Correlates of Examination Malpractice and Academic Performance of Primary School Students in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study investigated correlates of examination malpractice and academic performance in Primary Science among primary six pupils in Cross River State, Nigeria. Two hypotheses were tested and two instruments were used for data collection. They were correlates of examination malpractice questionnaire (CEMQ) and a 50-item primary science achievement test. These instruments were administered to 1818 pupils out of 68,201 pupils in 70 schools. A proportionate stratified random sampling was adopted and stratified into three educational zones with different populations. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r), One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Independent t-test. There was significant relationship between correlates of examination malpractice (self-efficacy and moral tone of the school) and pupil’s academic performance. This study concludes that pupils should be helped to develop high self-efficacy and schools should provide a climate devoid of cheating to enable pupils to perform well. Besides, pupils should be taught high efficacy beliefs, which is the key to success.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, Moral tone, examination malpractice, academic performance.

Introduction
Low academic performance of pupils in internal/external examinations and the decision to cheat is traceable to pupils’ self-efficacy, the ability of students to perform in a difficult situation or carry out a difficult task. Murdock et al. (2001) maintained that low academic self-efficacy; essentially students’ belief in their inability to carry out tasks required for high performance is closely linked with cheating. Pupils’ self-concept, self-esteem and academic self-efficacy have significant roles to play in pupil’s decision to cheat or not. Pupils with low academic self-efficacy and low achievement need culminate in low self-esteem will find it difficult to resist cheating when faced with difficult tasks such as examination. In the absence of the zeal to work hard and control one’s feelings of competency, examination malpractice will set in.

The morality of school has a lot to tell on how pupils behave in school. When its low, the pupils will be motivated indulge in examination malpractice so that they can easily pass examinations. In such a school, not only would the students be involved, the entire school community would be as well, hence some schools indulge in automatic promotion from class to class which is in itself a malpractice (Denga & Denga, 1998).

Background
Self-efficacy or self-concept of ability is the perception one holds to perform a task. According to Hergennahn & Olso (1997), its is referred as what one is capable of doing that arises from various sources that include accomplishments, failures, successes, and verbal persuasion. Perceived self-efficacy plays a major role in self-regulated behaviors and often affects students’ functioning by influencing activities, efforts and persistence. Schunk (2001)
affirmed that self-efficacy influences students’ choice of activities. Persons with high perceived self-efficacy as indicated by Santrock (2003) try, accomplish and persist longer at tasks than those with low self-efficacy. Those who have low self-efficacy are more likely to engage in examination malpractice and perform low in academics.

On the other hand, students with low self-efficacy are likely to attribute their failings to external factors other than themselves. They perceive themselves as ineffective therefore prone to cheating in examination in order to measure up with those who have high self-efficacy. Anderman et al (1998) in a study involving 285 Urban middle school students found that cheating student tend to engage in self-handicapping behaviors such as making excuses or attributing failure to circumstances as opposed to ability. This implies that students who attribute failure to other factors other than ability have low perceived self-efficacy and are more likely to cheat and perform low in academics. Murdock et al. (2001) reported that students’ believed in their inability to carry out tasks required for high performance so there was a link between self-efficacy and cheating. Similarly, reports showed relationship between self-concept and academic ability (Brookover, 1967; Amefuna, 2003)). For example, 500 high school children participated in a 6-year longitudinal program where self-concept questionnaire were administered and the result revealed that self-concept and school achievement were correlated in all grade levels.

The development of self-esteem depends on the individual’s sense of significance, competence and power and children with low self-esteem were liable to hold faulty beliefs (Coopersmith, 1970; Crowl et al. 1997). Also, Bandura (2000) maintained that once false beliefs are established, they become self-perpetuating because those holding these false beliefs seek out individuals or groups who share the same false beliefs. Most students who cheated in exams also sat close to each other. Primary school pupils have gradually internalized a false belief that cheating is a normal way of writing examination thereby engaging in the act without really knowing the implications and consequences. Schunk at al. (1987) carried out a study on elementary school children who were experiencing difficulty in Mathematics. The researchers had the students observe video tapes of other students under the variety of learning conditions: (i) Some of the students observed a teacher helping students solve problems. (ii) Others observed peer models who solved the problems easily and then make positive statements reflecting self-efficacy. (iii) Still others observed coping models in which students had difficulty and make mistakes but also utter coping statement. At the end of the experiments, it was revealed that observation of coping models seemed to produce the most beneficial result and improve the students’ self-efficacy. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that pupils can be helped to develop high self-efficacy through observation of coping model in difficult situation who were able to overcome their difficulties. This will enable the students to learn to withstand difficult tasks such as perceived difficulties in examination. Also, positive self-esteem is not only important but also likely to be more motivated to learn (Crowl et al. 1997).

Lobel & Levanon (1988:122) investigated an issue on the effects of personality and situational variables on the cheating practices of 228 children aged 10-12 years. They concluded that “children with high self-esteem and low need for approval cheated significantly less than the children with high self-esteem and high need for approval who behaved similarly to the children with low self-esteem. Gellerman in Peretomode (1991) affirmed that college students who have a strong achievement drive will usually get better grades than equally bright students with weaker needs for achievement. Several investigators have worked on the relationship between either intelligence or school achievement and cheating. The majority of studies indicated that students who are lower in intelligence or school achievement may cheat more frequently (Bushway & Nash, 1977). Similarly, efforts have been made to define environmental factors that foster cheating; considerable attempt has
also been made to define the personal characteristics of cheaters with sometimes contradictory results. Few of the characteristics highlighted are that, cheaters in comparison with their non-cheating peers tend to score low in “IQ” tests and have lower grades-point averages, are careless, self-sufficient, more neurotic, more extroverted, over ambitious (Underwood, 2003). On the whole cheaters have peculiar characteristics that make them prone to cheating in examination.

The school is a miniature of the society. What therefore exist in the society will equally be obtainable in the school. That is why Lindgren (1976) rightly said that frequent occurrence of examination malpractice in our educational system stems from tolerance of dishonesty in today’s society. Okoro (2001) is of the view that the permissive attitude of the school authorities and those involved in the supervision and invigilation of examinations aggravate the situation. The author went further to allege that some school principals and some proprietors of schools foster examination malpractice to maintain the prestige of their school. Suffice it to reiterate that the school is a microcosm of society and so what happens in the school is a reflection of what is happening in the society. The implication of the above views is that the school is simply reflecting what is going on in the society. In the same vein, Ekpo (1991) confirmed that examination malpractice in schools is the product of a society which nurtures cheating and turns cheating into celebrities. It is important to recognize that examination malpractice has indeed penetrated all schools including religious schools. Supporting this view, Godfrey (2002) opined that the incidence of cheating know no boundaries, state, private, independent and catholic schools, all gain dishonorable mention during a board investigation of academic malpractice. It is therefore not out of place to say that the moral tone or climate of the school can encourage examination malpractice of school pupils.

Corroborating the above statement, Smith (2005) maintained that the moral climate of the school influences the amount of cheating. Also, Bushway and Nash (1977) said that the moral tone of the school can have a positive effect on the characters of the students as well as on the incidence of cheating in the school and that a good emotional tone in the classroom and instruction about not to cheat before taking a test led to less cheating. Vitro (1971) in Smith (2005) found that cheaters generally are people who may have received several punishments or are not punished at all. The author suggest that a moderate degree of discipline results in children who internalized moral values and are more honest in their school work. Sheriff (2000) acknowledged that marked changes have taken place in the moral education of students at all levels during the past decades. The author reiterated that the moral traditional education which emphasis moral tradition has gradually given way to a new morality that is silent about ‘virtue’. This insinuates that the emphasis placed on moral values in the traditional education in those days is no longer there. There is no provision for moral instruction or values education in schools. Therefore the emergence of a morality without virtue is upheld in schools hence changes in the societal values which is based on unwanton competition and materialism. Furthermore, Sheriff (2000) opined that the present educational system has kept its distance from traditional virtues. The author maintained that the students unencumbered by the ‘old bag of virtues’, arrive toting a rag bag of virtues whose contents may roughly itemized as follows: Psychological egoism (the belief that the primary motive for actions is selfishness), moral relativism (the doctrine that what is praiseworthy or contemptible is a matter of cultural conditioning), and to be culturally and socially aware is to understand and excuse the punitive wrong doer). Another item in the bag is the conviction that the seat of moral responsibility is found in the society and its institutions, not in individuals (p.9). The implication here is that the old bag of virtues is exchanged for a new bag full of selfishness, cultural conditioning and an understanding with and excusing the wrong doer. As such, various individuals who make up the society and school community
Materials and Methods

Purpose of Study

The major purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which examination malpractice relate to pupils academic performance in primary science. Specifically the study seeks to examine the extent to which: (i) The influence of self-efficacy on pupils’ cheating behavior relates to their academic performance in primary science. (ii) The influence of moral tone of the school on cheating behavior relates to examination malpractice and academic performance in primary science. In order to carry out the investigation on this issue, the following research questions are formulated to guide the direction of the study: (i) To what extent does the influence self-efficacy on pupils’ cheating behavior relate to their academic performance in primary science? (ii) How does the influence of moral tone of the school on pupils’ cheating behavior relate to their academic performance in primary science?

Hypotheses

In an attempt to answer the above research questions, the following hypotheses are formulated to guide the study.

1. The influence of self-efficacy on pupils’ cheating behavior does not significantly relate to their academic performance in primary science
2. The influence of moral tone of the school on pupils’ cheating behavior does not significantly relate to their academic performance in primary science.

The study adopted the Expost-facto research design. The population of the study consisted of all the 2005/2006 academic session of primary six pupils in the three Educational zones of Cross River State. The total was 68,201 pupils with 34396 males and 33805 females. A proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select 70 schools out of 994 to participate in the study. A simple random sampling technique of hat and draw method was further used to select 1,818 pupils who participated in the study. Two instruments were used for data collection via- perception of examination malpractice questionnaire(EMQ) and a 50 item primary science achievement test. The instruments were face validated as well as content wise. The reliability was carried out using Cronbach Coefficient alpha method with estimates ranging from 0.50–0.90 which were considered appropriate. The instruments were administered after which data was coded for analysis.

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1: The influence of self-efficacy on pupils’ cheating behavior does not significantly relate to their academic performance in primary science. The result is presented in Table 1. The results showed that the Pearson Correlation (r) analysis was 0.2258 and it was observed to be greater than the critical r-value of 0.1946 with 1816 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Going by the result, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis is upheld. This means that the influence of self-efficacy on pupils’ cheating behavior has a significant relationship with their academic performance. That is, high self-efficacy by pupils help them to tackle problems even when the problems seem to be difficult.
Table 1. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) analysis of the relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance in primary science.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Σx</th>
<th>Σx²</th>
<th>Σy</th>
<th>Σy²</th>
<th>Σxy</th>
<th>r-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy (X)</td>
<td>1818</td>
<td>27569</td>
<td>507016</td>
<td>77011</td>
<td>1195045</td>
<td>1195045</td>
<td>0.2258*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance (y)</td>
<td></td>
<td>77011</td>
<td>3425496</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P < .05; df = 1816; critical r-value = 0.1946

Hypothesis 2: This hypothesis postulated that the influence of moral tone of the school on pupils’ cheating behaviour does not significantly relate to their academic performance in primary science. The result is presented in Table 2. From Table 2, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient analysis showed an r-value of 0.2753, which is greater than the critical r-value of 0.1964 with 1816 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. From the result, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was upheld that showed the influence of moral tone of the school on pupils’ cheating behavior has significant relationship with their academic performance. This also implies that high moral tone or climate of a school encourages pupils to study and achieve better scores while low moral tone encourages cheating.

Table 2. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) analysis of the relationship between the influence of moral tone of the school and academic performance in primary science

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Σx</th>
<th>Σx²</th>
<th>Σy</th>
<th>Σy²</th>
<th>Σxy</th>
<th>r-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral tone of the school (X)</td>
<td>1818</td>
<td>28065</td>
<td>519014</td>
<td>77011</td>
<td>1221426</td>
<td>1221426</td>
<td>0.2753*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance (y)</td>
<td></td>
<td>77011</td>
<td>3425496</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P < .05; df = 1816; critical r-value = 0.1946
The finding of hypothesis 1 revealed that there is a significant relationship between the influence of self-efficacy on pupils’ cheating behavior and their academic performance in primary science. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This by implication means that self-efficacy; pupils’ ability to control their feelings of competency has a relationship with their academic performance. This could be that pupils have low self-efficacy and low need for achievement and as such could not strive to perform academically high as they supposed to be. This finding agrees with the findings of Murdock et al. (2000), who found that low academic self-efficacy, essentially students’ belief in their inability to carry out tasks required for high performance was a factor that warrants cheating among students. This finding is in consonance with the finding of Lobel & Levanon (1988), who found in a study concerning the effect of personality and situational variables that children with high self-esteem and low need for approval cheated significantly less than those with high self-esteem and high need for approval. This finding is in consonance with the findings of several other studies. For instance, Bandura (1980b) maintained that persons with high perceived self-efficacy will normally experience less uncertainty than those with low perceived self-efficacy who are likely to attribute their failings to external factors other than themselves. Furthermore, they always perceived themselves as ineffective and are prone to cheating in order to measure up with their counterparts with high self-efficacy. The likely explanation is that when pupils have low self-efficacy, they will find it difficult to learn and study science concept which may go a long way to influence their decision to cheat.

The finding of this study further corroborates Marsh et al (1985) views that academic self-esteem predicts children’s school achievement as well as their willingness to try hard at challenging tasks. This is because if one has not adequately developed academic self-esteem, he/she will not see any need of studying hard.

The analysis of hypothesis 2 showed that there is a significant relationship between the influence of moral tone of the school on pupils’ cheating behavior and their academic performance. This could be due to the moral climate of the schools that influence on pupils’ cheating behavior evident in their academic performance. Positive moral climate enhances pupils’ academic performance that corroborates the views of Okoro (2001) on how permissive attitude of the school authorities and those involved in the supervision and invigilation of examinations are responsible for academic dishonesty among students. In support of this, Ekpo (1999) affirmed that examination malpractice in schools is the product of society, which nurtures cheating and turns cheating into celebrities. The finding of this study further lend credence to Godfrey (2002) views on how cheating know no boundaries, state, private, independent and catholic schools, for all gain dishonorably mentioned during a board investigation of academic malpractice. The finding is also supportive of Smith (2005) who opined moral climate of school influences the amount of cheating. This implies that low moral tone of school promote cheating whereas high moral tone reduces the incidence. In agreement, Bushway & Nash (1977) affirmed, moral tone of school can have a positive effect on the character of student as well as incidence of cheating in school and a good emotional tone in the classroom and instruction about not to cheat before taking a test and great difficulty in cheating led to less cheating. Sheriff (2000) acknowledged that marked changes have taken place in moral education of students at all levels during the past decades hence moral traditional education which emphasis moral tradition has gradually given way to a new morality that is silent about ‘virtue’. This insinuates that the emphasis placed on moral values in the traditional education in those days is no longer there. Therefore the emergence of a morality without virtue is upheld in schools hence changes in the societal values which is based on unwanton competition and materialism. Furthermore, Sheriff (2000:9) opined that the present educational system has kept its distance from traditional virtues. The author
maintained that the students unencumbered by the ‘old bag of virtues’, arrive toting a rag bag of virtues whose contents may roughly itemized as follows;

- Psychological egoism (the belief that the primary motive for actions is selfishness),
- moral relativism (the doctrine that what is praiseworthy or contemptible is a matter of cultural conditioning), and to be culturally and socially aware is to understand and excuse the punitive wrong doer).
- Another item in the bag is the conviction that the seat of moral responsibility is found in the society and its institutions, not in individuals.

The implication here is that the old bag of virtues is exchanged for a new bag full of selfishness, cultural conditioning and an understanding with and excusing the wrong doer. As such, various individuals who make up the society and school community cheat their way out with a conviction that the seat of morality is found in schools and the society and not in individuals, failing to understand that they as individuals form the society and the school. The school as a social system should strive to maintain standards through the practice of abiding by the rules and regulations guiding examinations so that students will learn virtues of dedication, honesty, integrity, wisdom and self-sacrifice. The situation in the schools today is a reflection of what is happening in the society hence the school is miniature of the society.

**Conclusion**

Based on the above findings, it is concluded that pupil’s self-efficacy and moral tone of the school has a significant relationship with pupil’s cheating behavior which affects their academic performance in primary science. Therefore the ability to persist in difficult task is needed by all pupils to enable them refrain from exam malpractice. Also they need a morally stable school to strive in order to avoid the act.

**References**


