



THE CASUAL EFFECTS OF INDIVIDUAL BELIEF AND IDEOLOGY IN THE DETERMINANTS OF DISHONESTY AMONG STUDENTS OF ENUGU STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION(TECHNICAL), NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of self-concept and resilience on academic dishonesty among undergraduates of Enugu State College of Education (Technical). One hundred forty-nine participants (149) comprising of 78 males and 71 females were recruited in the study with a mean age of 25.38 years and standard deviation (SD) of 6.51. To assess variables of interest, three standardized instruments were used: 23-item Academic Dishonesty Scale (ADS), the 4-item measure of resilience and 30-item scale self-concept. The cross-sectional survey design utilized purposive sampling to recruit respondents. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regressions. Two (2) hypotheses were proposed; and findings revealed that resilience was a contributing variable to academic dishonesty while students with low self-concept was more prone to academic dishonesty than students with high self-concept. In view of the findings, discussions were made and conclusion reached, which yielded eclectic policy implications, practical recommendations and robust suggestions for future studies.

Keywords: Academic dishonesty, determinants, resilience, self-concept, students.

Introduction

Presently, education in Nigeria is suffering from the effects of cheating during periods of evaluation otherwise known as examination. Right from primary through to secondary, all the way to tertiary educational level, cheating as a student during examination has reached a troubling height. Idaka *et al.* (2011) opined that one of the major consequences of examination

misconduct is that students are given grades that in no way reflect the correct picture of their intelligence. Academic dishonesty also known as cheating in examination, occurs virtually in all country around the world in varying degrees. Being a questionable behaviour, academic dishonesty involves some kind of deception, with negative psychosocial effects (Trost, 2009). Education permits individuals to develop and acquire

necessary skills that will ultimately prepare them for survival in the real world. This is because, the school environment provides the enabling environment for students to model their teachers, and to learn in an objective way that is measurable through test and examinations. However, dishonesty in the tertiary educational system reduces the quality of outcomes, which is now common in most schools. As a result of the increase in reported cases of examination malpractice, researchers and scholars have turned their attention towards academic dishonesty during examination in higher institutions. Academic dishonesty is gradually becoming a monster that is bent on consuming the Nigerian citadels of learning (Afokasade & Suleiman, 2014). In most developing countries, such as Nigeria, corruption has become a growing phenomenon. It is widespread, permeating every part of our existence, including schools and examinations. In the latest Corruption Perceptions Index, Nigeria was ranked as one of the most corrupt countries. The rot is so bad to the extent that not just students, but teachers, government officials, and parents all appear to be caught in such web of deceit and dishonesty (Babu et al., 2011; Patnayakuni & Sundaram, 2021).

The situation is too critical now that reports has it that money change hands and some female students even offer their bodies as payment in order for them to be allowed to cheat and come out with good grades eventually (Patnayakuni &

Sundaram, 2021; Underwood, 2006). Sule (2009) in his work asserted that Nigerian's educational system is currently dysfunctional and may collapse due to the high level of examination malpractice. This was further confirmed when a 2012 report indicated that Nigeria occupied the first position in the index of World Examination Malpractice (Omeri, 2012). Due to truancy, difficulty in studying, and spending more time chatting with friends or watching television or films, even the intelligent ones are looking for a way to engage in cheating during examination because they do not prepare adequately for examination. In addressing the menace of academic dishonesty, the researchers incorporate resilience as a possible predictor of academic dishonesty.

On the other hand, resilience refers to the ability to effectively handle stressful situations (Johnson *et al.*, 2011). Within the field positive psychology, resilience has emerged as a topic of importance because it showcases what people can do to resolve challenging situations that appear insurmountable (Reivich *et al.*, 2011). Resilience is the innate ability of an individual to positively cope with prolonged stressors (Docena, 2015). Resilience describes two major characteristics: (1) the capacity of an individual to endure high amount of stress and (2) the capacity to recover from perturbation (Coutu, 2002; Manyena & Gordon, 2014). Research has shown that people with high amount of resilience naturally inclined to engage in healthy



forms of coping. Resilient individuals perceive challenges as a means for personal growth as they usually will wait out the storm (Britt *et al.*, 2001). As a productive factor, resilience interacts with stressors in a bid to reduce the probability of social vices such as academic dishonesty. More so, within the school, resilience has been viewed as an asset which aids students' mental health requirement, serving as a protective factor (Hartley, 2012). Therefore, understanding the causative factors of resilience as a construct among students could go a long way to reveal important underlying facts that can aid in tackling academic dishonesty. As with other variables previously analysed, self-concept is believed to predict cheating in examination. Morrison (2001) explained that self-concept connotes interplay between the individual and the environment, in which an individual's self-perception becomes more organised as one matures (Pastorino & Doyle-Portillo, 2013). As one of the most important subjects in the social sciences and education, self-concept with many dimensions, contributes to human behaviour. Cornelius-Ukpepi *et al.* (2012) argued that people with low levels of self-concept are likely to score high on external locus of control; they view themselves as ineffective and susceptible to cheat in examinations in order to measure up with those who have high self-concept. Negative self-concept inhibits an individual's participation in group activities that leads to socialisation. However, academic dishonesty is not only limited to students

with low self-esteem (De La Rosa *et al.*, 2016). Students who exhibit high self-confidence, cynicism and lack of emotional expression are equally involved in cheating.

Academic dishonesty may lead to imbalance in a student's values, potentially resulting to severe psychological problems that bother more on esteem, learning abilities, and motivation (Madara & Namango, 2016); if the risks associated with academic dishonesty are more than the perceived benefits then they will not attempt to cheat (Williams & Hosek, 2003). Another problem with academic dishonesty is the spiral effect it has on the degree awarding institutions. Further studies have proved that students who are dishonest in school, are more likely to steal or take what is not theirs (Beck & Ajzen, 1991), cut corners on taxes (Fass, 1990), take drug overdose (Blankenship & Whitley, 2004), and engage in unethical workplace behaviour (Ogilby, 1995). Hence, the justification of this study lies on understanding of underlying factors surrounding academic dishonesty and to design the most effective ways of controlling such behaviours with the introduction of self-concept and resilience. In light of the foregone, this study aims at investigating the extent to which self-concept and resilience contributes to academic dishonesty among undergraduates in Enugu State, Nigeria. The general objective of this study is to examine the role of self-concept and resilience in academic dishonesty among undergraduates of

Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate:

1. The contribution of self-concept on academic dishonesty among college students in Enugu State.
2. The influence of resilience on academic dishonesty among college students in Enugu State.

Literature Review

Rational Choice Theory of Cheating in Examination

Contemporary studies have revealed that rational choice theory is an ideal framework for expounding academic dishonesty among young people (e.g., Sattler *et al.*, 2013; Simkin & McLeod, 2009). Tapping from this theory's assumptions, these studies proposed that academic dishonesty do not happen by chance but as a result of a premeditated act; and when the supposed benefits exceed its costs, students will engage in that practice (Sattler *et al.*, 2013; Nnam & Otu, 2015). The researchers chose this theory as a framework because many students who engage in dishonest practices like cheating in examination simply do so mainly to derive some 'benefits' (Sattler *et al.*, 2013). Another theory to explain the variables of interest is the theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Academic dishonesty is carried out as a result of the rational choice domiciled within the individual. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) has been found to explain remarkable amounts of changeability

regarding dimensions of students' cheating in examination. Stone *et al.* (2009) in their work confirmed three factors that determine intention to perform a behaviour: attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. In this theory, Ajzen (1991) believes that intention directly precedes attitude or behaviour; he further showed that people make conscious decisions (subjective norms) to carry out some clear thought-out acts (say academic dishonesty) believing in a positive outcome. Ajzen (1991) also opined that perceived behavioural control serves a proxy for behavioural control, and in so doing, having direct impact on both intention and the behaviour - which can serve as a model to predict students' involvement in social vices and criminal activities such academic dishonesty which includes plagiarism, cheating in examination and so on.

Cheating behaviour among students in an experimental investigation and findings revealed that the problem was prevalent, while qualitative results indicated that parental expectations, peer influence, and behavioural problems were the prominent reasons for academic dishonesty (Anitha & Sundaram, 2022). Madara and Namango (2016) in studying cheating phenomenon, recruited a sample of 25 and indicated that students reported frequent indulgence in academic dishonesty. Yullyaningsih *et al.* (2022) analysed the predictors of cheating behaviour by recruiting 112 students and the results showed that peer conformity



contributed to cheating behaviour while self-efficacy also contributed to cheating behaviour intentions. Desalegn and Berhan (2014) conducted a study to determine the prevalence of cheating and identified factors that influence cheating among students, and found that prevalence of cheating behaviour was 19.8%; Hill *et al.* (2021) investigated contract cheating and found that illegal services are springing up faster than mechanisms set up to arrest the situation. Okoro and Effiong (2016) carried out a study to understand the concept of cheating behaviour by enrolling 3,070 students and results showed that self-concept significantly influence cheating behaviour. Ossai (2011) while enrolling 1,200 students, found significant connection between test anxiety and attitude towards cheating in so much that students who were high on test anxiety were more predisposed towards cheating in examinations. Furthermore, McGillivray and Pidgeon (2015) examined the attributes of 89 students and found that respondents with high levels of resilience reported lower levels of distress compared to university students who reported low levels of resilience. Williams and Aremu (2019) examined some factors (academic self-efficacy, motivation, locus of control, and gender) associated with academic dishonesty by recruiting 250 participants and their results revealed that self-efficacy and motivation showed an inverse relationship with academic dishonesty. Owenga *et al.* (2018) who recruited 380 students found a significant positive correlation between school

determinants and examination cheating. Ekeh and Oladayo (2016) carried out a study to determine psychosocial correlates of examination malpractices by recruiting 400 students from 8 secondary schools. The results indicated that psychosocial factors combined (test anxiety, low self-concept, stress, study habit, parental influence, gender, and peer pressure) correlated positively with examination malpractice among secondary school students; peer pressure had the strongest correlation while stress had the weakest positive correlation, respectively. Indeed, some studies on related concepts have been significantly explored (Stephen & Gehlback, 2007, as cited in Anderman & Murdock, 2007; Zuckerman, 2008); however, the findings of this present study will empirically prove the link between resilience, self-concept and academic dishonesty and thereby provide further corroborative evidence. Hence, this study examines the effects of students' self-concept and resilience on academic dishonesty and practical ways to prevent this population from engaging in examination malpractice.

Hypotheses

1. Students with low levels of self-concept will be more prone to be dishonest in examination than students with high self-concept.
2. Students with low psychological resilience will be more prone to be dishonest in examination than students with high psychological resilience.

Methodology

Research Design

A cross-sectional design was employed in the study. Cross-sectional survey design draws from the population at one specific point in time.

Study Area

The study was conducted at Enugu State College of Education, Nigeria. Primary data was generated using standardized questionnaire suitable for the purpose of this study.

Study Population

The target population for the study was students of Enugu State College of Education from first year to final year.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling technique was utilised to recruit students of Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu, Nigeria. The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase was the pilot study in order to revalidate the instrument, while the second phase was the main study. The administration of questionnaires was carried out in within a period of 3 days at Enugu State College of Education. The researcher employed the services of two research assistants who were in their final year; these research assistants were trained for the task required of them. One hundred and sixty (160) copies of questionnaires were administered to respondents and only 154 copies of questionnaires were returned while 5 were not properly filled. This left the researcher with 149 copies

representing a return rate of 93.13%; thereafter, a statistical analyst was employed to code, analyze and interpret the data which was explained in the results section. However, prior to the main study, a pilot study were conducted using 30 students from Peaceland college of Education, Enugu State.

After the main study, one hundred and four nine (149) students served as participants. Their ages ranged from 15 years to 45 years with mean age of 25.38 years and standard deviation (SD) of 6.51. Gender of respondents indicated that 78 (52.3%) were males while 71 (47.7%) were females. Participant's level of study in the university showed that those in year 1 were 34 (22.8%), year 2 were 30 (20.1%), year 3 were 27 (18.1%), year 4 were 51 (34.2%), year 5 were 3 (2.0%) while 4 (2.7%) participants who did not indicate their level of study. The marital status of participants indicated that 73 (49.0%) were single, 14 (9.4%) were in a relationship but not married; 19 (12.8%) were engaged; 37 (24.8%) were married, 2 (1.3%) were divorced and 4 (2.7%) did not respond to this section.

Instruments for Data Collection

The study utilised instruments that were divided into four sections: A, B, C, and D. Section A comprised the demographic variables, while Section B looks at the Response to Stressful Experiences Scale (RSES) as developed by De La Rosa *et al.* (2016). The Section C is the Academic Dishonesty Scale (ADS) which was developed by Bashir and Bala (2018),



and Section D is the Adolescents' Self-concept Short Scale (ASSS) that was revalidated by Veigaa and Leiteb (2016).

Resilience: In measuring resilience among participants, a 4-item measure of resilience titled 'Response to Stressful Experiences Scale' as developed by De La Rosa, Webb-Murphy and Johnston (2016) was employed; which originally was a 22-item scale scored on a 5-point likert; higher scores indicated more resilient response to stressful events. However, for the main study, Cronbach Alpha $r = 0.54$ was obtained.

Academic Dishonesty: To measure academic dishonesty, the 23-item Academic Dishonesty Scale (ADS) as developed by Bashir & Bala (2018) was employed. The scale consists of six dimensions: cheating in examination; plagiarism; outside help; prior cheating; falsification and lying about academic assignments. Moreover, the developers found that internal consistency, alpha coefficient ($\alpha=.83$) was obtained. However, for the main study, Cronbach Alpha $r = 0.73$ was obtained indicating high internal consistency. However, for the purpose of this study only one dimension: cheating in examination with five items was utilized. Some of the items include, "During examination I use signals to fetch answers from my friends, I interchange my allotted book with other student to get better grade in examination, and during a test I try to copy from another study. Items are directly scored."

Self-concept: In order to measure self-concept among students, the 30-item scale as revalidated by Veigaa and Leiteb (2016) was utilized; the scale was found in a previous study (Veiga & Domingues, 2012). The inverse items are items 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, and 30. The internal consistency indices, alpha coefficient ($\alpha=.58$) was obtained in the main study.

Method of Data Analysis

Inferential and descriptive statistics were utilized for statistical analysis. First, the study data was coded and displayed by employing descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequencies). Thereafter, multiple linear regression statistical analysis was employed for data analysis using IBM Statistical Package (version 20).

Ethical Considerations

Institutional consent and ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Board of Enugu State College of Education (Technical). Information concerning the objectives and the relevance of the study were made clear and the respondents' informed consent obtained from each of the respondent. Prior to administering the questionnaires, Students were briefed on the study aim of the study and participants were also made to understand that participation in the study was optional and voluntary. Participants were made to know that there is no right or wrong answers; they were also assured that their responses will be confidential, and be only used for academic purpose.

**Results****Table 1: Summary of frequencies and percentages showing demographic characteristics of study participants (N = 149)**

Variables	N	%
Age		
Mean age= 25.38 (SD: 6.51)	149	100.0
Minimum age=15; Maximum age=45		
Gender		
Male	76	51.0
Female	71	47.7
No Response	2	1.3
Total	149	100.0
Level of Study		
Year 1	34	22.8
Year 2	30	20.1
Year 3	27	18.1
Year 4	51	34.2
Year 5	3	2.0
No Response	4	3.0
Total	149	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	73	49.0
In a relationship but not married	14	9.4
Engaged	19	12.8
Married	37	24.8
Divorced	2	1.3
No Response	4	2.7
Total	149	100.0

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of study participants at a glance ranging from age, gender, level of study, marital status, and ethnic group.

Table 2: Table of multiple linear regressions showing the contributory influence of psychological resilience and self-concept on academic dishonesty among students.

Variable	Academic dishonesty					
	Model 1 β	SE	β	t	P	95% CI
Constant	9.48	1.31		7.24	<0.05	[6.89, 12.06]
Self-Concept	-0.28	.56	-.04	-.50	<0.05	[-1.38, 0.83]
Psychological Resilience	1.71	.56	.25	3.06	<0.05	[0.60, 2.81]
R	.263					
R ²	.069					
R ²	.056					
F	5.43					
Sig.	<0.05					

Note: N = 149; CI = Confidence Interval; SE = Standard Error; *P<0.05; ** P<0.01

Results from Table 2 yielded a coefficient of multiple correlation (R) of 0.263 and multiple correlation square (R²) of 0.069. In other words, about 6.9% of the variance of academic dishonesty was accounted for by the contributory influence of treatment need of psychological resilience and self-concept among students. However, on independent basis, results from Table 2 indicates that self-concept showed independent significant contribution to academic dishonesty ($\beta = -.28$; $t = -.50$; $P>0.05$). Hence, the first hypothesis which stated that students with low self-concept will be more prone to be dishonest during examination than students with high self-concept was

confirmed. Further, psychological resilience contributed to academic dishonesty, ($\beta = 1.71$; $t = 3.06$; $P<0.05$). Therefore, the second hypothesis which stated that students with low psychological resilience will be more prone to academic dishonesty than students with high psychological resilience was confirmed. This confirmation was evident from the correlational direction of the findings which shows that psychological resilience exhibited by students, parallels their tendency to be dishonest during examination. However, findings revealed a joint contribution of psychological resilience and self-concept on academic dishonesty $F(2, 148) = 3.47$, ($\beta = 9.48$; t



= 7.24; $P < 0.05$). This implies that independent variables of this study worked together or showed a significant interplay to academic dishonesty.

Discussion

This study assessed the role of self-concept and resilience on academic dishonesty among undergraduates in Enugu State, Nigeria. The first hypothesis which states that students having low self-concept will be more prone to be dishonest in examination than students with low self-concept was confirmed. This implies that self-concept is an important independent variable that can contribute to academic dishonesty. This finding was consistent with the findings of Williams and Aremu (2019) who found that academic self-efficacy and motivation has a negative relative relationship with academic dishonesty, thus indicating that when academic self-efficacy and motivation towards success is low, then there will be a rise in academic dishonesty and when it is high, academic dishonesty will reduce. The finding is in line too with the study of Okoro and Effiong (2016) who found that self-concept exerts significant influence on cheating behaviour of students. A possible explanation of this finding can be analyzed in the sense that people's perception of who they are cannot possibly be affected by whether they cheat during examinations or not. They possibly can explain away their cheating in examination as a result of other extrinsic factors such as the unfriendly personality of the lecturer which made them to engage in such a behavior or they can give as excuse when caught that they

did what they did as a result of financial or health related issues.

The second hypothesis which states that students with low resilience will be more prone to be dishonest in examination than students with high resilience was confirmed. The finding was in line with the study of McGillivray and Pidgeon (2015) that showed that university students with high levels of resilience reported significantly lower levels of psychological distress and significantly higher levels of mindfulness, compared to university students reporting low levels of resilience. The finding of this study was also in consonance with the finding of Ekeh and Oladayo (2016) who indicated that psychosocial factors combined correlated positively with examination malpractice and peer pressure had the strongest connection while stress had the weakest correlation among secondary school students. Possible explanation for this finding appeared inverse in nature. This is because, since resilience connotes a protective factor that interacts with stressors (such as anxiety that comes with examination) to reduce tendency of negative outcomes, the same resilience acted as negative protective factor which used the stressor as a shield to cheat during examinations.

Policy implications of the study

The findings of this study implies that self-concept and resilience should be closely investigated seeing that they could directly and indirectly bring about an undesirable outcome through

rationalization and other forms of defense mechanism. The study also portends great promise in addressing the social vice of cheating in examination or being dishonest in academic activities because building and imbibing positive self-concept among undergraduate students could go a long way in addressing rationalization tendencies seen among undergraduates' low psychological resilience and self-concept that may predispose them to be dishonest during examination.

Limitations and suggestions for further studies

Participants were reluctant to respond to the questionnaire as some requested for financial incentives while others requested for snacks and soft drinks. But due to the paucity of funds during this study, the researcher was not able to fulfill any of these but resorted to gratitude as reward to those who were willing to participate. So, making them to cooperate was quite difficult. Another challenge was finding students to fill the questionnaire. This was as a result of the COVID-19 on-going protocols as at the time the data was gathered. Taking a cue from the limitations, future studies should consider scouting for local or international grants that will enable researchers to reach out to a greater number of students and expanding the sample population to other universities apart from Enugu State College of Education (Technical), could increase the probability of generalization and preserve and strengthen the internal

reliability of the data. Future research could examine the causal relationship of other variables other than resilience and self-concept such as locus of control, personality factors, and emotional intelligence.

Recommendations

In line with study findings, a couple of recommendations were outlined below:

1. First, competent counselors should be engaged by every department in tertiary institutions that can help coach students on coping and management skills.
2. Second, conducive reading environments should be provided by tertiary institutions and students should be assigned to mentors either individually or in groups in order to help them develop levels of self-concept and resilience.
3. Awareness creation through the social media on the importance of resilience and self-concept in addressing academic dishonesty is also recommended.
4. The study also recommends promoting and showing integrity in every academic dealing, including university mission-statements and admissions-orientation exercises as well as curriculum-design.

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