

***Academic Anxiety, Locus of Control and Cheating Tendencies among Undergraduate Students in Universities in Cross River State***

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**Abstract**

*The focus of the study was to examine academic anxiety, locus of control and cheating tendencies among undergraduate students in Universities in Cross River State. To achieve these objectives, two hypotheses were formulated to be tested. The study adopted an ex-post facto research design, with a stratified and purposive sampling techniques to select a total of 1000 students from the two universities that were selected for the study. A questionnaire titled “Psychological Variables and Cheating Tendencies Scale (PVCTS)” was used for data collection. The instrument was validated using Cronbach alpha reliability technique for estimating the degree of consistency of the sub scale and the coefficient of 0.74 to 0.86 was obtained. Data were collected by the researchers and analysed using simple regression statistics and the result showed that there is a significant influence of academic anxiety and locus of control on cheating tendencies among students. Based on the findings, it was recommended that students should be encouraged to develop a positive self-image that would help them avoid cheating in the examination hall. That student should learn to always realise where they have not worked well and improve on it rather than blame people for cheating in the examination hall.*

**Keywords:** Academic, anxiety, locus, control, cheating, tendencies

**Introduction**

Since the beginning of western education, examination is a veritable tool that has been used to ascertain the extent to which learners have achieved objectives of instruction. The teacher in the classroom is entrusted with these objectives to ensure that learners acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, attitude and techniques that can help them to function effectively in the society. Unlike the carpenters, tailors and medical personnel that use calibrated instruments like tapes, thermometer and so forth to determine the

presence and magnitude of a particular attribute, the teacher in the classroom relies heavily on various assessment tools to ascertain the extent to which the stipulated objectives have been achieved. One of such is test or examination. Examination is the main source through which the knowledge and skills acquired are determined in the school. It is organized in order to evaluate, assess and test the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of the learners, assess the instructional effectiveness of a chosen method and material, provide guidance to the learner, diagnose and provide remedial measures to the problems of the learner.

Unfortunately, today students have misconstrued the rationale for examination after instructions; and this accounts for a lot of unhealthy test taking behaviours among many university students. Many scholars, researchers, stakeholders and even examination bodies have lamented tenaciously on the wounds that unhealthy examination behaviours have caused to the Nigerian educational system. From the basic level of education through the secondary to tertiary levels, cheating in examinations has attained a gargantuan proportion that is beyond the comprehension of ordinary mind. Cheating in examination has taken different dimensions as the day grows. Initially, examination malpractice was found in students copying in sheets of papers, writing in their palms and desk especially those in the secondary schools. Today, examination misconduct has metamorphosed to a more sophisticated dimension of students browsing with their phones inside the examination hall, using sign language for answers in objective type test, copying on their shirts and laps, writing from recorded tapes, utilization of electronic watches that are internet connected, hiring of mercenaries, bribery of supervisors, sorting of lecturers in tertiary institutions, collecting script from outside to submit in the examination, body writing or tattoo, giraffing, super printing, impersonation or mercenaries, use of sophisticated software among others (Akpo & Akpo, 2006; Chima, 2006; Ekuri & Egbai, 2018; Maduabum, 2001; Ogbonna, 2001; Ita & Egbai, 2019).

The effect of this unhealthy examination behaviour to the individual and the society generally is alarming. Certificates from Nigerian tertiary institutions have lost credibility. Half-baked graduates are produced on a daily basis. In other words, students carry certificates that they cheated their way to obtain and hence, cannot defend. Unemployment is at increase due to lack of employability skills among graduates. Viral spread of laziness from lecturers, who are not competent in teaching, economic recession, social vices among others, are some of the effects of examination malpractice. One question that continually begs for answer in the mind of the researchers is, what are the factors that have continually increase cheating tendencies among students in higher institutions. Researchers have given variant answers to this question. Most of the answers provided are parental desire for children quick graduation, lecturer's greed and corrupt tendencies, over-emphasis on certificates, fear of failure, poor teaching method, examination phobia, low self-confidence and esteem, fear of subject, invigilators or supervisors/examiners' indiscipline, poor management, poor study habits, poor attitude

to class attendance, identification of lecturers' weak points, lack of interest in the subject, and a host of other factors. Government, administrators, social organization, examination bodies and even Ministry of Education have made concerted effort to step down, control, eliminate or stamp out cheating among students. For example, Kayode (2006) noted that the Federal government Decree 20 of 1984 stated that culprit will be given a penalty of 21 years imprisonment. Some examination bodies have over the years been blacklisting invigilators/supervisors/examiners, schools and centres that are involved in the act and are also cancelling results of a particular candidate, group of candidates, school(s) or centre(s) or withholding their result for a period of time. Additional measures include suspension by not less than one year of the affected school(s) or centre(s) from presenting candidates for WAEC or JAMB examinations; rustication of the affected student(s) in the form of suspension or probation for one or two semesters or total expulsion; and demotion or termination of appointment on the part of affected staff, among others. In spite of these efforts to ensure that cheating tendencies are reduced among students, the problem still exists. The researchers thus presumed that certain psychological factors could be responsible for this problem.

Psychological factors refer to one's psychological development in an interaction with a social environment. Psychological factors are factors that can influence behaviour. Some of such factors are anxiety, attitude of learners, environment, and low self-efficacy of students, self-concept, peer group influence, parental pressure, the society, the teachers and the government. The researchers are presuming that certain psychosocial variables like academic anxiety and academic motivation could be responsible for these cheating tendencies among undergraduate students. It is against this backdrop that the researchers were spurred into carrying out this study.

Anxiety is a state of mind in response to some stimuli in the environment which brings in the feelings of apprehension or fear. When the person is exposed to the cause of anxiety the next time, the conditioning effect causes a repeat response and the person will try to avoid the cause. All the responsibilities of being an academic brings with it a state of mind referred to as "academic anxiety." Academic anxiety arises out of the apprehension of rebuke from teachers, parents and peers regarding the failures of performing the responsibilities of an academic properly. Developing a state of academic anxiety causes a decrease in attention span, concentration and memory which can result in having a negative effect on the performance of the individual. It is now being learnt that some level of anxiety is required for the person to take up all the responsibilities seriously, but both high levels of academic anxiety or very low level have deleterious effects on academic performance, which in turn may lead to more academic anxiety. It is this uneasiness of mind while doing or focusing on academic activities in school or at home which causes competition making students more anxious and eager of whether they can do well in their academic part or perform well in academic activities that may adversely affect the mental health of students; which relates to the impending danger from the environment of the academic institutions

including teaching certain subjects like mathematics, science, English etc. Academic anxiety afflicts students during school-related situations.

In a study on test anxiety and cheating in examinations conducted among secondary schools students in Calabar, Idika (2005) uses a sample of 739 year one students out of a population of 1268 whose ages are between 11 and 14 years. He adopted ex-post facto design and make use of structured questionnaire. The data so generated were analysed using the analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the calculated value of F ratio was 1.76 at a significant level of 0.05 with 3 and 632 degrees of freedom. His analysis was not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) thus; he accepted the null hypothesis and concluded that students with different level of cheating do not differ significantly on test anxiety.

Idika (2005) carried out a study designed to investigate the causal relationship between students' cheating tendency in examination and some psychosocial variables in Cross Rivers State of Nigeria. The study examined the composite and relative contributions of socio-economic status, study habit, achievement motivation, test anxiety, self-concept and attribution to hardwork to students' tendency to cheat in examination. The sample consisted of 600 senior secondary school students (300 males and 300 females) who responded to a 50-item questionnaire developed for the study. Analysis of the data was done by using two related statistical procedures (multiple regression analysis and path analysis); the result of the finding showed that, of the six psychosocial variables, five contributed significantly to the prediction of cheating among students, as only study habit did not contribute significantly to the prediction. The result also indicated that the same five variables had direct and indirect effect; and that the relative order of importance of the prediction showed that examination anxiety was the highest. The researcher further asserted that heightened anxiety through threat is likely to increase in the students the tendency to cheat in examination. On the increased incidence of cheating in examination in Nigeria, the researcher fingered test anxiety as one of the psychological factors that influence cheating. She also opined that secondary school students in Nigeria look on examinations as confrontation with an enemy.

Locus of control stems from social learning theory of Rotter, 1954 and Weiner's 1974 and 1985 attribution theory, which refers to a person's perception about the underlying root cause of successes or failures in his or her life. When individuals, most often, believe their successes and failures are due to factors within their control, they are viewed as having an internal locus of control (i.e. success or failure happened because of effort the individual put forward or did not put forward). If individuals, most often, believe their successes and failures are due to something outside of their control (i.e., success or failure happened because of luck or task difficulty), they are regarded as having an external locus of control. Attribution interpretations can lead to both positive and negative reactions. For example, if an individual interprets a failure as the result of too little effort (an internal locus of control), he or she likely believes that increased

effort will make a positive change in the outcome. Those with an internal locus of control are more likely to strive for achievement, work to improve their situation, apply what they learn toward positive outcomes for the future, and persist in the face of difficulties. Conversely, if an individual interprets a failure as the result of a difficult exam or an unfair instructor (an external locus of control), he or she may believe that his or her performance is due to factors beyond his or her control and may not see any reason to hope for future improvements. Some researchers have found significant results regarding the relationship between academic dishonesty and an external locus of control (Gallagher, 2010). Alarape and Onakoya (2003) examined the cheating behaviours and personality variables, including locus of control, of Nigerian college students. They report that students with an external locus of control reported more cheating behaviours.

In a study on measures of academic dishonesty that examine high ability college students' loci of control and its effect on behaviours of academic dishonesty, as moderated by academic self-concept by Urwick (2009), a total of 357 high ability college students who enrolled at two universities in the south-western United States took part in this study. Variables and the moderation of academic self-concept were examined for the aggregate group ( $n = 357$ ) and for the disaggregate honours and non-honours groups. Students completed the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966), the Self-Description Questionnaire III (Marsh, 1989), and a scale to measure academic dishonesty based on the work of Geddes (2011). A 17-item measure of academic dishonesty was developed. Results indicate locus of control does not significantly predict academic dishonesty for the non-honours group, but several relationships were found among variables for the aggregate group and for the honours and non-honours groups.

In another study on relationship between locus of control and test taking behaviours among undergraduates in College of Education in Katsina-Ala, Benue State Nigeria, Ugereki (2010) used a population of 498 students registered in the Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology, College of Education Katsina-Ala for 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 academic sessions, and a sample of 364 student volunteers, participated in the study. Four research questions and three hypotheses tested at 0.05 alpha level were designed to guide the study. The instruments for data collection were College Students' Test Behaviour Scale (CSTBS) and College Students' Locus of Control Scale (CSLCS) validated by experts in relevant fields. Their reliability coefficients obtained through test-retest method and Pearson product moment correlation technique were .73 and .78 for CSTBS and CSLCS respectively. The data generated from these instruments were analysed using SPSS. It was found that most students attributed their test taking behaviour to external factors while those who are independent in the examination attributed their behaviour to internal factors and luck. In another study on Locus of control and risk behaviour among college students by Lauren (2006), the purpose of the study was to determine the relationship, if any,

between an individual's locus of control (internal or external) and their degree of engaging in risk behaviour. Participants were male (N=8) and female (N=24) undergraduate college students from Rowan University. Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale was used to assess the subject's attributions (internal vs. external) for the outcomes of his or her behaviour. To assess the amount of risk behaviour in the subjects, items from the National College Health Risk Behaviour Survey (NCHRBS) were used. A demographic questionnaire was also used. Regression analysis showed that there was no relationship between Locus of Control and Risk Behaviour scores.

In a similar study, Ita and Egbai (2019) sought to examine psychological indices and cheating tendencies among undergraduates in Universities in Cross River State. Two hypotheses guided the study, which adopted ex-post facto research design. Stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used to choose 1000 students from the two universities that were selected for the study. A questionnaire titled 'Psychological Variables and Cheating Tendencies Scale (PVCTS)' was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three Measurement and Evaluation experts in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar. Cronbach alpha reliability technique was used for estimating the reliability of the sub scales and coefficient range of 0.74 to 0.89 was obtained and the instrument was adjudged as reliable. Data were collected by the researchers and analysed using independent t-test and one way analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistics and the result showed a significant influence of self-concept and attitude on cheating tendencies among students. It was recommended that students should develop a positive attitude to examination and high self-image in order to forestall issues of malpractices that have beclouded assessment practices.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- i. What is the influence of academic anxiety on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students
- ii. How does locus of control influence cheating tendencies among undergraduate students?

### **Statement of hypotheses**

The hypotheses were formulated as follows;

**Ho1** There is no significant influence of academic anxiety on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students.

**Ho2** There is no significant influence of locus of control on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students.

## Methodology

The study adopted an ex-post facto research design with a stratified and purposive sampling technique to select a total of 1000 students from the two universities that were selected for the study. A questionnaire titled 'Psychological Variables and Cheating Tendencies Scale (PVCTS)' was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three Measurement and Evaluation Experts in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, Calabar. Cronbach alpha reliability technique was used for estimating the degree of consistency of the sub scale and the coefficients of 0.74 to 0.87 was obtained for the instrument adjudging it as reliable. The instrument used was a questionnaire which was constructed by the researchers to elicit response from the sample. It was divided into two sections. Section A was designed to elicit demographic data such as age, gender and year of study while Section B was designed with a four point Likert-type scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) to elicit responses on 35 items on the variables. The responses were manually scored and coded as (SA) = 4, (A) = 3, (D) = 2 and (SA) = 1. Data were collected by the researchers and analysed hypothesis by hypothesis. For hypothesis one, the independent variable was academic anxiety while hypothesis two has locus of control as the independent variable. The two hypotheses have cheating tendencies as the dependent variable. The analysis was carried out using simple regression statistics.

## Presentation of results

**Ho1:** There is no significant influence of academic anxiety on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students.

The independent variable is academic anxiety while the dependent variable is cheating tendencies. To test this hypothesis, simple regression analysis was used and the result is presented in Table 1. The result showed that the Adj  $R^2 = .013$ . This implies that the variation in the dependent variable (cheating tendencies) can be explained by contribution of 1.3% of the independent variable (academic anxiety). A look at the analysis of variance result showed that  $F = 14.400$ ,  $p < .05$ . Since  $p(.000)$  is less than  $p(.05)$ , this implies that there is a significant influence of academic anxiety on cheating tendencies among students. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 1:** Simple regression analysis of the influence of academic anxiety on cheating tendencies

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	463.186	1	463.186	14.40	.000
Residual	32102.41	998	32.167		
Total	32565.59	999			

Adj  $R^2 = .013$     Std Error = 5.67157

**Ho2:** There is no significant influence of locus of control on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students.

The independent variable is locus of control while the dependent variable is cheating tendencies. To test this hypothesis, simple regression analysis was used and the result is presented in Table 2. The result showed that the Adj  $R^2 = .017$ . This implies that the variation in the dependent variable (cheating tendencies) can be explained by contribution of 1.7% of the independent variable (locus of control). A look at the analysis of variance result showed that  $F=18.229$ ,  $p<.05$ . Since  $p(.000)$  is less than  $p(.05)$ , this implies that there is a significant influence of locus of control on cheating tendencies among students. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 2:** Simple regression analysis of the influence of locus of control on cheating tendencies

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	584.143	1	584.143	18.22	.000
Residual	31981.45	998	32.046		
Total	32565.59	999			

Adj  $R^2 = .017$  Std Error=5.66088

**Discussion of findings**

Hypothesis one that stated that there is no significant influence of academic anxiety on cheating tendencies among students was rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of academic anxiety on cheating tendencies among students. This could be due to the fact that when students are anxious about examination especially when they lack the knowledge of the content of what they are about to write, there is every possibility that they rather get themselves prepared to cheat in the examination. Most especially, when the subject requires calculations, most of the students do not even want to write, they devise a lot of means in order to pass. The findings of the study were in line with that of Idika (2005) that carried out a study on test anxiety and cheating in examinations conducted among secondary schools students in Calabar. The result also showed that students with different level of cheating do not differ significantly on test anxiety.

Hypothesis two which stated that there is no significant influence of locus of control on cheating tendencies among students was rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of locus of control on cheating tendencies among students. This could be due to the fact that attribution interpretations can lead to both positive and negative reactions. For example, if an individual interprets a failure as the result of too little effort (an internal locus of control), he or she likely believes that increased effort will make a positive change in the outcome. Those with an internal locus of control are more likely to strive for achievement, work to improve their situation, apply what they learn toward positive outcomes for the future, and persist in the face of failure. The findings of the



study were in line with that of Urwick (2009) that carried out a study on academic dishonesty and examine high ability college students' loci of control and its effect on behaviours of academic dishonesty, as moderated by academic self-concept. Results indicate that locus of control does not significantly predict academic dishonesty for the non-honours group, but several relationships were found among variables for the aggregate group and for the honours and non-honours groups.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that academic anxiety and locus of control significantly influences students cheating tendencies. Based on the conclusion, it was recommended that students should be encouraged by counsellors to develop a positive self-image that would help them avoid cheating in the examination hall, and that student should learn to always realise where they have not worked well and improve on it rather than blame people for cheating in the examination hall.

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