

**PEER INFLUENCE AND SELF -ESTEEM AS CORRELATES OF
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS
EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN ANAMBRA STATE**

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Abstract

Examination malpractice a social menace in Nigerian education system has often been blamed on peer influence and self-esteem which play significant role in shaping the attitude of students. Report released by Exam Ethics Marshal International revealed that Anambra State ranked 3rd state in the south-east zone and 13th state in Nigeria with the highest rate of examination malpractice. This necessitated this study which sought to ascertain how peer influence and self-esteem of secondary school students relate to their attitude towards examination malpractice in Anambra State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The correlation survey design was adopted for the study. The participants were selected through simple random sampling. A total of 1300 SS2 students from the population of 8,978 SS2 students in the 174 co-educational public secondary schools in Anambra State made up the sample for the study. Three sets of questionnaires titled "Self-Esteem Scale (SES)", "Peer Influence Scale (PIS)" and "Attitude Towards Examination Malpractice Scale (ATEMS) were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by three experts and the reliability of the ATEMS and PIS were ascertained using Cronbach alpha and they yielded cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.85 and 0.76 respectively while the SES yielded 0.74 in Nigerian secondary school setting. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The findings showed that peer influence has low negative correlation with students' attitude towards examination malpractice. Self-esteem has low positive correlation with students' attitude towards examination malpractice. Based on the findings it was concluded that students' have negative attitude towards examination malpractice based on peer influence. It was recommended among others that students should be encouraged to develop positive sense of worth about

themselves and also be enlightened on the strategies of coping with negative peer influence to shun examination malpractice.

Keywords: Peer Influence; Self-Esteem; Attitude; Examination malpractice

Introduction

In the Nigerian educational system, examination has been and still remains the preferred tool for objectively assessing and evaluating what learners have acquired after a period of schooling (Olatubosun, 2012). It also helps to decide who is permitted to go to the next level of academic endeavour or whose academic endeavour has reached its apogee. Examination is essential for students' success in today's world, and such success is usually measured in terms of achieving a good score or grade, and evidenced by obtaining a good certificate which helps in getting admission in a reputed college or university, and a good job (Khawaja, cited in Khan & Khan, 2011). Moreover, students are expected to pass any form of examination they partake in based on a fixed cut-off mark that segregates achievers from potential achievers, otherwise known as low achievers. This 'rigid' expectation, thus unconsciously propels students to engage in fierce competition for them to achieve good results and good certificates. Researchers observed that students these days find various means of achieving success in these examinations (Adegoke, 2013; Queensoap & Dogitimiye 2013) and one of such ways is by resorting to examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice refers to any irregular act exhibited by candidates, their associates or anybody charged with the conduct of examination, which is clearly a breach of the rules governing the conduct and integrity of the examination. Examination malpractice has become etched into the fabric of the Nigerian educational system, from the primary to the tertiary level, becoming one of the major problems confronting educational institutions in Nigeria (Olowodunoye, 2011). Bearing in mind the role education is supposed to play in nation building, a nation stands the risk of being under-developed in terms of accumulation of illiteracy, disease and poverty when its youths reject the honour of getting sound education and seem to opt for fraudulent and deceptive ways in making ends meet as epitomized by examination malpractice. Examination malpractice has other several negative effects on the individual, education system and the entire society (Queensoap & Dogitimi 2013).

These negative effects have manifested in so many ways in Nigeria and Anambra State in particular. These days, the situation seems to be that majority of the students in Anambra State irrespective of age, gender, family background and school environment indulge in one form of examination malpractice or the other. This could imply that they seem to lack the virtue and value of hard work in terms of study. It is no longer news that students skip lessons at will, lack effective study habits, goal setting and time management skills and consequently they could violate examination rules and regulations at unprecedented rates in order to make academic ends meet. Some of them were reported to vandalize principals' offices to mutilate results, get

suspended or expelled from school, and end up as societal nuisance (Anyamene, Nwokolo & Anyaegbune, 2015).

Researchers revealed that some secondary school students in Anambra State have engaged in one form of examination malpractice or the other. Some of them excuse such indulgence with reasons such as poor teaching and learning environments; the need to improve grades in order to maintain or improve competitiveness and the need to succeed in especially adjudged difficult examinations (Anyamene, Nwokolo & Anyaegbune, 2015; Olowodunonye, 2013; Adegoke, 2013). Some students in the state also create the impression that examination malpractice is not really bad since majority of them indulge in it to succeed and be promoted along with other classmates. With these various reasons, it is obvious that examination malpractice is high among secondary school students in Anambra State, and as observed from the discussion by the researcher with those students, most of them will still cheat as the opportunity presents itself. Regrettably, the incidence and degree of secondary school students' involvement in examination malpractice has become so alarming, problematic, and threatening that the well-being of Nigeria's educational system is threatened (Judy & Nelson, 2002), despite various attempts to curb the menace.

Government both at national and state levels have meted out laws, penalties and measures in order to curb or at least reduce the trend of examination malpractice at the barest minimum. Such measures include serving of jail term, penalty option of huge fine, suspension and expulsion of the indicted students, cancellation or cessation of results. Despite these measures the incidence of examination malpractice in Nigeria which started with mere leakage of question papers in the Senior Cambridge Local Examination in 1914 (Adebile & Omoluwa, 2013) has cut across all the states in Nigeria, Anambra State inclusive and still persisted till date even taking new trends.

The trend of examination malpractice in Nigeria and Anambra State in particular has become so widespread that there is almost no examination anywhere at all levels of the formal school system, without one form of sharp malpractice or the other (Obidigbo, 2011; Oluremi, 2014). It is no longer news in this contemporary time that students in Anambra State cheat in examinations through impersonation, possessing incriminating materials and are ready to pay any prize, cash or kind to pass examination they did not prepare for (Anyamene, Nwokolo & Anyaegbune, 2015). More worrisome is that these students spend most of their times with their peers which invariably influence their attitude, conduct and decision making. This makes it a challenge that must be urgently tackled since peers play significant role in shaping the attitude of students towards examination malpractice positively or negatively depending on the type of peers a student associates with.

Peers refer to persons of the same age, or who has the same social status with another (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2011), especially one belonging to the same societal group mostly based on age grade, or status and they play an increasingly influential role in the lives of youths. During this period, adolescents begin to break away from their families. They spend more time with their friends and less time with

their families and as a result of their interactions socialize and develop a sense of belonging, form lifestyle and norms suitable to them. The desire to feel accepted and to fit in is one of the strongest forces paramount to adolescents' bonding; this can lead them to do things that are risky or accept positive attitude towards and or indulge in examination malpractice, just to feel accepted among like peers (Oni, 2010). On the other hand, the desire to keep up with the peers can also inspire adolescents to achieve goals that they might never aim at on their own. Such goals can lead students to study hard, build confidence in one's ability to perform well without malpractice and also eschew such ugly act. This implies that students at this developmental stage are more susceptible to peer influence due to the shift in emotional dependence from parents to peers (Berk, 2004).

Peer influence is often used to describe instances where individuals feel indirectly swayed into changing their behaviour to match that of their peers (Eder & Nenga, 2003). It can be described as the indirect or subtle control exerted by a peer group in encouraging a person to change his or her attitudes, values, or behaviours to conform to their peers. It has been suggested that adolescents might adopt attitudes or engage in behaviours that they perceive to be endorsed by popular peers (Brechtwald & Prinstein, 2011). Okorodudu (2013) emphasized that peer influence has much impact on adolescents' behaviour than any other factor and much more powerful than the influence of counsellors, teachers and other significant figures. This influence could be positive or negative depending on the peers an adolescent associate with. Researchers revealed that peers have negative influence on adolescents on anti-social and risk-taking behaviour (Litt & Stock, 2011; Teunissen, Spijkerman, Prinstein, Cohen, Engels & Scholte, 2012), involvement in examination malpractice (Okorodudu, 2013) and alcoholism (Mukama, 2010; Anyio, 2015). On the other hand, peers have been revealed to have positive influence on adolescents ranging from academic improvement and motivation (Allen, Chango & Szewedo, 2014), academic achievement (Ryan, 2001) to involvement in prosocial behaviours (Eisenberg and Sheffield Moris, 2004). Pfeffer and Hunter (2012) also found that that peers have the potential to exert beneficial influence on health-risking behaviour. Adolescents' interaction with peers is a contributory factor in their self-esteem development (Uslu, 2013).

Self-esteem refers to a person's overall evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds towards himself (Kristen, 2009). Explaining further, Kristen, asserted that self-esteem is a subjective experience which the individual conveys to others by verbal reports or other overt expressive behaviour. Self-esteem is an important factor in students at the secondary school level and is easily affected by peer influence (Uslu, 2013). Peer acceptance and relationships are important to adolescents' emotional development and healthy development of self-esteem (Encyclopedia of Children's Health, n.d.) while peer rejection has been reported to affect self-esteem negatively (Uslu, 2013).

The way students in Anambra State evaluate their self-esteem could determine their attitude towards examination malpractice. It is important to note that

poor self-esteem could lead one to having wrong belief that one will not be able to perform well in perceived or adjudged difficult tasks such as examinations. Accordingly, students' belief in their inability to carry out tasks required for high performance could be closely linked to cheating in examinations (Murdock, Hale, & Webber, 2001). On the other hand, Alutu and Aluede (2006) observed that self-esteem is not a significant factor in determining students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

Attitude could be described as the predisposition or readiness to respond or act in a certain way towards an object. Attitude has been viewed as a person's state of mind which represents the emotions, behaviour and beliefs that he or she has in relation to a situation, event or towards an individual (Crambette, 2012; Siribadanna, 2012). In the same light, Robbins and Judge (2007), opined that attitudes reflect how one feels about something. According to Abba, Anazodo and Okoye (2004), social influence especially from peer group is a potent technique for behaviour change. Students for instance, interact with their peers in school, and such interaction most often, change their previous attitude on academic issues such as their attitudes towards examination malpractice. Attitude could be positive or negative and expressed through cognitive, affective, or psychomotor domain. Attitude can be formed through past experiences, socialization, influences from peers and can be affected by self-esteem irrespective of background, status or gender.

There was no consensus as to whether gender actually determines students' attitude towards examination malpractice. Some researches posited that gender is not a significant factor in students' attitude towards examination malpractice (Okoro & Udoh, 2014). On the other hand, it was posited by Obidigbo (2011) that gender determines students' attitude towards examination malpractice. This however, does not preclude a further local investigation into how gender can contribute to the relationship between attitude and examination malpractice, taking cognizance of self-esteem of and peer effects on adolescents in secondary schools in Anambra State.

This study is hinged on social learning theory by Albert Bandura (1969). The theory posited that people learn through modelling, imitation and observation. It could be explained by this theory that students learn from their peers through mere observation, imitation and modelling especially when such peers are seen as heroes or heroines. In this way, a student can learn to develop positive attitude towards examination malpractice or even indulge in it through modelling after peers who cheats in examinations without being caught and worse still scores high in such examinations. In this way, students who has an already formed attitude towards examination malpractice, positively or negatively resulting from parenting style in their various homes which is their first place of socialization may through observing their peers alter their attitude positively or negatively to suit that of their peers. Furthermore, adolescents may model after their peers to cheat in order to retain their affection and intimate relationships and also to feel as part of the peer group (Ezeh & Okoye, 2010).

There appears to be dearth of research work which examined peer influence and self-esteem as correlates of secondary school attitude towards examination

malpractice in Anambra State. This leaves a gap, hence, the interest in this study in order to fill the gap in literature. The problem of this study, therefore, is to examine how peer influence and self-esteem correlates with secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Anambra State. To give direction to this study, two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study as follows:

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between peer influence score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score?
2. What relationship exists between self-esteem score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- Ho₁: there is no significant relationship between peer influence and students' attitude towards examination malpractice.
- Ho₂: the relationship between self-esteem and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice is not significant

Method

The correlational research design was adopted in carrying out the study. This type of design seeks to establish what relationship exists between two or more variables (Nworgu, 2015). This study adopted this method because it was interested in establishing whether there was a relationship between peer influence and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice; self-esteem and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

The population of the study comprised 8,978 senior secondary class 2 (SS2) students in 174 co-educational public secondary schools in Anambra State (Source: Planning and Research Section, Anambra State Post Primary Commission). One thousand, three hundred (1300) Senior Secondary Class 2 students were sampled for the study. Multi-stage random sampling was used in selection of the participants for the study. In the first stage, 3 educational zones were picked at random from the 6 educational zones in Anambra State. The researcher further selected 2 local governments from each of the 3 educational zones through simple random sampling. From each local government, 4 schools were selected at random and all the male and female SS2 students in each of the schools formed the sample of the study

Instrument for Data Collection

Self-Esteem was measured using Hare Self Esteem Scale, re-validated by Omoluabi (1997) to suit usability in Nigeria. It is an 30- item instrument developed on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree which are rated 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The scale measures self-esteem on three

domains (peer, school, home). An average of all three subscales provides a score for general self-esteem. Higher scores indicate high self-esteem and negatively worded items are reversed during scoring. The instrument has a test-retest reliability index of 0.74.

The questionnaire titled Attitude of Students Towards Examination Malpractice Scale (ATEMS) is a 10-item questionnaire constructed by the researcher on four-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree which are rated 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument has two sections. Section A dealt with biodata while Section B contained ten items on students' attitude towards examination malpractice. A respondent was required to tick a point on a scale that agrees with his or her attitude. The maximum score for any positive response was 4, while the minimum score for the negative response was 1. The cut off point for deciding whether a respondent has a positive or negative attitude towards examination malpractice based on each item is 2.5. The Cronbach Alpha method was used in measuring the internal consistency of the test to ascertain how homogenous the test items are and Cronbach Alpha score of 0.85 was obtained

Peer influence was measured using Peer Pressure Inventory developed by Brown and Clasen (1985). It is an 50-item instrument measuring 5 domains of influence (peer conformity, family involvement, peer involvement, school involvement, misconduct). The researcher adopted 29 items from the instrument measuring peer conformity, peer involvement and misconduct domains for the study. The statements were in pairs and in each pair; individuals were to decide whether they were encouraged by their peers to do or not to do something. Each item was scored from -3 to +3 with the "no influence" option scored as zero. Thus: 3 = a lot, meaning a lot of influence from peers; 2 = somewhat, meaning a bit of influence; 1 = little, meaning little influence from peers, and 0 = no influence. In addition, -1 = little, meaning that friends do not encourage you to do something; -2 somewhat, -3 = a lot. Coding was as follows: -3 = 1, -2 = 2, -1 = 3, 0 = 4, +1 = 5, +2 = 6, +3 = 7. The potential range was from 0 - 168. Negative influence ranged from 0 - 56. Low influence ranged from 57 - 113, and positive influence ranged from 114-168. High scores implied positive peer influence from the positive direction or negative peer influence from the negative direction. The Cronbach Alpha method was used in measuring the internal consistency of the test to ascertain how homogenous the test items are and Cronbach Alpha score of 0.76 was obtained. The instruments were validated by two experts, one in Educational Psychology and the other in Measurement and Evaluation, both in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Method of Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation for both the research questions and testing the hypotheses. The hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 significance level. The decision rule for the null hypotheses was such that hypothesis with p-value higher than 0.05 was not rejected while the hypothesis with p-value lower than 0.05 was rejected.

Result and Discussion

The results for the study are presented as follows:

Research Question One

What is the relationship between peer influence score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score?

Table1: *Pearson (r) on Peer Influence Score and Secondary School Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice (N = 1300)*

Variables	Pearson Correlation coefficient (r)
Peer Influence Score	-0.008
Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Score	

The result in Table 1 revealed that the relationship between peer influence score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score is negligible and negative. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is -0.008 which indicates a negligible relationship. It is then concluded that there is negligible and negative correlation between peer influence score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score.

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between self-esteem score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score?

Table 2: *Pearson (r) on Self-Esteem Score and Secondary School Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Score (N=1300)*

Variables	Pearson Correlation coefficient (r)
Self-esteem score	0.271
Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Score	

The result in Table 2 revealed that the relationship between self-esteem score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score is low and positive. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is 0.271 which indicates a low relationship. It is then concluded that there is low and positive correlation between

self-esteem score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between peer influence and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

Table 3: Pearson (*r*) for Correlation Analysis of Peer Influence and Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice (*N*= 1300)

Variables	<i>R</i>	p-value	Remark
Peer Influence Score	-0.008	0.836	NS
Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Score			

NS – Non-Significant correlation at 0.05 level of significance

The result in Table 3 showed that the relationship between peer influence and students' attitude towards examination malpractice ($r = -.008$, $\rho > 0.05$) is not significant. The relationship between the peer influence and students' attitude towards examination malpractice is also negligible and negative. The null hypothesis was not rejected, thus it was concluded that there is no significant relationship between peer influence and students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

Table 4: Pearson (*r*) for Correlation Analysis of Self-esteem and Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice (*N*= 1300)

Variables	<i>r</i>	p-value	Remark
Peer Influence Score	.271	0.000	S
Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Score			

S – Significant correlation at 0.05 level of significance

The result in Table 4 showed that the relationship between self-esteem and students' attitude towards examination malpractice ($r = 0.271$, $\rho < 0.05$) is significant. The relationship between the self-esteem and students' attitude towards examination malpractice is also significant and positive. The null hypothesis was rejected, thus it

was concluded that there is significant relationship between self-esteem and students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of research question one revealed that peer influence score has low and negative relationship with the secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice. The above findings prove that peers do not always have negative influence on students. They also have positive influence on students. The company or peers that a student keeps, associates or identifies with and the resultant effect they have on him would to a large extent determine his attitude whether positively or negatively, towards examination malpractice. Positive influence from peers on their fellow students could manifest in their attitude and attitude change. This means that students who have positive attitude towards examination malpractice in order to remain in affiliation with and not be rejected by peers, who have negative attitude towards the ugly act, will change their attitude to conform to that of their desired peers.

It could also be explained that peers in a positive, symbiotic relationship can help group associates/members develop good habits (including study habits), make good decisions, boost self-esteem and explore their identities. The result reveals that it is truism that peers could have positive influence on secondary school students even on their attitude towards examination malpractice.

The finding of this study agrees with Olowodunonye (2011) who found that high religious students did not engage in examination malpractice. This implies that students who are raised up with high moral principles and who are truly committed to their religions endeavour to respect their God and try to live out what they believe in. One of the ways they prove that they practice the principles of their religion is by developing a negative attitude towards examination malpractice which will serve as a check on them to shun the act.

On the other hand, the position of this study corroborates with the results of Anaeto (2014) and Bruno and Obidigbo (2012) who found in their various studies that students generally have negative attitude towards examination malpractice but ironically indulge in it. This may be explained by social identity hypothesis which makes students to join their counterparts in perpetuating evil even when they are against such evils.

Analysis of research question two revealed that self-esteem score has low and positive relationship with the secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice. This finding could be that the students have poor evaluation of their self-concept. Poor evaluation of self-concept otherwise known as low self-esteem could lead students to develop fear of failure and as a result of that adopt positive attitude towards examination malpractice. Examination malpractice could be seen as a way of escape from failing in examinations by such students to save their face from peers.

This result agrees with Aronson (2008) who found that low self-esteem has been closely associated with conformity to peer attitudes; hence if his peers were

involved in examination malpractice, a student with low self-esteem will likely tow the same line to remain in affiliation with them. Low self-esteem has an attribute of wanting constant approval from peers. As a result of this a student with low self-esteem could do anything to please his peers and might not dare to take up a different attitude from that of his peers who peradventure have positive attitude towards examination malpractice.

It also supports Murdock, Hale and Webber (2001) who found that students' belief in their inability to carry out tasks required for high performance is linked to cheating in examinations. What this result reveals is that poor self-esteem could lead one to having wrong belief that one will not be able to perform well in a perceived or adjudged difficult tasks such as examinations and consequently, might lead one to develop test anxiety. Accordingly, Okoro and Udoh (2014) found that there is a link between attitude towards examination malpractice and the actual involvement in it by students.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of peers and self-esteem on secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice and found out that peers have negative influence on students' attitude towards examination malpractice. It was also found that self-esteem has positive relationship with secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice. Therefore this study concluded that peer influence has negative relationship with students' attitude towards examination malpractice, and also, that self-esteem has positive relationship with students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

Implication of the Study

The result of this study has some obvious educational implications. The findings of the study revealed that peers have negative influence on the attitude of students towards examination malpractice. The type of peers adolescents keep matters a lot as they to a large extent could affect their attitude and possibly behaviour. If students identify with peers with good moral standing, who are focused and have negative attitude towards examination, they could be positively influenced by these peers and develop confidence in their ability to write examinations without engaging in malpractice.

Similarly, the findings revealed that self-esteem has a positive relationship with secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice. This implies that self-esteem could determine a students' attitude towards examination malpractice. Accordingly, the way a student evaluates his or herself relates to his or her attitude towards examination malpractice and attitude precedes action. Thus, poor self-esteem could lead a student to a wrong belief that one is worthless, lose confidence in one's ability to perform well, develop positive attitude towards examination malpractice and finally engage in it. This does not underscore the fact that it is always the case, since people who possess positive self-esteem could also have negative attitude towards examination malpractice but ironically indulge in it.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings and conclusions in this study:

1. Government, non-governmental organizations and private sectors should sponsor information services such as posters, bill-boards, jingles and debates in secondary schools and other strategic places to raise students' self-esteem, encourage good peer association and steer them from examination malpractice.
2. Parents, significant others, teachers and guidance and counsellors should provide emotional support to students to make them positive oriented towards boosting their self-esteem and modifying their attitude towards examination malpractice.
3. Schools should organize regular in-school programmes, seminars or workshops geared towards modifying the students attitude towards examination malpractice.
4. Educational psychologists and school guidance counsellors working in schools should develop and implement various programmes of behaviour modification and attitudinal reorientation. These programmes should focus on inculcating negative attitudes towards examination malpractice.
5. Parents, teachers and other significant adults should encourage good peer association among students and help modify their attitude towards examination malpractice by being consistent in expressing their disapproval to it.
6. Students should be taught and enlightened on the strategies of avoiding and or coping with negative peer influence as well as the need to maintain one's positive values against other opposing opinions.

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