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**PSYCHO-SOCIO FACTORS AS CORRELATES OF EXAMINATION
MALPRACTICES AMONG CANDIDATES IN PUBLIC
EXAMINATIONS IN BENUE STATE**

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Abstract

The certificates obtained from public examining bodies West African Examination (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) have important roles to play in Nigerian education sector. However, examination malpractice among candidates in public examinations (WAEC/NECO) is one of the serious impediments to quality of education in Nigeria because it affects the value and integrity of certificates issued by these public examining bodies. Federal Government of Nigeria and other stakeholders have made several attempts to curb this menace, but it continues to increase. The proliferation of this phenomenon seems to relate to psychological factors (anxiety and self concept) and social factors (emphasis on certificates, University admission policies and students' attitudes towards studies). This study is therefore set to find out the relationship between psycho-socio factors and examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations in Benue State. The study is a survey research. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used in selecting Six-hundred (600) SS3 respondents from twelve (12) secondary schools in Benue State. Students' Examination Malpractice Questionnaire (SEMQ) was developed by the researcher to elicit data. Correlation (spearson correlation) was used at 0.05 alpha level to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations

are related to psychological factors ($r = .160, p < 0.05$) societal values ($r = .169, p < 0.05$) and students' attitudes towards studies ($r = .068, p < 0.05$). Therefore, it is recommended that Government should ensure mastery learning, employers of labour should emphasize practical skills against emphasis on certificates, and candidates should be educated on how to balance their social life with academic activities.

Introduction

Examination malpractice is one of the serious impediments to quality education in Nigeria because people are subjecting certificates obtained in public examination in Nigeria to more screening than ever. Anwuluorah (2008) defined examination malpractice as any negative act done before, during or after examination by candidates or any concerned person with the intention of gaining undue advantage. In the same vein, Usman (2000) viewed examination malpractice as any act of wrong-doing or neglect that contravenes the rules or acceptable practices before, during and after the conduct of examination by anybody in any way for personal or group interest

Ojo (2008) observed that many students may involve in examination malpractices due to test anxiety. This may arise from the fact that, some parents impose subjects/courses on their children in order to influence their career choice without due consideration to their children's cognitive abilities. This tendency may cause mental and emotional stress for some of the students, and may push them into alternative means of passing examination to satisfy their parents.

Psychologists such as Akoja (2006), Ihaji (2004) & Shindi (2007) have identified test anxiety and long-term stress as the main cause of examination malpractice among students at all levels of education in Nigeria. According to Ibrahim (2004), academic success usually depends upon students' ability to adapt to academic situation. He argued that students who feel competent will not be much threatened by stressful academic demands but to one's surprise, students are generally anxious over examination, which invariably leads most of them to engage in examination malpractice. Ibrahim identified the following as factors that are responsible to test anxiety among students.

- (i) Inadequate preparation by the individual students; when a candidate fails to study hard and cover expected syllabus or content of a particular subject or course, he/she tends to develop fear and get confused to examination questions.
- (ii) Lack of test wiseness or test sophistication. Many candidates do forget to prepare for the needed writing materials before getting to examination hall. This can influence such students to indulge in examination malpractice. He concluded that all these factors can cause anxiety to the testee and push him/her to involve in examination malpractice.

According to Oredein (2008), test anxiety of students largely influence their behaviour especially during examinations. He added that even a properly prepared student who is over taken by anxiety doubts his/her ability to answer examination questions independently, but seeks external support to achieve success in an examination. Ukpore (2004) in his investigation of what encourages examination malpractice among secondary school students in Cross River State, discovered that, students who do not know how to manage anxiety and stress collapse in examination hall. He found that 47% of the victims was due to too much stress, while 53% of them were those that could not succeed in their plans to cheat in a particular examination due to lack of preparation and other extraneous factors.

Azizi and Jaafar (2006) observed that, students are often criticized or recommended by their parents, teachers, and their peers or anyone around them who has an opportunity about their cognitive ability and general behaviours. This has caused students to develop high or low self confidence. This resulted in individual developing inferiority complex, passive behaviour, dreary, and depression among others. Azizi and Jaafar further pointed out that, the crises involved in self concept lured most students with low self confidence into examination malpractices in schools. It has been observed that students who have low confidence in their academic abilities tend to cheat in examination to overcome their challenges.

Adeloye (2004) on his part stated that, self concept and self efficacy are important components of an individual which determine the learner's attitude, aspirations and academic achievement in

school. He added that, the level at which a particular student developed self confidence influence his/her comprehension and ability to study hard and excel above his peers. He further argued that, the self concept of an individual is determined by the level of his IQ (Intelligent Quocent) which differs from one individual to another

Dated back to colonial era, the academic value system in Nigeria placed emphasis on individual certificates as an assumed means for social, economic and political power through which most people employ every means to acquire the certificates. Awonusi (2002) opined that the main motivating tendency to cheat among students is the "get-rich-quick" philosophy of the society which he argued, had translated to "get-certificate-quick" syndrome, an act which invalidates and makes nonsense of the educational certificates awarded by the system.

More so, Idaka (2006) posited that the inherited mentality of value system has dominated and suffused the Nigerian school system such that the school products preferred to flaunt certificates and credentials rather than knowledge, skill and competence. As such therefore, students engage in short-cut means of acquiring these certificates during internal and public examinations. In the same vein, parental indiscipline and abuse of wealth sustain the phenomenon of examination malpractice. Many parents believe that with their wealth they can catapult their children to any heights in the society even if it involves buying question papers and bribing teachers and invigilators to ensure that their children pass examinations.

Aminu (2006) reported that too much emphasis is laid on certificate as a mean to achieve success in life (to gain admission into tertiary institutions, political appointment and employment in the labour market). This belief and practice make many parents who want their children to be the envy of everyone else, employed everything possible to ensure that their children come out with good grades by bribing their way through. Examination malpractice is perpetuated by individuals who are desperate to pass and acquire certificates. There seems to be an unholy, unwholesome conspiracy to aid and abet examination malpractice by school heads, teachers, invigilators, parents, students and "mercenaries" who have mixed motives to their behaviours (Adenipekun, 2004 & Idaka, 2006).

Also, discussing the admission policy by Nigerian universities, Awanbor (2005) in his presentation on credentialing process in Nigerian education system reported that majority of Nigerian children indulge into examination malpractice in public examinations in order to meet the requirement and secure admission in the university education. Akorh (2010) in his investigation of societal demands as causes of examination malpractice in English and Mathematics among WAEC candidates in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State discovered that Nigerian university admission requirement is one of the causes of examination malpractice in these core subjects.

According to Ohungur (2004), many students in 21st century develop laxity behaviours towards studies due to bad companies and modern technological influence. Most of them see examination malpractice as a last resort to their academic deficiencies. They spent most of their time with social networks, attending club/night parties, watching movies and sports with little or no commitment to academic work. They smuggled handset phones (GSM) with vital information into examination hall. Such students are bound to cheat in examination hall to achieve excellent result.

Statement of the Problem

The issue of examination malpractices in education most especially in public examinations (WAEC and NECO) and their devastating effects has been a major concern to stakeholders in Nigeria. Government, researchers and many stakeholders in education have made several attempts to identify the causes of this phenomenon and curb its existence in public examinations. Candidates who are the major group of people that involve in examination cheats have not been giving adequate attention to identify the reason why they often indulge in this menace. The existing studies are not conclusive on students centered factors as causes of examination malpractices among WAEC/NECO candidates.

It is based on this that, a study of this nature is set to find out the relationship between psycho-socio factors (test anxiety, societal values and students attitude towards studies) as correlates of examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations in Benue State.

Research Questions

In carrying out the study, the following research questions were developed

- i. What is the relationship between psychological factors (test anxiety and self concept) and examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations in Benue State?
- ii. What is the relationship between society values (emphasis on certificates and University admission policies) and examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations in Benue State?
- iii. What is the relationship between students' attitudes towards studies and examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations in Benue State?

Scope of the Study

The study covers psychological factors (anxiety and self concept) and social factors (emphasis on certificates, university admission policies and students' attitudes towards studies) among candidates who are preparing to write West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) examinations in all secondary schools in Benue State.

Methodology

Research Design

A survey design will be used as a design for the study. This is because there will be no manipulation of any variable as they will be studied as they exist. Students' response across the state will be sampled and analyzed without manipulation.

Target Population

The target population for this study comprises all the public and private Senior Secondary School students in the three senatorial zones of Benue State. There are 313 public and 775 private secondary schools in the state with the total of 1088 government approved secondary schools. All the senior secondary school students from these public and private schools constitute target population for the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for the study comprises 600 senior secondary school (SS3) students selected from 12 secondary schools in the state. The study employed multi-stage sampling technique in selection of local governments, schools and respondents as representatives in the study. The schools were sampled from three selected local government areas across the three senatorial zones. The selection of 600 senior secondary school (SS3) students, 50 SS3 students from each of the 12 schools was done, using simple random sampling technique.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for data collection was Students Examination Malpractice Questionnaire (SEMQ). The questionnaire, which was constructed by the researchers, aims at eliciting information from respondents. It comprises section 'A' which contains students' Bio data. Section 'B' has information on examination malpractice among senior secondary students while section 'C' sought information on psychological factors (anxiety and self concept) and section 'D' contains information on social factors (emphasis on certificates, admission policies and students' attitudes to studies) as correlates of examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations.

Method of Data Analysis

Data gathered for the study was analyzed using correlation. Each of the independents variables was correlated with dependent variable of the study to determine their level of relationship.

Result

Research Question I: What is the relationship between psychological factors (test anxiety and self concept) and examination malpractices among candidates of public examinations in Benue State?

Research Question II: What is the relationship between students' attitudes towards studies and examination malpractices among candidates of public examinations in Benue State?

Table 4.1: Correlation Matrix of the Effects of Psychological Factors on Examination Malpractices in Public Examinations in Benue State

		Psychological Factors	Examination Malpractice
Psychological factors	Pearson correlation	1	.160**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	600	600
Examination malpractice	Pearson Correlation	.160**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	600	600

**correlation is significant at 0.04 (2-tailed)

Table 4.1 shows that there was a significant positive correlation between psychological factors and examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations (WAEC/NECO) ($r = .160$, $N = 600$, $p = .000$). This implies that, examination malpractice among candidates in public examinations is significantly related to psychological factors (anxiety and self concept).

The finding of this study revealed that examination malpractice among candidates in public examinations is related with their anxiety and low self concept. They lack self confidence to write WAEC/NECO without external support. This implies that when candidates in Benue State control their anxiety and develop high self confidence, they can refrain from examination malpractices.

The finding of this study is in support of Olopoeniyan (2000), Akande (2003) and Uduk (20009) who in their studies, discovered that inferiority complex and fear for depression significantly and positively predicted students' behaviours and performance in Economics, Agricultural science and Mathematics in Cross River States, Enugu State and Kogi State of Nigeria.

Research Question II: What is the relationship between Societal Values and Examination malpractice among candidates of public examinations in Benue State?

Table 4.2: Correlation Matrix of the Effects of Societal Values on Examination Malpractices in Public Examinations.

		Examination malpractice	Societal values
Examination malpractice	Pearson correlation	1	.169**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	600	600
Societal values	Pearson correlation	.160**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	600	600

****Correlation is Significant at 0.05 (2-tailed)**

Table 4.2 shows that, there was a significant positive correlation between societal values and examination malpractice among candidates in public examinations ($r = .169$, $N = 600$, $p .000$). This means that, the involvement of candidates in examination malpractice is significantly related to increasing societal demand on certificates as a mean to an end and discriminately University admission policies in Nigeria. The researcher has discovered that examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations (WAEC/NECO) in Benue State is significantly related to the emphasis the society placed on certificates and University admission policies in Nigeria. It implies that, if the value placed on certificates by the society and University admission policies change, the rate of examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations will reduce.

The findings of this study agreed with Nwandiani (2005) who observed that Nigeria's education system is largely certificate oriented. So much value and emphasis are placed on someone's certificates instead of knowledge, skills and abilities. The labour market place value and reward for the level and face value quality of certificates tend to promote tendencies or attitudes among individuals to cheat in the process of certification. These findings also agreed with Tsumba (2011) who posits that in Nigeria, the persistent frauds in WAEC/NECO by some stakeholders in education is to acquire good certificates either for promotion in office or secure admission into Universities for higher studies.

Research Question III: What is the relationship between students' attitudes towards studies and examination malpractices among candidates of public examinations in Benue State?

Table 4.3: Correlation Matrix of the Effects of Students' Attitudes on Examination Malpractices among Candidates of Public Examinations.

		Examination Malpractice	Students' Attitude
Examination Malpractice	Pearson correlation	1	.068*
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.049
	N	600	600
Students' Attitude	Pearson correlation	.068**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.049	
	N	600	600

* **Correlation is significant at the ($p < 0.05$).**

Table 4.3 shows that there was a significant positive correlation between students' attitudes towards studies and examination malpractices among candidates in public examinations ($r = .068$, $N = 600$, $p = .049$). The finding of this study revealed that examination malpractices is significantly related to students' attitudes towards studies (watching of football or sport competitions and spending time on social networks (2go, twitter and face book) among others.

The result of this study confirmed the findings of Omiyefa (2008) who in his observation on students' behaviours as a cause of examination malpractice and poor learning outcome among students laments that, watching television and performing social activities on internet such as; face book, 2go, twitter, etc among youths do not only take away their time from school work but also, expose them to immoral act of examination malpractice. The findings also agreed with

Ogunsanwo (2000) and Kayode (2003) who in their studies on the determinants of students' achievement in Economics and Agricultural science discovered that students' study habit and attitudes were significant and have positive relationship with their involvement in examination malpractices in school. However, this

study contradicts that of Onabanjo (2000) who discovered that students' attitudes towards mathematics have no significant effect on their behaviours in examination and performance in school.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, the proliferation of examination malpractice among candidates in public examinations (WAEC/NECO) is related to psychological factors such as anxiety and self concept. Individual student who suffers from high level of anxiety in examination hall with inferiority complex (self concept) is bound to indulge into examination malpractices.

Based on the findings of this study, it is apparent that examination malpractice among candidates in public examinations is related to societal values such as emphasis on certificates as a mean to an end and University admission policies in Nigeria.

Apparently, this phenomenon among candidates in public examinations is linked to poor attitudes of students towards studies such as watching sport competitions, spending too much time on social network (2go, face book and twitter) among other laxity behaviours.

Recommendations

- i. The educational curriculum planners should redirect school curriculum to achieve mastery learning at secondary school. This will help learners to develop their cognitive ability and self confidence to pass any form of examination without seeking external support.
- ii. Parents and school authorities should identify the academic ability of their students or wards and guide them on how to prepare effectively for examination to avoid anxiety in examination hall.
- iii. Parents should also be educated not to impose subjects or courses on their children.
- iv. Government and other employers of labour should emphasize practical skills as a criterion for one's appointment in the labour market, as against the emphasis on certificates.

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