mean score of ($M=14.98; SD=5.97$) than the mean score of undergraduate student ($M=12.38; SD=8.02$). The mean difference is slightly higher. Statistically, significant difference exists in the behavioural intention of UG and PG towards

academic dishonesty [$t(180) = -2.906, p = 0.04$]. A further analysis was carried out to determine the effect size of the difference that was recorded between the two groups. The effect size revealed $d = 0.36$ which is considered a small effect according to Cohen's threshold, therefore the statistical difference is a trivial one and practically it was not too important.

Table 7: Show the independent t-test analysis of respondents' behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty base on gender (Male and female)

Respondents	N	df	M	SD	T	P-value
Male	114	180	14.31	6.22	1.186	0.24
Female	68		13.27	5.39		

The finding of this analysis showed that behavioural intention of male and female students toward academic dishonesty revealed a mean score of ($M=14.31; SD=6.22$) for the male students while it revealed the mean score of ($M=13.27; SD=5.39$) for female students. The mean difference was slightly small and no statistical difference exists in the behavioural intention of the two group towards academic dishonesty [$t(180) = 1.186, p = 0.24$]. What this suggest was that both group have common dispositions and intention towards academic fraud. This explain why significant difference was not recorded despite the slight difference in the mean of the groups.

DISCUSSION

In line with the objectives of this study which set to empirically tested a model to explain the influence of societal norm on student disposition to academic dishonesty and cheating and as well check whether difference exist in student behavioural intention toward academic dishonesty based on level of study and gender. The finding of the study revealed the strength of subjective norm on students' behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty. In fact, the factor stand-out to be a very strong one with an effect size of ($\beta = 0.73 < 0.05$). What this finding indicated was that majority of those that the students look forward to as being important to them and whose action they make reference to do not frown at such behavior. In other word, those the student value in



the society seem to encourage the behavior this could explain the rationale for the large effect of the variable on the behavioural intention towards academic fraud. The finding seems to be in tandem with Harding et al, (2007) that study the theory of planned behavior as a model for understanding academic dishonesty in humanities and engineering undergraduate program in a California University, in that study subjective norm significantly influences student intention toward academic dishonesty. The finding of this present study also supported the finding of Ruto et al (2011) who reported that demand for good grade by parent from their wards which is one of the indicator in subjective norm can influence academic dishonesty. Similarly, the study supported the finding of Nwoye et al. (2019) where societal pressure to succeed impacted student attitude toward academic dishonesty. The societal pressure is also one of the indicator of subjective norm for this study and the indicator happen to be a strong factor influencing student perception about academic dishonesty.

The hypothesis that stated group norm would positively influence student behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty stand validated with effect size of ($\beta=0.15 < 0.01$), though the effect appears weak yet it supported Shmeleva and Semenova (2018) finding on academic dishonesty among college students in Russia the finding showed that peer influence located in contextual factor which is one of the indicator of group norm predict academic cheating most significantly. The finding of this study also revealed that peer influence an indicator of group norm influence student behavioural intention toward academic dishonesty, the finding is supported by Ruto et al. (2011) study on factors influencing cheating in undergraduate examinations in Kenya universities.

The hypothesis that stated group norm would positively influence awareness of consequences indicated an effect size of ($\beta=0.45 < 0.05$) though stand validated but surprisingly the finding is at variance with Shmeleva and Semenova (2018) who realized that perceived peer behavior and perceived probability of punishment does not discourage dishonest practice among the student.

The hypothesis that stated awareness of consequence will positively influence student behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty show a negative effect of ($\beta= -.09 < 0.05$) this finding demonstrated that awareness of consequence may not discourage the student from cheating. The finding supported Shmeleva and Semenova (2018) who realize that plagiarism rate are not contingent of the probability of punishment. In other word, student do not see punishment as deterrent or what can discourage them from involving themselves in academic dishonesty. The finding also corroborates Faley (2005) finding that revealed that student engage in academic fraud because stiff penalty and sanction was not imposed on those caught cheating and thus provide reason for the prevalence in cheating behavior among Nigerian students.

The hypothesis five and six tend to check if difference exist in the behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty of students based on student academic level (Undergraduate and postgraduate) and gender. The finding in students' level of study showed the existence of statistical difference in student behavioural intention among undergraduate and post graduate students, though the difference is trivial in magnitude and thus imply that both group of students 'share similar intention towards academic dishonesty in the setting of this study. In the same vain, a check in the difference in male and female students' behavioural intention towards academic dishonesty showed that statistical difference does not exist between male and female student intention towards academic fraud. The finding was not consistence with Ali, Nurhanis, Daniah and Mohd (2018) study that revealed statistical and significant relationship between gender and academic cheating among Malaysian Nursing students. The finding show that male student engaged in cheating more than their female counterpart. The finding of the study is also at variance with Ballantine, Larres and Mulgrew (2014) who reported that male accounting student are more prone to cheating than the female student. In other word, female students are likely to follow rule of examination than their male counterpart. While literature revealed that male student engaged more in academic fraud than the



female in some study, the present study revealed that no statistical difference in the student intention towards academic dishonesty in respective of their gender.

CONCLUSION

The study has explored the influence of societal norm on student academic dishonesty, and the finding have brought to fore a germane variable which significantly influence student behavioural pattern toward cheating in the present setting of the study. Empirical evidence showed that subjective norm more than other variables strongly and statistically contributed to students' world view on ethical behavior toward academic pursuit. Most of the indicators of subjective norm use in the study includes not limited to the following: *The people I value most would not think something is wrong with me if caught cheating; Those who can influence my behavior may not encourage me to be a total sincere student; If caught cheating in an examination those who are important to me may not bothered; My parent would expect me to cheat if the need arises during the course of my study.* This are few items use as an indicator of subjective norms and there are other salient items used for gathering the data of study. It is then obvious that what the student is exhibiting in term of ethical behavior towards learning is a reflection of society disposition to ethical behavior which has in no small measure induce student behavioural intention. With the findings of these study it is therefore imperative for the university to develop a robust curriculum on ethical behavior for all discipline and programmes of the university. Such curriculum should be made compulsory for all category of student. The curriculum should be design in a manner to transform the learner world view on why they should be honest to themselves and the society. More attention should be paid to learner character and attitude so that they can be truly to have been worthy in character and learning. Regular workshop and seminar should be carry-out for staff and students on the importance of integrity and honesty in all their dealing both in the university and outside the university. The university should create a rewards system for student who were found to consistently exhibiting good character as a mean of encouraging and

motivating them and other to strife to be a morally upright student

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