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INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL VARIABLES ON EXAMINATIONS CHEATING TENDENCIES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE: A PATH ANALYTICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on the path analysis of students' personal variables influencing their tendencies to cheat in examinations in Anambra State, Nigeria. Four research questions guided the study and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The design adopted for the study was correlation survey with a path analytical background. A sample of 650 students drawn from the population size of 5,005 using simple random sampling technique was involved in the study. The instruments for data collection were Test Anxiety Inventory, Academic Self-regulated Learning, Academic Self-confidence, Academic Self-resilience and Examination Cheating Tendency Scales. The instruments were validated by three experts. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha to obtain 0.91, 0.88, 0.76, 0.68 and 0.83 respectively. The data obtained were analyzed with path analysis using Mplus software. The findings of the study revealed among others that the The paths through which the independent variables caused variation in the dependent variable are those test anxiety, academic self-regulated learning, academic self-resilience, and academic self-confidence on cheating tendencies in examinations. It was recommended among others that Secondary school teachers should organize and give students motivating self-talks before and after lessons in order to help them develop the significant identified personal variables which will in turn reduce their tendencies to cheat in examinations.

Keywords: Path Analysis, Students' Personal Variables, Cheating Tendencies, and Examinations

Introduction

Since the introduction of western education in Nigeria, examination has been the major instrument used for the evaluation of learners' achievement in schools. Examination has many functions which includes; for

promotion, placement, certification, to achieve the purpose for which it is designed, and to be a reliable consistent means of measurement. An examination or test is an educational assessment intended to measure a test-taker's knowledge, skill, aptitude, physical fitness, or other traits. Examination is a means of assessing the quantity and quality of performance that a student has accumulated at the end of a teaching and learning process. Examinations are aimed at measuring characteristics such as achievement, performance, intelligence, ability, and aptitude, among others (Bassey & Iruoje, 2016). Furthermore, Collins (2023) that examination is a formal test that one takes to show one's knowledge or ability in a particular subject, or to obtain a qualification. Onyeama-Obioma (2023) defined examination as the formal assessment of students in order to determine their extent of mastery of the subject content.

The application of tests and examinations help teachers adjust or change their instructional strategies in the process of teaching and learning in the school system (Bassey & Iruoje, 2016). This implies that, when a student's performance in examination is encouraging, it indicates that the teacher's methods of teaching maybe appropriate, efficient and effective. The benefits of examination to students or test takers include among others; promotion of spirit of competition, job placement and remuneration, memory enhancement, promotion of self-confidence, self-concept, and improvement academic performance. Examinations can be categorized into formative, summative, internal or external (public) forms.

Formative assessment is a strategy designed to identify learners' learning difficulties with a view to providing remediation measures to enhance the performance of majority of students. Assessment is said to be formative when assessment-elicited evidence of students' learning weaknesses are gathered and instruction modified in response to the feedback obtained through the process (Esomonu & Ikeanumba, 2021). The researchers continued that the feedback given as part of formative assessment helps learners become aware of any gap that exists between their desired goals and their current knowledge, understanding or skills and guide them through actions necessary to obtain the goal. Formative assessment can take the form of daily work, quizzes, presentation and participation in class), projects/term papers and practical work (example laboratory work, fieldwork, clinical procedures, drawing practice). On the other hand, summative assessment is an assessment administered at the end of an instructional unit in a course. These assessments are

intended to evaluate student learning by comparing performance to a standard or benchmark. They are often high-stakes, meaning they have a high point value. Examples of summative assessments include midterm examinations, a final examination or a final project. Summative assessments are given to students at the end of an instructional period (Esomonu & Ikeanumba, 2021).

Internal examination is the type of examination that is conducted by each private institution for its students within the school context. Examples of such examinations are interviews, continuous assessments, post-UTME, as well as terminal, cycle, semester and annual or promotional examination. They are referred to as school- based assessments. These examinations are always conducted and controlled by each school. Such examinations could be conducted for the purposes of promotion, guidance, feedback, decision making, evaluation and/or monitoring (Ike & Agu, 2021). External examinations, on the other hand, could also be referred to as public examinations. Ike & Agu (2021) described public examination as the process and procedure of coordinating an examination for the large populace in order to sample or measure their behaviour in comparison with a domain of performance with others in a group. The tests in this type of examination, are developed, administered, scored and controlled externally.

Success in examination serves as a good motivator for students, teachers, school administrators, employers of labour and all stakeholders in education. On the other hand, failure to perform successfully in examination demoralizes all stakeholders in education, especially students. It is the crave to succeed and avoid frustration and/or embarrassment associated with failure that makes students engage in cheating, which has threatened the very foundation of the educational system (Bassey & Iruoje, 2016). Whenever irregularity or examination misconduct occurs, then the validity and resulting outcome of the performance is questionable. The most important threat to the credibility of the results of educational assessment in Nigeria and Africa at large is examination misconduct.

Eexamination misconduct as defined by Iruoje (2016) is the act of using fraudulent means to project oneself as possessing knowledge perpetrated by violating the rules. Examination misconduct as viewed by Onuka and Durowoju (2013) is any dishonest or unauthorized action or deed committed by a student on their own or in collaboration with others like fellow students, guardians, parents, teachers, head teacher, examination officials, supervisors, invigilators, security officers and anybody or group of people before, during or after examination in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades.

Examination misconduct has graduated from mere stretching of the neck (giraffing) to see what another candidate is writing during examination or consulting unauthorized notes or books inside or outside the examination hall to such sophisticated methods as the use of micro-computer, mobile phones and guns to intimidate those concerned with the administration of examination. Many more forms of examination misconduct are employed by students to carry out this nefarious act.

The negative effect of examination misconduct is so disastrous that when students resort to cheating, the true assessment of knowledge and skills becomes compromised, leading to a decline in the overall quality of education. They will as well face difficulties in the future, as employers and higher education institutions might question the authenticity of their qualifications. To this end, Wangare and Sinwa (2023), noted that the negative effects of examination misconduct, among others, includes undermining the values of honesty, integrity, and fair competition in the educational system, posing unreliable data for psychometricians, leading to a lack of trust, disrespect for academic achievements, and lack of academic excellence, and so on. The growing menace of examination misconduct in Nigerian schools is becoming a worrisome and disturbing phenomenon on a daily basis.

In Nigeria, cases of cheating before, during and after examinations of different examination bodies and levels of education abound (Bassey & Iruoje, 2016). This ugly situation was reported by Nigerian Tribune (2017) for West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council for 2014-2016 academic years.

According to the report, Kogi, Benue, Kano, Cross River and Abia states are the states with the highest examination misconduct rates in the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). In 2014, 9.89 percent of its candidates had issues with WASSCE examination fraud; but the percentage rose to 10.28 in 2015 (of the 52,801 candidates that sat for the examination that year); and in 2016, it peaked at 17.35 per cent. Other states experiencing this notoriety in this regards include Adamawa, Kano, Kwara and Cross River. Again, in 2016, 18.87 per cent of WASSCE candidates in Cross River were involved in examination fraud. It was a sharp increase over the 9.26 per cent recorded in 2015. Bauchi, Borno, Kano and Kebbi states are top of the list of schools involved in examination misconducts in Nigeria. This was announced by the Registrar of the National Examinations Council. In Anambra State, the case of the menace is the same as it

was reported by Anierobi, Nwikpo, Okeke, & Unachukwu (2018) that Anambra state ranked 3rd state in the south-east zone and 13th state in Nigeria with the highest rate of examination misconduct. The ongoing discourse has shown that examination misconduct has eaten so deep in our public secondary schools. Several researchers were of the view that students' lack of interest, negative attitude towards the subject, method of teaching, and tendency to cheat in public examination among students and others may be the possible causes examination misconduct among students (Onete, 2020).

Tendency to cheat in examination as defined by Onote (2020) could be defined as the inclination to indulge in behaviour or action that interferes with or hinders the pursuit of knowledge and results in misrepresentation of academic materials, taking credit or recognition for academic work (including papers, quizzes, examination, and so on) that is not one's own, or fabricating data, records or tampering with academic documents. Tendency to cheat in examination is the willingness to carry out illegal act or behaviour by a candidate or a group of candidates before, during or after examination as to have unfair advantage over others (Offor in Bassey & Iruoje, 2016). Tendency to cheat in examination, therefore, is the desire to pass examination through illegal or fraudulent means. Unfortunately, all efforts made by school management, the government and other educational stakeholders appear to be creating no impact, in terms of eliminating this tendency to cheat in examinations among students.

Tendency to cheat in examinations does not just occur; it could be premeditated by different variables. The list of such variables is endless. However, many studies have been carried out on the relationship between students' personal variables like sex, age, self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, achievement motivation, academic self-confidence, attribution to hard work, self regulation, academic self-regulated learning, achievement goal orientation, personality type, test anxiety, anomie, academic self-resilience, neutralization techniques of the examinees and their cheating tendencies in examination (Bassey & Iruoje 2016; Egbai, Ita & Nwogwugwu, 2020; Onete, 2020). Thus, the present study proposed a hypothetical model on how the 4 variables; test anxiety, academic self-regulated learning, academic self-confidence and academic resilience predicted tendency to cheat in examinations among students.

Test anxiety is a psychological concern that could motivate cheating in academic engagements, including examinations, presentations, and debates (Nnaji, 2022). Test anxiety is a situation of uneasiness, worry or feeling of uncertainty

about impending or on-going evaluation programme, examination. In situations where the pressure is on and a good performance counts, students can become so anxious that they are actually unable to do their best (Morin, 2023). Many students experience stress or anxiety before an examination. Hence, a little nervousness can actually help students perform their best. However, Porcelli and Delgado (2017) stressed that, when this distress becomes so excessive that it actually interferes with performance on an examination, it is known as test anxiety. Test anxiety can cause students difficulties in studying or performing adequately on their examinations. Several researchers were of the view that test anxiety can be reduced or checked by factors like academic self-regulated learning among others (Amate-Romera & Fuente, 2021; Garzón-Umerenkova, Fuente, Amate, Paoloni, Fadda, & Pérez 2018; Pichardo, Cano, Garzón-Umerenkova, de la Fuente, Peralta-Sánchez, & Amate-Romera, 2018). Consequently, test anxiety could be reduced by developing good academic self-regulated learning habit by the students.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to learning that is guided by meta-cognition (thinking about one's thinking), strategic action (planning, monitoring, and evaluating personal progress against a standard), and motivation to learn (Burman, Green & Shanker, 2015). A self-regulated learner monitors, directs, and regulates actions toward goals of information acquisition, expanding expertise, and self-improvement. Dweck and Leggett (2021) explained that, self-regulated learners are cognizant of their academic strengths and weaknesses, and they have a repertoire of strategies they appropriately apply to tackle the day-to-day challenges of academic tasks. Students engaging in effective self-regulated learning can reduce their tendency to cheat in examinations and foster a sense of academic self-confidence in their abilities to excel in examinations.

Academic self-confidence refers to the standard of ideas or the assurance that students have in their abilities to achieve academically. Koarraju and Nadler as cited in Anyanwu and Emesi (2021) described academic self-confidence as students' beliefs that they can perform well in school tasks. This indicates that academic self-confidence is one of the most influential indicator, motivator, facilitator, and regulator of behaviour in students' everyday academic life. Students with a high academic self-confidence have realistic view of themselves and with capability which make them persistence in their endeavours. Students' academic self-confidence influences their choice and commitment to academic task, and their tendency to cheat in examination.

The commitments to academic tasks spur students to adopt certain academic self-resilience to ensure success at such tasks.

Academic resilience refers to students' capacity to effectively cope with academic setbacks, challenges, and pressures such as grades, exam stress, and the various difficulties encountered in their academic or school life. Iviemu (2021) defined academic self-resilience as a student's capacity to deal with academic barriers, problems, difficulty, and stress in an academic or educational setting. According to Abubakar, Ain, Mohd, Hashim, Fatin, and Kamarudin (2021), academic resilience is defined as a student's capacity to enhance academic performance following an unpleasant occurrence such as failing an individual assessment. As a result, only students who are academically resilient are better equipped to cope with academic stress during teaching and learning.

Studies have been conducted in most of the related factors influencing students' tendency to cheat in public examination using different analysis. (Onete, 2020; Eremie & Ikpa, 2020; Bassey & Iruoje, 2016). To the best knowledge of the researcher, no study has been carried out on how these selected students' personal variables: academic resilience, test anxiety, self-regulated learning and self-confidence, directly and indirectly interact to influence students' tendency to cheat in examinations through a causal path. It is against this background that the researcher deemed it fit to determine the influence of secondary school students' personal variables and their cheating tendencies in examinations using path analysis.

Statement of the Problem

There has been a significant increase in examination misconduct tendencies among students of public secondary schools despite the studies carried out previously. Cheating in examination is a vice that has bedeviled public secondary schools. The act is likely to be caused by students whose intention is to have unfair advantage over the rest of the students due to competitiveness in the high stake examinations among others.

Despite the negative effect of cheating in examinations by students, and efforts made by school management and government appear to be creating no impact, in terms of eliminating these cheatings to cheat in examinations among student, this behaviour still persist. The causes therefore need to be unearthed and solution be proffered to stamp out this problem among students given that cheating in examination may lead to production of half-baked graduates from the secondary schools and higher educational institutions, unqualified professionals in job markets and bad

reputation to the learning institutions where the act is practiced.

The present study was necessitated by the facts that not only do the student personal variables influence each other but they may also interact through different pathways to influence students' tendency to cheat in examinations. To validate the nature of the interaction, one has to build a path model of the variables and trim the model for only those variables that meaningfully and significantly influence students' tendency to cheat in public examinations through different causal paths. Some studies reported that students' personal variables which include test anxiety, academic self-regulated learning, academic self-confidence and academic self-resilience, among others have relationships with cheating tendencies in examinations.

Although studies have equally being carried out on the influence of students' personal variables on students' tendency to cheat in examinations, most of these studies were done based on ANOVA, simple correlation or multiple linear regression. These approaches are not capable of determining both direct and indirect effects of the independent variables on the students' tendency to cheat in examinations. Lacking in these studies are strength of causation and proportion of the total influence of the aforementioned students personal variables on cheating tendencies in examinations that are direct and indirect. Hence, the current study explored the influence of secondary school students' personal variables and cheating tendencies in examinations in Awka, Education Zone, Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the estimate of the strength of causation (path co-efficient) of the personal variables on examination cheating tendencies among secondary school students in Anambra State?
2. What is the proportion (percentage) of the total effect of the students' personal variables that is (a) direct and (b) indirect?

Research Method

The design adopted for the study was correlation survey with a path analytical background. A sample of 650 students drawn from the population size of 5,005 using simple random sampling technique was involved in the study. The instruments for data collection were Test Anxiety Inventory, Academic Self-regulated Learning, Academic Self-confidence, Academic Self-resilience and Examination Cheating Tendency Scales. The instruments were validated by three experts. The reliability of the instruments was established using

Cronbach Alpha to obtain 0.91, 0.88, 0.76, 0.68 and 0.83 respectively. The data obtained were analyzed with path analysis using Mplus software.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What is the estimate of the strength of causation (path coefficient) of the personal variables on examination cheating tendencies among secondary school students in Anambra State?

Table 1: Directions and Estimate of the Strength of Path Coefficient (Standardized Estimates) in the Causal Model

Variables that have effects on Exam Cheating Tendencies	Path co-efficient	Unstandardized	Strength
Test anxiety	.541	2.441	Very high positive
Academic self-resilience	-.412	-1.312	High Negative
Academic self- confidence	-.372	-1.272	High Negative
Academic self-regulated learning	-.237	-1.137	Moderate Negative
Variables that have effect on test anxiety			
Academic self-resilience	-.417	-1.317	High Negative
Academic self-confidence	-.506	-.906	Very Negative
Variable that has effects on Academic self-resilience			
Academic self- confidence	.280	1.480	Moderate positive
Academic self-regulated learning	.370	1.270	High positive
Variable that has effects on Academic self- confidence			
Academic self-regulated learning	.319	2.919	High positive

Note: X1= Academic self-regulated learning, X2= Academic self-confidence, X3= Academic self-resilience, X4= Test anxiety, X5=Examination Tendencies to Cheat

Path co-efficient below .1 is low, .11 to .30 is moderate, .31 to .50 high while .51 and above very high (Cohen, 1988).

Table 1 showed that test anxiety had a very high positive influence (0.541) on tendencies to cheat in examinations. This implied that as test anxiety increased, the tendencies to cheat in examinations also increased among students, and vice versa. Additionally, academic self-resilience had a high negative influence (-0.412) on examination tendencies to cheat. This meant that as academic resilience increased, the tendencies to cheat in examinations reduced, and vice versa. Furthermore, academic self-confidence had a high negative influence (-0.372) on examination tendencies to cheat. This also implied that as academic confidence increased, the tendencies to cheat in examinations decreased, vice versa. Moreover, academic self-regulated learning had a moderate negative influence (-0.237) on examination tendencies to cheat. This

implied that as academic self-regulated learning of students increased, their tendencies to cheat in examinations reduced, and vice versa. Please refer to Figure 4 for details. Furthermore, academic self-resilience had a high negative influence (-0.417) on test anxiety. This meant that as students' academic self-resilience increased, their test anxiety tended to reduce, vice versa. Similarly, academic self-confidence had a very high negative influence (-0.506) on test anxiety. This also implied that as students' academic self-confidence increased, their test anxiety reduced, vice versa. Academic self-confidence had a moderate positive influence (0.280) on academic resilience, and academic self-regulated learning also had a high positive influence (0.370) on resilience. This implied that as students' academic confidence and self-regulated learning increased, their academic self-resilience also increased, vice versa. Finally, academic self-regulated learning also had a high positive influence (0.319) on academic self-confidence. This also implied that as students' academic self-regulated learning increased, their academic self-confidence increased, vice versa.

Research Question 2: What is the proportion (percentage) of the total effect of the students' personal variables that is (a) direct and (b) indirect?

Table 2: Proportion of Total Effects (TE) of Selected Personal Variables that are Direct and Indirect

Predictor Variables 1-4	TE	DE	%	IE	%
Test anxiety	0.541	0.541	-35.13	-	-
Academic self-resilience	-0.686	-0.412	26.75	-0.274	17.79
Academic self- confidence	-0.713	-0.372	24.16	-0.341	22.14
Academic self-regulated learning	-0.681	-0.237	15.39	-0.444	28.83
Total Effect	**-1.54**		**31.17**		**68.76**

Note: X1= Academic self-regulated learning, X2= Academic self-confidence, X3= Academic self-resilience, X4= Test anxiety, X5=Examination Tendencies to Cheat

Table 7 shows a total effect size of -1.54 as well as a total direct effect of 31.17% and a total indirect effect of 68.76%. Table 7 indicates that students' personal variables contributed 31.17% direct effect of the variation on their cheating tendencies in examinations. Furthermore, Table 7 reveals that students' personal variables contributed 68.76% indirect effect of the variation on their cheating tendencies in examinations.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from research question 1 show that test anxiety has highest positive causal influence on students' tendencies to cheat in examinations. This was followed by academic self-resilience, and academic self-regulated learning. Furthermore, academic self-resilience has highest positive causal influence on test anxiety, followed by academic self-confidence. Again, academic self-confidence has a moderate positive causal influence on academic resilience followed by academic self-regulated learning. Finally, academic self-regulated learning also has high positive causal influence on academic self-confidence. The findings is consistent with the findings of Bassey and Iruoje (2017) who found in their study that the highest percentage of the total variation in cheating tendencies is accounted for by test anxiety. More, so, the findings of Indri and Diana (2019) revealed that academic self-regulated learning, goal orientation, and demographic variables have great influence on cheating behaviour of students. Furthermore, Eremie and Ikpa (2020) found among others that there is a significant relationship between excessive trembling, feeling of hopelessness, low self-esteem, affective tension and examination misconducts among secondary school students in Rivers State.

Findings from research question 2 shows that students' personal variables of test anxiety, academic self-resilience, academic self-confidence and academic self-regulated learning contributed 31.17% (proportion) of the total direct effect while academic self-resilience, academic self-confidence and academic self-regulated learning contributed 68.76% (proportion) of the total indirect effect of the variation on their cheating tendencies in examinations. This is in consonance with the findings of Ugwuanyi and Nworgu (2016) who found out that students' achievement in physics is not only influenced by the variables that have direct paths with it but can also be influenced by other variables that do not have direct paths with it. Consequently, the findings of the study is in line with the works of Idika, Idika and Enu (2021) who found out that the proportion of the total effects that are direct (21.57%) and indirect (78.43%) respectively. These percentages indicate that the six psycho-social variables used in this study exert more of an indirect than direct effect on students' cheating tendency. More so, the findings of the current study is in consonance with the works of Nwanze and Okoli (2021) who found out that student variables have indirect effect and indirect effect of the total effect on their academic achievement in biology.

Conclusion

This study developed a causal model for the explanation of the students' tendencies to cheat in examinations with four selected student variables. The result showed the directions as well as the estimates of the strengths of the causal paths. The results of the study further revealed that the proportion of the total effects of the four predictor variables accounted for direct and indirect variation of the students' tendencies to cheat in examinations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Students should avail themselves opportunities for personal development through workshops and seminars especially those relating to academic resilience, academic self-regulated learning, academic self-confidence and facilitating test anxiety.
2. Policy makers, curriculum planners and ministries of education board should put in place intervention programmes that will boost students' personal variables, encourage and support students passing through hard times and in which enrich curriculum contents in ways that could help them become academically confident, and resilient. They should also model for students good study patterns and direct them on how to develop effective regulated learning.
3. Government should organize workshops, seminars and conferences for teachers to educate them on the need to consider the improvement of students' personal variables during teaching and learning.

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