

RESEARCHING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: WAYS TO HELP RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS GIVE GENUINE RESPONSES

Inga Gaižauskaitė¹, Sonja Bjelobaba², Rubén Comas-Forgas³, Tomáš Foltýnek⁴,
Irene Glendinning⁵, Stella-Maris Orim⁵, Salim Razi⁶, Zeenath Reza Khan⁷, Laura Ribeiro⁸,
Shiva Sivasubramaniam⁹, Lorna Waddington¹⁰

¹ *Vilnius University, Lithuania*

² *Uppsala University, Sweden*

³ *Balearic Islands University, Spain*

⁴ *Mendel University in Brno, Czechia*

⁵ *Coventry University, United Kingdom*

⁶ *Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey*

⁷ *University of Wollongong in Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

⁸ *University of Porto, Portugal*

⁹ *University of Derby, United Kingdom*

¹⁰ *University of Leeds, United Kingdom*

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survey design, academic integrity, research ethics, asking sensitive questions

Whether attempting a qualitative or quantitative study, scientific research depends on the appropriate methodology to identify the target population, collect and analyse information that ensures the validity of the study and reliability of its results. Flawed research methodologies result in measurement error which is considered as the difference between the actual value and the measured one. Although it is difficult to avoid random errors, any systematic errors (e.g., invalid and/or unreliable instrument) should be avoided. However, certain areas largely depend on self-reporting by participants and researchers are left with very little option but to rely on the respondents to honestly and completely answer the questions asked. When conducting research about academic integrity, questions may deal with sensitive topics and honest answers may be self-incriminating for participants. This may be the case in most areas of study in the field of academic integrity, resulting in measurement error.

Surveys on academic integrity often include questions on academic dishonesty. They touch both upon the respondents' perceptions of others as well as their

personal dispositions and behaviour. In this regard, academic integrity and academic dishonesty can be seen as normative behaviour (e.g., like voting or exercising); thus, being more prone to a social desirability bias even when applying self-administered survey modes (Brenner and DeLamater, 2016). Moreover, self-reporting can add inherent bias depending on the respondent's mood, behaviour, attitude, honesty and many other variables that cannot be controlled (Kreitchmann et al., 2019). Sources of response bias in self-reporting can be both conscious and unconscious, including the respondent's concerns about confidentiality of answers, willingness to "help" researchers, (mis)understanding a question, memory (i.e. ability to recall), etc. (e.g. Latkin et al., 2016; Althubaiti, 2016). Similarly, response rates can vary depending on who administers surveys, the geographical location, length of the surveys and so on which can further tarnish the reliability and validity of the results (Fincham, 2008). Bearing in mind these questions on academic integrity or dishonesty are inherently linked to an institutional environment to which respondents belong, there can be additional

pressures when self-reporting. There is additional tension for participants when the research is being conducted within their own institutional environment. Therefore, there is a need to develop indirect or unobtrusive measurement procedures (e.g., Brenner and DeLamater, 2016; Vésteinsdóttir et al., 2019) and look into alternative methods that could be efficiently applied in academic integrity research, e.g., interview methods (Heath et al., 2018).

Where participation is voluntary, results may be biased and unrepresentative of the population if people holding particular views of the research topic are more likely to respond than those with other experiences or opinions. Guidance notes for participants in research about sensitive topics will usually include statements about confidentiality and anonymity, but prospective participants may not be fully convinced by this reassurance and may choose to selectively answer, give neutral responses or opt not to participate, through fear of identification. In any survey, truthful answers could be withheld for personal reasons or to avoid reputational damage to colleagues or the participant's company or institution.

Furthermore, not all research proposals and survey designs undergo rigorous ethical checking and approval. Some institutions do not have an ethical approval process and others only require approval for certain categories of research. Such limitations can

lead to surveys being administered that have badly worded questions, ambiguities and lack of information for participants. The participant responses from poorly designed surveys are difficult, perhaps impossible, to interpret fairly and accurately, potentially wasting funding, participants' contributions and opportunities to advance knowledge. Even though local ethical approval processes may differ, or not be required, the onus is on researchers to carry out their research according to an internationally acceptable code of conduct, for example, the Singapore Statement (WCRIF, 2010).

Based on our collective experience in conducting research on academic integrity (e.g. Foltýnek et al., 2017; Glendinning, 2015; Waddington and Campbell, 2020) and developing academic integrity self-evaluation tools (Gaižauskaitė et al., 2020), we propose this workshop as a platform to highlight the challenges of academic integrity surveys and collaboratively look for potential solutions. s

The workshop aims to develop a shared understanding of observed limitations of survey responses, strategies to mitigate these limitations, share experiences with other methods and techniques of data collection and how they can be implemented.

During the workshop, the participants will have the opportunity to engage in discussions of different topics in smaller groups.

WORKSHOP TAKEAWAYS

- Develop an understanding of observed limitations of survey responses.
- Develop an appreciation of experiences with alternative methods of data collection: focus group discussions, individual (qualitative) interviews, document analysis and others.
- Develop an understanding of the importance of the ethical approval process, confidentiality and informed consent when human participants are involved in academic integrity research.

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