From Surveillance to Support: Guidance and Counselling for Academic Integrity in Nigerian Distance Learning

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Abstract

This conceptual paper examines how guidance and counselling can complement, rather than replace, institutional academic-integrity systems in distance and open learning. A focused narrative review and conceptual synthesis was undertaken using peer-reviewed reviews, foundational psychological theory, assessment scholarship, and Nigerian open-distance-learning policy. The synthesis organised evidence around individual, social, institutional, technological and assessment-design factors. The literature indicates that online academic dishonesty is multidetermined: perceived opportunity, pressure, weak self-regulation, unclear rules, peer norms, assessment conditions and institutional climate interact. Evidence supports a layered response combining clear policy, authentic and varied assessment, proportionate verification, integrity education, and accessible psychosocial support; it does not justify claiming that counselling alone reduces malpractice. The paper develops a theory-informed counselling-and-integrity model for distance-learning institutions, specifies professional boundaries and privacy safeguards, and proposes measurable implementation actions relevant to Nigeria. The model should be tested through mixed-methods and quasi-experimental research before causal claims are made. **Keywords:** Academic Integrity;

Academic Dishonesty; Distance Learning; Guidance and Counselling; Online Assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Distance and open learning widen access for learners who are geographically dispersed, employed, caregiving, or otherwise unable to attend a conventional campus. The same flexibility creates assessment conditions in which students may work with limited supervision, variable connectivity and competing responsibilities. Research reviews identify plagiarism, unauthorised collaboration, use of prohibited resources, impersonation and examination-content sharing as recurring forms of online academic dishonesty, while also emphasising that the causes are not reducible to technology alone (Holden et al., 2021; Noorbehbahani et al., 2022; Chiang et al., 2022).

This distinction matters because surveillance is only one part of an integrity system. Remote proctoring, identity checks and plagiarism-detection tools may provide evidence or deterrence, but they can also create accessibility, privacy, false-positive and trust concerns. Conversely, supportive counselling cannot investigate an allegation, determine guilt or substitute for due process. The appropriate question is therefore not whether institutions should choose surveillance or support, but how they can combine proportionate assessment security with preventive education, student support, fair procedures and better assessment design.

The literature is substantial on online cheating, proctoring and assessment redesign, but less integrated on how guidance and counselling should be positioned within that broader system. This paper addresses that gap by answering three questions: (a) what individual, social and institutional mechanisms are relevant to misconduct in distance learning; (b) how do selected counselling theories explain practical interventions; and (c) what institutional model, safeguards and indicators can translate the synthesis into practice? The paper is a conceptual/narrative literature review, not an empirical evaluation. Its claims are consequently propositional and should not be read as evidence that counselling has already caused reductions in malpractice.

METHOD AND APPROACH

A focused narrative review was conducted to synthesise literature relevant to academic integrity in online or distance assessment, assessment design, counselling and student self-regulation, proctoring ethics, and Nigerian open-distance-learning policy. Priority was given to systematic reviews, peer-reviewed research, foundational theoretical works and authoritative policy or teaching resources. The review was organised thematically rather than as a full systematic review; therefore, it does not report a PRISMA-compliant search, meta-analysis or estimate of effect size. The method is appropriate for developing and justifying a conceptual framework, but it limits the strength of causal conclusions.

Analytical domain	**Question asked**	**Implication for the proposed model**
Conceptual clarity	What counts as integrity, dishonesty, misconduct and examination malpractice?	Use precise, non-interchangeable terms and distinguish authorised from unauthorised tool use.
Mechanisms	How do pressure, opportunity, norms, self-regulation and policy interact?	Offer counselling alongside education, assessment redesign, clear rules and fair enforcement.
Theory-to-practice	What does each counselling theory explain?	Map each theory to a distinct intervention mechanism rather than listing theories.
Implementation	Who acts, under what safeguards, and how is success measured?	Define roles, confidentiality boundaries, access channels and process/outcome indicators.

CONCEPTUAL CLARITY AND THE PROBLEM IN DISTANCE LEARNING

Academic integrity is a commitment to values such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage in learning, teaching and assessment (Bretag, 2016). Academic dishonesty is the student behaviour that violates those values, including cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, unauthorised collaboration and impersonation. Academic misconduct is the broader institutional or regulatory category used to describe conduct that compromises the academic process; it may include student, staff or procedural violations. Examination malpractice is the narrower term used here for dishonest conduct connected specifically with an examination or other formal assessment event. The terms overlap, but they should not be treated as synonyms.

Use of an internet search engine, generative-AI system, calculator, notes or peer collaboration is not automatically malpractice. The relevant question is whether the resource or collaboration is authorised, transparently acknowledged where required, and consistent with the assessment rules. A well-designed open-book or AI-permitted task can be entirely consistent with academic integrity; the same action may be misconduct in a closed-book assessment. Clear task-specific instructions are therefore a prevention measure, not merely an administrative detail (Ohio State University, n.d.).

Online misconduct should also be described cautiously. Reviews report perceived opportunity, access to information, peer influence, pressure and weak awareness as associated factors, but association is not proof that online anonymity or a technological vulnerability causes cheating in a particular institution (Holden et al., 2021; Chiang et al., 2022). A useful working model is interactive: pressure and low self-efficacy may increase motivation; unclear rules and weakly designed tasks may increase opportunity; peer norms and rationalisation may make dishonesty seem acceptable; and institutional support, assessment design and fair procedures may reduce or amplify these conditions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Four complementary perspectives were selected because no single theory explains the full pathway from assessment conditions to ethical action. Cognitive behavioural theory addresses beliefs and coping; Bandura_s social cognitive theory addresses modelling, norms and

selfregulation; developmental counselling addresses growth in ethical reasoning and identity; and the person-centred humanistic approach addresses empathy, autonomy and intrinsic motivation.

Together they connect the learner, the learning community and the institutional environment.

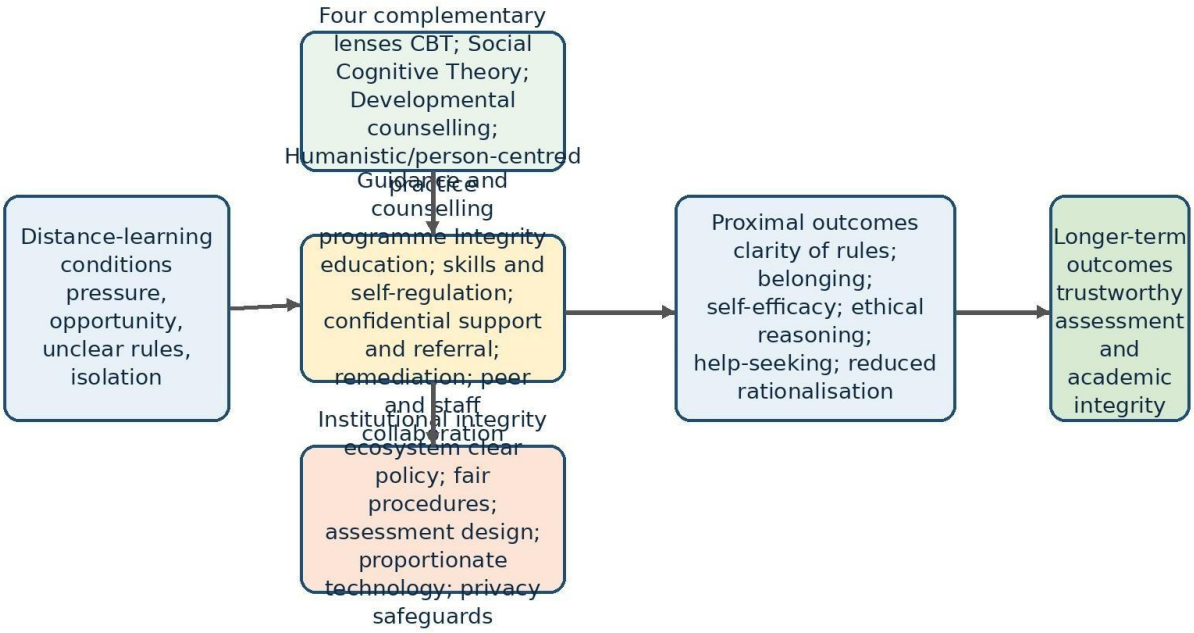


Figure 1. Theory-informed conceptual framework linking distance-learning conditions, counselling and institutional integrity.

i. Cognitive behavioural theory

Cognitive behavioural theory explains how situations are interpreted through beliefs and how those interpretations shape emotion and behaviour. In an assessment context, thoughts such as ―everyone cheats,‖ ―failure is intolerable‖ or ―I have no legitimate way to recover‖ can support anxiety, avoidance or rationalisation. Counselling can use cognitive restructuring, problemsolving, study planning and coping rehearsal to test such beliefs and build lawful alternatives. The claim is not that CBT automatically prevents misconduct; rather, it identifies modifiable cognitive and behavioural processes that may be relevant to pressure and self-regulation. The proposed intervention should therefore be evaluated through measures of

academic stress, selfefficacy, help-seeking and ethical decisionmaking, not only misconduct counts. **ii. Social cognitive theory**

Bandura‗s social learning and later social cognitive work explain behaviour through reciprocal interaction among personal factors, behaviour and environment (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Four mechanisms are especially relevant: modelling by lecturers and peers; perceived descriptive norms about how common cheating is; reinforcement through rewards or consequences; and selfregulation through goal-setting, monitoring and selfevaluation. Peer mentors can model citation, help-seeking and honest preparation; instructors can make integrity visible in feedback and course design; and institutions can align policy enforcement with procedural fairness. Counselling contributes by helping students interpret norms critically and practise selfregulation, while the institution changes the environment in which those behaviours occur (Zimmerman, 2000).

iii. Developmental counselling and ethical reasoning

―Developmental counselling‖ is specified here as a growth-oriented model rather than a standalone causal theory. It draws on developmental perspectives in which learners progressively strengthen identity, perspective-taking, moral reasoning and self-regulation through guided reflection and experience. Counsellors can use case discussions, reflective writing and decisionmaking exercises to move students from rule compliance based solely on fear of punishment toward understanding fairness, responsibility and the consequences of misrepresentation. Developmental work should be age- and contextsensitive and must not assume that a student who violates a rule lacks moral development. Its contribution is to create structured opportunities for ethical reflection and re-engagement. **iv. Person-centred humanistic practice**

Rogers‗s person-centred approach emphasises empathy, congruence and acceptance as conditions that support constructive change (Rogers, 1957, 1961). In distance learning, a respectful counselling relationship may reduce shame and make it more likely that students disclose confusion, stress or an integrity dilemma before an assessment. The approach complements CBT rather than duplicating it: person-centred practice establishes the relational climate and supports autonomy, whereas CBT offers structured methods for examining

thoughts and practising coping. Consistent with self-determination theory, supporting autonomy, competence and relatedness may strengthen internal motivation, but this remains a proposed mechanism requiring empirical testing (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

PROPOSED GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING MODEL

i. Preventive integrity education

A preventive programme should be compulsory at induction and revisited before major assessments. Counsellors, academic-integrity officers, librarians and course lecturers should jointly deliver short, scenario-based modules covering definitions, citation, collaboration boundaries, authorised technology and AI use, examination rules, helpseeking and the consequences of misconduct. Participation can be ensured through a lowstakes LMS module and an integrity-acknowledgement quiz, with alternative telephone or centre-based access for students with limited connectivity. Outcomes should include completion, rule-interpretation accuracy, confidence in seeking help and changes in reported ambiguity; completion alone is not evidence of reduced cheating (Ohio State University, n.d.; Holden et al., 2021).

ii. Psychosocial support, referral and safeguarding

Counselling should address academic stress, time management, study skills, self-efficacy and ethical decision-making. Family responsibilities, financial difficulty, disability, health concerns or mental-health symptoms should be treated as possible contextual stressors, not presumed causes of misconduct. Services should use informed consent, explain limits of confidentiality, maintain secure records, and establish referral routes for clinical, safeguarding, disability, financial or emergency needs. Counsellors should not promise absolute secrecy where there is a serious and immediate risk of harm or a lawful institutional requirement; those limits should be communicated before counselling begins.

iii. Remediation after an allegation or finding

Counselling may support a student after an allegation or finding, but it must remain separate from investigation and adjudication. A restorative conversation can be offered voluntarily, where appropriate, after procedural fairness has been protected; it may focus on understanding impact, repairing educational harm and planning re-entry. It should complement, not

automatically replace, disciplinary procedures. Safeguards include informed consent, an independent facilitator, no coercion to disclose therapeutic information, the right to appeal, protection from retaliation and a clear separation between counselling records and misconduct evidence. Serious or repeated misconduct may still require formal sanctions under institutional policy.

iv. **Institutional roles and confidentiality boundaries**

Actor	**Primary role**	**Boundary**
Counsellors	Prevention education, confidential support, referral, self-regulation and re-engagement.	Do not investigate, collect Proctoring evidence, recommend guilt or disclose counselling content except with consent or defined safety/legal exceptions.
Lecturers and assessors	Clarify task rules, design fair assessments, provide feedback and report suspected misconduct through due process.	Do not pressure students to reveal counselling information or treat suspicion as proof.
ICT/proctoring personnel	Maintain secure systems, explain data practices, preserve relevant evidence and support accessibility.	Use proportionate, validated tools; do not make unreviewed automated decisions.
Administrators /integrity officers	Publish policy, train staff, oversee investigations, appeals, data governance and quality assurance.	Separate investigative records from counselling records and ensure procedural fairness.

DISTANCE-LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION, INCLUDING NIGERIA

Nigerian open and distance learning serves learners across varied regions, schedules, languages, devices and connectivity conditions. The National Open University of Nigeria_s

open, distance and e-learning policy identifies ethical learning content and academic integrity as quality concerns (National Open University of Nigeria, 2023). The implication is practical: a support model cannot assume continuous broadband, private space, a webcam or the ability to attend synchronous sessions.

Access route	**Use**	**Implementation condition**
LMS and email	Modules, appointments, reminders, policies and asynchronous resources.	Mobile-friendly, low-data content and clear response times.
Telephone/SMS/USSD where feasible	Appointment booking, reminders, brief checkins and referral.	Consent, privacy scripts and escalation pathway; no sensitive counselling detail in ordinary SMS.
Study centres	Face-to-face counselling, supervised assessment support and digital-literacy assistance.	Private rooms, trained personnel and referral directory.
Scheduled virtual sessions	Individual or group counselling and integrity workshops.	Flexible times, practice sessions, interpreter/language support where needed and alternatives for those unable to connect.

Culturally responsive practice requires listening to students and local study-centre staff rather than making broad claims about Nigerian learners. Counsellors should use understandable language, respect religious and community values without imposing them, and recognise that

help-seeking may be affected by stigma, gender, disability, employment and family obligations. Institutional policy should be communicated consistently, but examples and delivery formats should be adapted through student consultation and pilot testing.

ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND THE SURVEILLANCE–SUPPORT RELATIONSHIP

Assessment design is central because it shapes opportunity, pressure and the type of learning that must be demonstrated. A layered approach is preferable to a single highstakes, surveillanceheavy examination. Frequent low-stakes checks, staged projects, portfolios and feedback distribute risk and create a record of learning. Authentic tasks require application to a case, workplace or community context; oral or short viva components can help verify authorship; open-book tasks can make authorised resource use explicit; and personalised prompts can require explanation rather than reproduction. These approaches are consistent with review evidence recommending oral, project-based, dynamic and portfolio assessment, but they are not cheatproof (Chiang et al., 2022; Holden et al., 2021).

Assessment form	**Opportunity reduced**	**Limitations and quality assurance**
Open-book/openresource	Concealed notes and unauthorised searching become less relevant when resources are permitted.	Requires higher-order questions, source-use and instructions marking reliability.
Oral/viva component	Impersonation and unauthored work are harder to sustain when reasoning is discussed.	Time, bandwidth, language, disability and examiner bias require moderation and alternatives.
Project/portfolio with milestones	Last-minute contract cheating and copied final products are made more visible through drafts and feedback.	Requires secure versioning, authentic supervision and consistent rubrics.

Personalised/dynamic tasks	Sharing a single answer set is less useful.	Question generation must be valid, accessible and tested for comparability.
Proctored assessment	Identity and unauthorised assistance may be deterred or documented.	Privacy, connectivity, false positives, disability access, algorithmic bias and data governance must be addressed.

Surveillance should therefore be proportionate, transparent and subordinate to educational validity. Before using remote proctoring, institutions should conduct a necessity and impact assessment; explain what is collected, why, for how long and who can access it; minimise data; provide retention and deletion rules; offer an accessible alternative where justified; and ensure human review of flags. Students should be able to challenge an automated or proctoring-based allegation. These safeguards respond to the ethical tension between trustworthy assessment and privacy rather than assuming that more monitoring is always better (Güneş, 2024; Holden et al., 2021).

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND RESEARCH AGENDA

Institutions should evaluate the model using a combination of process, proximal and outcome indicators. A fall in reported cases alone may indicate under-reporting, so interpretation must triangulate records with anonymous surveys, focus groups, assessment-quality reviews and accessibility data. A feasible pilot could compare study centres or course cohorts using a stepped implementation, measuring baseline and followup changes while controlling for course and student characteristics. The outcomes should include rule clarity, self-efficacy, belonging, helpseeking, perceived fairness, privacy concerns, assessment validity, reported incidents, substantiated cases and appeals. Qualitative evidence should examine how students experience counselling, proctoring and cultural fit.

Level	Illustrative indicator	Caution in interpretation
Process	Induction completion; counsellor training; referral response time; accessible-channel use.	Shows implementation, not effectiveness.
Proximal	Rule-interpretation accuracy; self-efficacy; ethical reasoning; perceived fairness and trust.	Use validated or piloted instruments and avoid socially desirable responses.
Outcome	Reported and substantiated cases per assessment; authorship verification; appeals; retention and achievement.	Rates are affected by reporting, enforcement and assessment exposure.
Equity/privacy	Connectivity-related access; disability accommodations; demographic differences in flags or sanctions; data-retention compliance.	Disaggregate carefully and protect confidentiality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority and responsible actors	Action	Conditions	Measurable indicator
Immediate; senate/management and integrity office	Publish a single plain-language distance-assessment integrity policy defining misconduct, authorised tools/AI, collaboration and appeal rights.	Student consultation and course-specific examples.	Policy acknowledgment and rule-interpretation accuracy above a preset target.

Immediate; counselling, library and academic units	Deliver compulsory induction plus preassessment integrity and studyskills modules.	Low-bandwidth, telephone and studycentre alternatives.	Completion, quiz performance and student-reported clarity.
High; faculties and quality assurance	Redesign high-stakes tasks into varied, scaffolded, authentic assessments with rubrics and moderation.	Workload planning, accessibility review and pilot validity checks.	Share of courses using milestones/varied tasks; moderation and appeal data.
High; ICT, dataprotection and management	Adopt proctoring only after necessity, privacy and equity review; provide human review and	Data minimisation, retention schedule, audit logs and appeal route.	Flag-to-confirmation rate, appeal outcomes and privacy incidents.
	alternatives.		
High; counselling lead and HR	Train counsellors in online practice, digital ethics, safeguarding, data protection, referral and academicintegrity boundaries.	Supervision and continuing professional development.	Training completion, competency assessment and referral response time.

Medium; research/quality unit	Pilot and evaluate the integrated model using mixed methods and disaggregated equity indicators.	Baseline measures, ethical approval and transparent reporting.	Pre-registered evaluation report and annual improvement cycle.

CONCLUSION

The central contribution of this paper is a theory-informed account of where guidance and counselling fits within a broader distance-learning integrity system. Counselling can help students interpret rules, manage pressure, develop self-regulation, seek legitimate assistance and re-engage after an incident. It cannot by itself correct invalid assessment, unclear policy, weak institutional climate, inequitable access or poorly governed surveillance. The strongest defensible position is therefore layered: prevention and support should be combined with valid assessment design, proportionate verification, fair investigation and privacy protection.

This is a conceptual synthesis, not evidence of programme effectiveness. The field still needs well-designed Nigerian and cross-context studies that measure counselling exposure, assessment changes, student experience, misconduct reporting and equity outcomes over time. Institutions should not claim that counselling reduces malpractice until such evidence is collected. They can, however, implement the model as a testable quality-improvement intervention with transparent indicators, student participation and safeguards.

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