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Research Paper

Prominence of Verbal Feigning among Graduate Students: Comparative Analysis

Yash Jagtiani[1]*, Dr. Deepa Pandey[2]

ABSTRACT

Verbal feigning, understood as the intentional distortion of verbal communication to manage social impressions, It was observed within among the young adults within educated learning communities. The present study examined association of verbal feigning among graduate students and its significance between male and female young graduates. The sample consisted of 60 graduate participants (N = 60) from an educated academic community, including 30 males and 30 females, all 18 years to 25 years. Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently enrolled in graduate programs with adequate proficiency in verbal communication. Exclusion criteria included undergraduate students, individuals below 18 years of age, and persons from non-academic or informal learning environments. Verbal feigning was assessed using the Lying in Everyday Situations (LiES) Scale (Hart et al., 2019), a freely available self-report measure designed to evaluate everyday verbal deception. The scale was administered in a standardized format under controlled conditions following informed consent. Emotional outcomes (e.g., guilt, anxiety, emotional dissonance) and social outcomes (e.g., peer trust, social acceptance, communication patterns) were examined as dependent variables. The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design. Findings suggest that there was high level of verbal feigning among graduate students, while it was also revealed that female showed higher levels of verbal feigning as compared to male.

Keywords: *Verbal feigning, Learning communities, Graduates, Verbal deception, Gender difference*

Human communication is not always a transparent reflection of internal thoughts or external realities. In everyday interactions, individuals frequently change, amplify, withhold, or distort verbal information to manage impressions, avoid conflict, or achieve socially desirable outcomes. Such deliberate transition of speech, commonly referred to as verbal feigning, represents a pervasive form of deception embedded within routine social life. Unlike visible lying in forensic or clinical contexts, verbal feigning often occurs in socially acceptable, low-risk situations and is frequently normalized within social and institutional settings. From a psychological view, verbal feigning is closely linked to self-presentation, impression management, and social desirability, wherein individuals consciously regulate verbal expressions to match with perceived social expectations.

[1]Student, AIBAS, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow Campus
[2]Associate Professor, AIBAS, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow Campus
*Corresponding Author

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Communication theories suggest that people generally operate under an assumption of honesty during interactions, a phenomenon described as the *truth-default state*. This assumption reduces uncertainty in routine communication and allows verbal feigning to function effectively without immediate detection. Consequently, verbal feigning becomes a strategic communicative tool, particularly when truth threatens one's social image, relational stability, or evaluative outcomes (Levine 2014).

Globally, research indicates that verbal deception is a common component of everyday communication across cultures, age groups, and social roles. Linguistic and psycholinguistic studies have demonstrated that deceptive verbal statements systematically differ from truthful ones in terms of lexical complexity, emotional tone, and structural features. Despite the presence of such verbal markers, individuals remain largely ineffective at detecting deception, often performing at chance levels. This paradox where deception leaves traces yet frequently goes unnoticed contributes to the persistence of verbal feigning in daily interactions. Verbal feigning is especially evident within close interpersonal relationships, including friendships, romantic partnerships, and peer groups. In such contexts, individuals may feign agreement, conceal dissatisfaction, or exaggerate emotions to maintain harmony, avoid confrontation, or preserve relational bonds. Developmental research further indicates that the capacity for verbal feigning evolves over time, becoming increasingly sophisticated with cognitive maturity, emotional regulation, and social understanding. By young adulthood, individuals are typically capable of sustaining coherent and contextually appropriate verbal deception, suggesting that verbal feigning is not merely impulsive dishonesty but a learned social competence.

Within the Indian context, verbal feigning assumes particular significance due to sociocultural emphasis on social harmony, respect for authority, and academic achievement. Educational environments in India are often characterized by high evaluative pressure, competitive performance standards, and strong expectations from family and institutions. These factors may encourage students to engage in strategic verbal behaviors, such as overstating academic preparedness, concealing stress or confusion, or presenting socially desirable narratives to peers and educators. Although direct empirical studies on verbal feigning in India remain limited, existing research on social desirability and impression management among Indian youth suggests a favorable context for such behaviors (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Goffman, 1959; Triandis, 1995).

At the regional level, particularly in states such as Uttar Pradesh, academic mobility is frequently viewed as a primary pathway to social and economic advancement (Tilak, 2002). Students within higher education institutions often navigate layered pressures arising from familial aspirations, peer comparison, and institutional evaluation (Chandra, 2017). In such environments, verbal feigning may emerge as an adaptive strategy to negotiate academic identity, manage perceived competence, and maintain social standing within learning communities (Goffman, 1959; Levine, 2014). Learning communities, encompassing students, peers, and academic environments, are inherently social and evaluative systems. They rely heavily on verbal interaction for assessment, collaboration, feedback, and relationship building. Within these settings, verbal feigning may arise in response to fear of negative judgment, performance anxiety, or the desire for social acceptance. While such behaviors may offer short-term interpersonal benefits, they may also carry emotional costs, including guilt, anxiety, emotional dissonance, and exhaustion, as well as social consequences such as reduced trust and authenticity in peer relationships. The present study seeks to examine verbal feigning among graduate students within educated learning

communities, with a focus on its emotional and social implications. By situating verbal feigning within developmental, social, and educational frameworks, the study aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how strategic verbal behavior influences student well-being, gender dynamics, and academic environments.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conceptual Foundations of Verbal Feigning

Verbal feigning is a subset of deceptive behaviour characterized by the deliberate manipulation of spoken or written language to influence another individual's beliefs, perceptions, or social judgments. Contemporary psychological literature positions verbal feigning within broader frameworks of self-presentation, impression management, and social desirability, emphasizing its strategic nature in interpersonal communication (Hart et al., 2019). In everyday social and academic contexts, deception is primarily enacted through language, making verbal indicators a critical focus for deception research. Unlike pathological lying or criminal deception, verbal feigning often serves adaptive interpersonal functions. Individuals may engage in mild exaggeration, selective disclosure, or partial truth-telling to maintain social harmony, protect self-image, or avoid negative evaluation. Within learning communities, students may feign understanding during lectures, exaggerate preparation levels, or conceal confusion to preserve academic identity. Thus, verbal feigning operates not merely as dishonesty but as a socially regulated communicative strategy embedded within normative interaction patterns.

Truth-Default Theory (TDT) offers a foundational explanation for the prevalence of verbal feigning in routine interactions. According to TDT, individuals operate in a "truth-default state," wherein honesty is presumed unless sufficient contextual cues prompt suspicion (Levine, 2014). This communicative assumption allows verbal feigning to persist with minimal immediate detection, particularly in low-risk, cooperative environments such as classrooms and peer learning groups, where trust is normative and verification is rare. The theory further suggests that deception surfaces when truth presents a problem for goal attainment, thereby framing verbal feigning as a goal-directed behavior rather than a random communicative anomaly.

Empirical investigations into linguistic deception consistently demonstrate that false statements differ systematically from truthful ones. In a large-scale linguistic analysis of approximately 1,500 true and false statements, false utterances were found to be less lexically complex, more concise, and more concrete, with a higher frequency of positive emotion words and fewer negative emotion terms (Masip et al., 2023). These linguistic patterns suggest that verbal feigning involves simplification strategies, likely reflecting attempts to reduce cognitive load and avoid inconsistencies during deception.

Despite identifiable verbal markers, human accuracy in detecting deception remains limited. Research examining acoustic-prosodic and lexical cues to deception demonstrated that individuals rarely perform better than chance when judging truthfulness, even when confident in their assessments (Levitan et al., 2020). Moreover, cues perceived as trustworthy by listeners were often unrelated to actual truthfulness, revealing a significant mismatch between perceived and objective indicators of deception.

This discrepancy highlights a cognitive bias in deception detection: individuals rely on heuristics rather than empirically valid cues. In learning communities, where peer trust and collaborative engagement are central, such biases may allow verbal feigning to go

unnoticed. Students may interpret fluency, confidence, or politeness as indicators of honesty, even when linguistic markers suggest otherwise.

The persistence of verbal feigning, therefore, may be explained not solely by its structural subtlety but by social overconfidence in deception detection. This dynamic has implications for academic integrity, peer evaluation, and teacher–student communication, where credibility assessments influence grading, recommendation, and collaborative opportunities.

Educational Development in Verbal lying

Developmental research indicates that verbal lying becomes increasingly sophisticated with age as executive functions such as inhibitory control, working memory, and cognitive flexibility mature, enabling individuals to construct and maintain coherent deceptive narratives (Lee et al., 2002; Talwar & Lee, 2008; Evans & Lee, 2011). Within educational settings, structured evaluation systems, competitive academic climates, and peer norms further shape deceptive behaviors, particularly when performance goals outweigh mastery goals (McCabe et al., 2001; Anderman & Murdock, 2007). From a communicative standpoint, the truth-default assumption described by Timothy R. Levine (2014) explains how such verbal feigning often operates without immediate detection in classroom environments that presuppose honesty. Moreover, moral reasoning development, as conceptualized by Lawrence Kohlberg (1984), suggests that adolescents and young adults may cognitively justify deception when it protects academic outcomes or social standing. In the Indian context, although direct studies on verbal feigning remain limited, research on social desirability using the Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale, alongside evidence of heightened academic pressure and reputational concerns among students, indicates that educational advancement and evaluative stress may create a conducive environment for strategic verbal misrepresentation (Deb et al., 2015; Tilak, 2002). Collectively, these findings suggest that verbal feigning in educational contexts is both developmentally enabled and institutionally reinforced.

Developmental Perspectives on Verbal Deception

Developmental research underscores that verbal feigning is not an innate behavior but a skill acquired and refined over time. Talwar and Lee (2008) demonstrated that while children as young as six years engage in verbal deception, their ability to maintain consistency across deceptive statements improves significantly with age. This improvement was strongly correlated with second-order belief understanding, highlighting the role of theory of mind in sustaining coherent verbal deception.

Talwar and Crossman (2011) further established that children's deceptive behaviors evolve from simple denial to complex narrative fabrication as cognitive and social competencies develop. Importantly, the motivation for deception shifts across development from avoiding punishment in early childhood to managing social impressions in adolescence and adulthood.

By young adulthood, individuals possess advanced executive functioning, emotional regulation, and social awareness. These capacities enable sophisticated verbal feigning, particularly in environments characterized by performance evaluation and social comparison. Thus, graduate students represent a population developmentally equipped to engage in strategic verbal manipulation when motivated by academic or relational concerns.

Verbal feigning within different gender

Research examining gender differences in verbal feigning suggests that disparities are more motivational than purely frequency-based. Foundational work by Bella M. DePaulo et al. (1996) indicates that men and women report comparable overall rates of lying; however, men are more likely to engage in self-enhancing or competence-oriented deception, whereas women more frequently employ relationally motivated lies aimed at maintaining social harmony. This pattern aligns with Alice H. Eagly's (1987) Social Role Theory, which posits that gendered behavior reflects internalized societal expectations of agency for men and communality for women. Within educational contexts, such role socialization may translate into males using verbal feigning to project academic competence or status, while females may adopt strategic misrepresentation to avoid negative evaluation or interpersonal conflict. Developmental findings by Kang Lee and colleagues further suggest that although boys and girls begin lying at similar developmental stages, contextual reinforcement shapes the form and function of deception (Talwar & Lee, 2008). Additionally, higher education research by Donald L. McCabe et al. (2001) reports that male students exhibit slightly higher rates of overt academic dishonesty, whereas female students often demonstrate higher socially desirable responding, as measured by the Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale. Collectively, these findings suggest that gender differences in verbal feigning within educational environments are shaped by socialization patterns, impression management demands, and evaluative pressures rather than substantial differences in deceptive capacity.

Rationale of the Study

Existing studies have largely focused on forensic detection, developmental lying in children, or technological identification of deception, leaving a gap in understanding how everyday verbal feigning operates among young adults in academic settings and how it affects their emotional and social functioning. Despite extensive research on deception and verbal lie detection, limited attention has been given to verbal feigning specifically within graduate learning communities, particularly in Indian educational settings. graduate students frequently engage in verbal self-presentation to manage academic expectations, peer relationships, and evaluative pressures. Understanding verbal feigning is important because, while it may serve as an adaptive strategy for social acceptance and academic functioning, it may also contribute to emotional discomfort and altered peer trust. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine verbal feigning among graduate students and its significance between male and female gender differences.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of verbal feigning among graduate students.
2. To explore gender differences in feigning among undergraduate students.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant level of verbal feigning among graduate students.
2. There will be a significant difference in verbal feigning between male and female graduate students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine verbal feigning among graduate students within an educated learning community and gender. The study relied on standardized self-report measures and data was obtained from educational institutes such as Amity university, IIM Bodhgaya and SRM Gaziabaad.

Sample

The sample comprised 60 graduate students (N =60) drawn from an educated academic community. The participants included 30 males and 30 females, ensuring equal gender representation. All participants were 18 years of age to 25 years of age, reflecting young adult developmental status appropriate for graduate-level academic engagement. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, as participants were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria relevant to the objectives of the study.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were included in the study based on the following criteria:

1. Individuals currently enrolled in a graduate academic program.
2. Age of 18 years or above.
3. Adequate proficiency in verbal communication.
4. Belonging to an educated learning community.
5. Willingness to participate and provide informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded from the study if they met any of the following conditions:

1. Individuals not enrolled in any graduate programs.
2. Individuals below 18 years and above 25 years.
3. Participants from non-academic or informal learning environments.
4. Individuals with reported difficulty in understanding or responding to self-report questionnaires.
5. Incomplete or improperly filled questionnaires.

Tool Used

- **Lying in Everyday Situations (LiES) Scale:** The Lying in Everyday Situations (LiES) scale developed by Christopher L. Hart et al. (2019) consists of 14 items designed to assess self-reported lying behavior in everyday contexts, structured into two subscales: Relational Lying (Items 1–7) and Vindictive Lying (Items 8–14). Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Scoring involves summing all 14 items for a total LiES score, with possible scores ranging from 14 to 98, while each subscale ranges from 7 to 49; higher scores indicate greater propensity toward everyday deception. The scale demonstrates strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported at approximately .89 for the total scale, .86 for the Relational subscale, and .87 for the Vindictive subscale. Confirmatory factor analysis supported a two-factor structure, providing evidence of construct validity, while positive associations with dark personality traits and manipulativeness supported convergent validity; discriminant and criterion validity were also established through distinct subscale differentiation and predictive associations with self-reported deceptive behavior.

RESULT ANALYSIS

Table 1 Showing Descriptive Statistics of Verbal Feigning between Male Graduate Students and Female Graduate Students (N=60)

Variables	Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Minimum	Maximum
Males	30	45.60	22.589	0.769	14	98
Females	30	39.20	18.100	0.783	14	83

Table 1 indicates significant statistical difference in Verbal Feigning between Male Graduate Students and Female Graduate Students.

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test showing significant relationship in verbal feigning between Male Graduate Students and Female Graduate Students (N=60)

Verbal feigning	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	30	45.60	22.589	58	1.211	0.231
Female	30	39.20	18.100			

Table 2 indicates no significant difference between Male Graduate Students and Female Graduate Students on verbal feigning. Thus, in this case, hypothesis 2 is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined verbal feigning among graduate students within an educated learning community, with particular attention to gender differences. Globally, research has consistently demonstrated that verbal deception is embedded in everyday communication and manifests through identifiable linguistic patterns such as reduced lexical complexity and increased cognitive regulation (Masip et al., 2023). Despite the presence of such markers, individuals remain largely inaccurate in detecting deception (Levitan et al., 2020), allowing verbal feigning to persist in routine interpersonal environments. Within academic contexts, where communication forms the basis of evaluation, credibility, and peer interaction, verbal feigning becomes especially relevant. The prevalence of verbal feigning in routine interactions. According to TDT, individuals operate in a "truth-default state," wherein honesty is presumed unless sufficient contextual cues prompt suspicion (Levine, 2014) , literatures suggesting verbal feigning as evident composition for individual's pattern of prominently used in communication.

The first hypothesis proposed that there would be a significant difference in verbal feigning between male and female graduate students. Descriptive statistics (Table 1) indicated that male students (M = 45.60, SD = 22.589) reported higher mean verbal feigning scores compared to female students (M = 39.20, SD = 18.100). The distribution for both groups showed moderate positive skewness, suggesting variability but no extreme distortion in responses. Although the mean difference appears noticeable at a descriptive level, inferential analysis (Table 2) revealed that this difference was not statistically significant, $t(58) = 1.211$, $p = .231$. Therefore, the hypothesis predicting a significant gender difference in verbal feigning was not supported. The observed mean variation may reflect social or contextual influences; however, statistically, verbal feigning tendencies did not differ reliably between male and female graduate students in this sample.

The second hypothesis examined whether verbal feigning significantly differed between male and female graduate students. Based on the independent samples *t*-test results, this hypothesis was rejected due to the absence of statistical significance. The lack of a significant difference indicates that verbal feigning may function as a common adaptive strategy across genders within academic learning communities. This finding aligns with broader deception research suggesting that gender differences in everyday verbal deception are often minimal when contextual factors are controlled. Verbal feigning, as supported by cognitive-load theory and linguistic research, appears to be more strongly influenced by situational demands and communicative goals than by biological sex differences. Existing literature has largely focused on forensic deception detection, developmental lying in children, or technological identification of deception cues. Limited empirical attention has

been given to verbal feigning within postgraduate academic environments, particularly in non-Western contexts. The present findings contribute to this gap by empirically examining verbal feigning in a graduate student population and demonstrating that gender may not be a primary differentiating factor in such behaviors.

CONCLUSION

In summary, while descriptive trends indicated slightly higher verbal feigning among male graduate students, inferential analysis demonstrated no statistically significant gender difference. Verbal feigning appears to operate as a shared communicative strategy within academic environments rather than a gender-specific behavior. Beyond statistical interpretation, verbal feigning represents a crucial dimension of human social functioning. It reflects the fundamental human tendency to align oneself with societal frameworks, maintain belongingness, and negotiate identity within evaluative systems. As such, verbal feigning is not merely an act of deception but a psychologically embedded mechanism through which individuals adapt to social expectations, preserve relational stability, and sustain participation within structured communities. Understanding this phenomenon is essential for promoting authentic communication and psychological well-being within higher education settings.

Future Implications

The findings of the present study indicate that demographic variables such as gender may not significantly predict verbal feigning among graduate students, thereby highlighting the need for future research to prioritize contextual and psychological determinants. Subsequent investigations should examine variables such as academic stress, social desirability, emotional regulation, communication anxiety, and peer evaluation pressure to better understand the motivational and regulatory mechanisms underlying verbal feigning in learning communities. Longitudinal designs would be particularly useful in determining whether sustained engagement in verbal feigning contributes to emotional exhaustion, diminished authenticity, or erosion of interpersonal trust over time. Furthermore, culturally sensitive research within Indian academic contexts is necessary to explore how sociocultural norms surrounding conformity, achievement, and impression management influence verbal self-presentation. Integrating mixed-method approaches such as linguistic analysis alongside self-report measures may also enhance ecological validity and theoretical precision.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study is subject to several limitations. The relatively small and localized sample restricts the generalization of findings to broader populations of graduate students. The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation, preventing conclusions about the directional relationship between verbal feigning and emotional or social outcomes. Reliance on self-report measures may have introduced response biases, particularly given the socially evaluative nature of deception-related constructs. Additionally, the exclusion of moderating variables such as academic stress or social desirability reduces explanatory depth. These limitations underscore the need for more comprehensive and methodologically rigorous investigations to advance understanding of verbal feigning within higher education environments.

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Conflict of Interest

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