

Pupils' Perception and their Involvement in Examination Malpractice in Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of pupil's perception on their involvement in examination malpractice and cheating strategies in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study adopted ex post facto research design to guide the study, one research question and a hypothesis were formulated. The sample was made up of 1251 respondents drawn from 30 primary schools in the study area. The instruments for data collection were a researcher designed questionnaire and performance test on the relevant subjects. Data obtained were analysed using percentage and chi square and independent t-test statistical techniques. The results showed that there is significant difference between pupils with the right perception of examination malpractice and those with wrong perception with regards to involvement in examination malpractice. In all the cheating strategies that showed significant difference between groups, the mean scores for cheating among pupils with wrong perception about examination malpractice was higher than those with right perception. Based on these recommendations were made among which are proper counseling of pupils, effective teaching of all subjects, etc.

Keywords: Pupils, Perception, Involvement, Examination Malpractice, Cross River State & Nigeria
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Aims Research Journal Reference Format:

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1. INTRODUCTION

In education, examination is very crucial for many reasons. Results obtained from examination provide basis for proper decision-making. These may include admission into school, placement of learners into different categories based on skills, promotion from one class to another. Through results from examinations, the teacher, the school and the entire educational processes are appraised in order to generate data for decision-making. Annan (2005) observes that examination has emerged as the major yardstick and the most practical way of assessment. According to the author, the main objective of education is to equip students with the requisite knowledge and skills that would enable them to contribute effectively to the national development effort. The training demands periodic assessment and evaluation in form of examination in order to ascertain the level of knowledge and competence of students.

As a result of the all important nature of examinations, it has become a focus of attention for stakeholders in education- the pupils/students, parents, teachers, school heads, government, examination bodies and the general public. Examination is, thus, seen as a means to an end. Some learners would do anything to obtain the appropriate grades through legitimate or illegitimate means. The desperate attempt to succeed in examination through fraudulent means by learner has given rise to the ever increasing and diverse cases of examination malpractices in Nigeria.

Examination is guided by certain rules and regulations. Malpractices arise when such rules and regulations are violated by any party involved in the conduct of the examination. Onyechere (2005) sees malpractice as any act of omission or commission, which compromises the reliability and integrity of any assessment or evaluation system. In Nigeria, cases of cheating in examination at different levels of education are frequent and have become a national issue. According to Saintmoses (2006) examination malpractice in Nigeria has attained a frightening proportion. It is sophisticated and sometimes institutionalized. Records of malpractice in examination over some years now are quite revealing and startling. In 2012 Exam Ethics Marshall International

....regretted the fact that 18 out of every 100 people that participated in examinations in Nigeria last year were indicted for malpractices, which it said were a cause for serious concern, despite slight improvement registered between 2011 and 2012. The statistics also showed that Bayelsa State has the highest number of de-recognised schools(13), followed by Delta (12), Ondo (eight), Kaduna seven), Cross River (seven), Imo (seven), Plateau (six), Rivers (six) Kogi (five) Lagos (five) Nasarawa (five), Sokoto (four) and Anambra (four)" (Nairaland Forum, 2012) p2.

Over the years, Cross River State has been fighting examination malpractice vigorously through diverse approaches such as orientations, sanctioning of schools, school heads and supervisors/invigilators who were found wanting in the conduct of examinations. However, according to the annual publication of the Examination Ethics Project also known as Exams Ethics Marshals International (EEMI), a non-governmental organisation, analysis of exam misconduct in Nigeria reveals that South-South zone (Cross River State which constitutes the area of this study inclusive) ranked first consistently for 3yrs (2002-2004) in malpractice and second in 2005. Within the period under review, Cross River State steadily rose in involvement in examination malpractice index ranking 18 in 2002, 8th in 2003, 2nd in 2004 and 2005. Over the years there has been remarkable improvement, although the battle is not over.

This social ill has no restriction. Even at the primary school level, examination malpractice has been found to be thriving (Jamiu, 2006). It is disturbing that at this formation stage, pupils begin to learn cheating. There is the tendency for them to cultivate this habit and carry it over to other levels of education as well as other aspects of their life endeavours. If this activity is left unchecked, the effect on the learners and the entire society could be devastating. What factors may be responsible for this anti social behaviour that has eaten very deep into the fabric of the society? This study sought to examine pupils' perception of examination malpractice, their involvement and cheating strategies.

Perception is an important construct in discussing behaviour. It is a major factor that regulates the behaviour of human beings. Generally, perception refers to the interpretation an individual gives to an issue, task, event, person or an action encountered. This in turn will guide the behaviour or reaction of the perceiver. Perception is subjective rather than objective. Hjella and Ziegler (1981) in examining perception from Carl Roger's phenomenological perspective noted that what is real to an individual i.e. what reality is thought, understood, or felt to be, is that which exists within that person's internal frame of reference, or subjective world, including everything in his or her awareness at any point in time. The authors observed that an individual's perception and experiences not only constitute that person's reality but also form the basis for his or her actions. Thus, one responds to events in accordance with how one perceives and interprets them. Gibson (1987) opined that perception is a requisite property of animate action. Without perception, actions would not be guided and without action perception would be pointless.

The implication of the above is that perception is critical for actions. The quality and direction of perception may direct the quality and direction of behaviour or reaction to the interpretation arising from what is perceived.

Educational activities including examination like other human endeavours are directed by human perception. Not all players in the educational environment act or react to educational activities in the same way. The way people perceive education in terms of the values and the way it should be pursued could influence their actions and reactions in the process of acquiring education. Okwubunka (1997) observed that it is becoming increasingly clear that one of the difficulties which people experience in some areas of life and education in particular, is closely related with the way they see themselves and the world in which they live. The author noted that some difficulties learners encounter in school is not due to low intelligence, poverty or poor eyesight but because they have learned to see themselves as incapable of handling academic work or see the work as irrelevant to their perceptual world. Academic achievement from the above opinion can be influenced by the individual's perception of himself and his situation. This in turn will determine the approach to learning or how one takes to achieve the goals of education.

Research findings have established a correlation between cheating in examination and perception of cheating. Schiming (2006) is of the view that cheating in examination as a social ill has remained perpetual as a result of the way it is perceived. Schiming identified six ways cheating is perceived by students.

- (i) Cheating is just a game, so much that, it is not important how you win but what is important is that you win.
- (ii) Cheating is an addiction, once a student has successfully cheated in some academic context, the urge to continue can become addicting.
- (iii) Cheating is an easy way out, rather than working hard to master the materials, student can be tempted to use the shortcut of academic dishonesty.
- (iv) Cheating is a personal dilemma. Students do not begin to cheat because they are not ignorant of the potential consequences. Rather, the decision to cheat is a difficult decision for most students.
- (v) Cheating is theft. The act of cheating robs the institution, the teacher, the cheating students and the other students of integrity.
- (vi) Cheating is a team effort, cheating does not occur in a vacuum. Where there is a culture that condones cheating and where a student sees other students cheating, academic dishonesty is more likely to flourish.

This study is anchored on the theory of social facts by Emile Durkheim, a great French sociologist. Durkheim (1961) in examining the implication of subjective reality on behaviour observed that people's behaviour is shaped by their perception or that of others through conversation or interaction. According to Durkheim, sometimes some people hold certain beliefs that are in contrast to reality or what people have collectively agreed as actual, or normal. The theorist also notes that through interaction or conversation, people's perception is influenced. People perceive situation, event, idea or issue in different ways based on context, exposure or personal feelings. And the way a phenomenon is perceived determines the reaction of the perceiver. It could be drawn from the above that the way pupils perceived examination malpractice may influence their involvement or not. In the same way, their interaction with people around them-the parents, teachers, peers etc may shape their perception concerning examination malpractice. This may be positive or negative, depending on how such people perceive examination malpractice. This may invariably influence their behaviour during examination.

This study answered one research question and tested one hypothesis.

1.1 Research question

What is the relative percentage of pupil's involvement in examination malpractice in English Language, Mathematics and Basic Science?

1.2 Hypothesis

Pupils who have the right perception of examination malpractice do not differ significantly from those who have wrong perception, in their:

- (i) involvement in examination malpractice.
- (ii) Cheating strategies

2. METHODS

The research design adopted for this study is the expost facto. The population of this study consisted of all the final year pupils in public primary schools in Cross River State. Two methods of sampling were adopted namely stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The study area was stratified first based on the education zone in which two out of the three zones were randomly selected through simple random sampling. Further stratification was on Local Government Areas in the sampled zones in which six out of eleven Local Government Areas were randomly drawn (three Local Government Areas in each zone were sampled). In selecting schools from the Local Government Areas, table of random number was used to randomly select a total of 30 schools from which 1251 pupils were drawn.

The instruments used for gathering data for this study was the questionnaire tagged "Pupils' examination cheating and other related behaviour questionnaire" (PECORBQ) constructed by the researcher. Six possible examination malpractice scenarios were created and pupils' opinions were sought as whether they consider such as cheating behaviour or not. This is to measure their perception of exam malpractice. Eight items of probable strategies that can be adopted in cheating by pupils were structured in 4 points scale of very often, often, not often and not very often, to determine the extent to which each subject had adopted any of the said approaches.

To gather data on pupils' involvement in examination malpractice, they were subjected to a terminal examination conducted by their teachers. It was assumed that this type of assessment will bring out the actual behaviour of pupils in examination situation. Since the essence is not to measure performance, rather emphasis was on tendency to cheat, validation was not considered necessary. Objective questions in English Language, Mathematics and Basic Science were used. The teachers marked the scripts by only counting the correct answers and recorded what each pupil scored. The next day the answer scripts were returned to the pupils to score while the teacher read the correct answers. Each pupil marked his or her own script. The purpose is to find out if in the process of marking, some pupils will demonstrate any form of cheating behaviour. Any of the following were considered cheating. Variation between what the teacher scored and what the pupils scored (by adding score), altering initial wrong answer to make it right, refusing to submit marked script because of failure.

For item seeking responses on pupils' perception of examination malpractice, each right perception was assigned 1 while wrong perception was scored 2. The score obtained by a subject was divided by the number of items (in this case six items). The minimum score that can be obtained is 6 and the maximum is 12. Any subject that has a mean score of 6 and below is considered to have right perception of examination malpractice while a mean score above 6 signifies wrong perception of examination.

3. RESULTS

Research Question : What is the relative percentage of pupil's involvement in examination malpractice in English Language, Mathematics and Basic Science?

Table1: Percentage of pupils' involvement in examination malpractice according to subject type

subject	involvement		Non-involvement		total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Mathematics	629	50.3	622	49.7	1251	100
Basic Science	619	49.5	632	50.5	1251	100
English Language	468	37.14	783	62.6	1251	100

The result as indicated in Table 1 showed that out of the 1251 pupils investigated the frequency count of those who demonstrated cheating tendencies in Mathematics were 629 represented by 50.3%, 619 (49.5%) cheated in Basic Science while 465 represented by 37.4% demonstrated cheating behaviours in English Language. This implies pupils would cheat most in Mathematics than in Basic Science and English Language and more in Basic Science than English Language.

Ho: Pupils who have the right perception of examination malpractice do not differ significantly from those who have wrong perception, in their:

- involvement in examination malpractice.
- Cheating strategies

To test pupils' involvement in exam malpractice as it relates to their perception, the data gathered was subjected to chi square analysis.

Table 2 :Chi-square analysis of difference between pupils with right and wrong perception of examination malpractice and their involvement in examination malpractice

Involvement	Perception				total	X ²
	Wrong perception		Right perception			
	O	E	O	E		
Involvement	468	440.6	284	311.4	752	10.3*
Non involvement	265	292.4	234	206.6	499	
Total	733		518		1251	

*sig at .05, df=1, critical $X^2 = 3.84$

From Table 2, the calculated X^2 value of 10.3 is greater than the critical X^2 value of 3.84 at .05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 1. With this, the null hypothesis is rejected. It implies that there is significant difference between pupils with the right perception of examination malpractice and those with wrong perception with regards to involvement in examination malpractice. In testing pupils' perception of examination malpractice and their cheating strategies, independent t-test was adopted.

Table 3: Independent t-test analysis of pupils' perception and their cheating strategies

Cheating strategies	Perception				t
	Right perception n=518		Wrong perception n= 733		
	X	SD	X	SD	
Bringing in notebook	1.99	1.06	2.35	1.22	-5.36*
Writing on pieces of papers	2.18	1.10	2.29	1.12	-1.66
Communicating vital information	2.55	1.08	2.87	1.15	4.84*
Asking classmate	2.50	1.24	2.59	1.18	-1.30
Writing on palm of hand	1.70	1.12	1.80	1.10	-1.151
Writing on the desk	1.59	1.06	1.60	1.00	-0.26
Going out to find answer	1.48	0.95	1.65	1.15	-2.73*

*sig at .05, df=249, critical t=1.96

The results in Table 3 shows that the calculated t-test values for cheating strategies through use of notebook, communicating vital information to fellow examinees and going outside to find answer are higher than the critical t value at .05 level of significance. The results in respect of these strategies revealed significant difference among the two groups. In all cases the mean scores for cheating among pupils with wrong perception about examination malpractice is higher than those with right perception.

4. DISCUSSION

This study revealed that pupils cheated most in Mathematics than in Basic Science and English Language and more in Basic Science than English Language . This could be explained by the general phobia people have for Mathematics and by extension sciences.

The findings in respect of the hypothesis in this study indicated that pupils differ significantly in their perception of examination malpractice as it relates to their involvement in examination malpractice and the cheating strategies they adopt during examination. It was found that pupils who believe that involvement in examination malpractice is wrong differ from their counterparts who do not see anything wrong in their involvement in examination malpractice. Earlier researches revealed that the way students perceive examination malpractice can influence the tendency among them to engage or not to engage in some academic dishonesty (Wikipedia Encyclopedia,1979; Generaux and Mclead, 1995; and Gereman, 2002). McCabe and Trevino (1997) also reported that the strongest predictor of cheating behaviour is students' perception of peer disapproval while Crown and Spiller (1998) noted that if cheating is perceived as common place or acceptable among peers, students are more likely to cheat.

It is not surprising that difference is found between those who have positive perceptions of examination malpractice and those who have negative perceptions. Perception is fundamental among factors that regulate human conducts. Ones' perception tells much about his personality, what he believes in and consequently, guides his behaviours. It is instrumental to the quality or otherwise and direction of human behaviour. It will not therefore, be an exception in determining the values pupils place in their education and the subsequent ways they pursue it to attain their goals. These differences in cheating behaviour between the two groups could be explained by the way their perception have influenced their attitude or life style to cheating.

Therefore, pupils who perceive examination malpractice as a means to success will damn all consequences or may not even see anything wrong in cheating in examinations. They will always contemplate and have sufficient reasons to justify their behaviour. Such beliefs as everyone is doing it, it is an easy way out, the end justifies the means are probable consolation views of some who have negative perception about examination malpractice.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To fight examination malpractice, adequate preparation of pupils from primary school level to higher institution through effective teaching and learning especially Mathematics and Basic Sciences is necessary.
2. School counselors need to counsel pupils on the consequences of examination malpractice, building in them the right perception about examination malpractice.
3. Sensitization on the consequences of examination malpractice should be vigorously done through the mass media.
4. Curriculum planners should make consequences of examination malpractice part of Religious Studies, Civic and Value Education or Social Studies at Basic Education levels.

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APPENDIX 1

Perception about cheating tendency (PACT)

Instruction: Place a tick (✓) in the bracket beside the statement that expresses your feeling.

1. Rose was writing examination, she did not know the answers to some of the questions. Peter sat next to her and has written all the answers but Rose refused to copy the answers from him and she failed.

Rose did the right thing. []

Rose did a foolish thing. []

2. Raymond and John were in an examination, John saw what Raymond was writing and John copied from Raymond. Raymond saw him copying but did not say anything.

Raymond should be punished. []

Raymond should not be blamed for it. []

3. James missed examination given by the teacher. He then explained to the teacher why he could not sit for the exam. And the teacher agreed to give him a make-up exam. Before James went to write the exam, he called Tom to ask him what the teacher asked them in the previous examination. Tom told him. James used the information to score high in the examination.

(a). Tom was wrong for giving James the information. []

Tom did nothing wrong. []

(b). James should not have used the information. []

James would be stupid not to have used the information. []

4. Almost everybody in the class was cheating in the exam. Moses didn't want to cheat but because he saw others cheating, he decided to copy from his textbook.

Moses should be blamed, even though others were equally cheating. []

Moses should not be blamed, since others were equally cheating. []

5. Primary six pupils were writing the First School Leaving Certificate Exam. The teacher wanted all of them to pass, so he helped them answered the questions

The teacher was right. []

The teacher would not have helped them []