

## ***Psychological Indices and Cheating Tendencies among Undergraduates in Universities in Cross River State***

<sup>1</sup>**Caroline I. Ita**  
[Carolineita33@gmail.com](mailto:Carolineita33@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup>**Julius M. Egbai, Ph.D**  
[juliegbai@gmail.com](mailto:juliegbai@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Educational Foundations*  
*Faculty of Education*  
*University of Calabar, Calabar*  
*Cross River State, Nigeria*

### **Abstract**

*This study 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.*

**Keywords:** psychological, indices, cheating, tendencies, university, undergraduates

### **Introduction**

Examination has remained one of the most valid means of ascertaining the extent to which a student has performed well in school. It is a potent means of making value judgment about the growth of the learner after being exposed to a given set of instructions. Over the years, many people have criticized that examination is not a true test of knowledge, given the fact that every examination that is carried out contains some elements of errors. The truth however remains, that there is no other potent means of ascertaining the degree of acquisition of knowledge, values and skills among students other than examination. Hence, it is mostly used all over the world for

assessment. Thus, examination are conducted not to punish the students but to help students, teachers, administrators and even the government.

It is sad that over the years, most students have misconstrued the import of examinations and this accounts for why a lot of activities transpire during examination which are inimical to the learner, the educational system and even the community. One of these is the issue of examination malpractices. Many students get themselves unprepared before, during and after examination; as a result, they acquire scores that may not measure the level of possessed traits that are measured in the examination hall. To this end, they develop a lot of cheating strategies and many of them even go a long way to go after scores even after the examination exercise. From the basic level of education through the secondary to tertiary levels, cheating in examinations is common place. It is worrisome that even during common entrance examinations, teachers assist pupils by copying the answers on the board for the pupils.

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 school. 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, lack of conducive examination environment, laxity in penalizing or punishing offenders, 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, use of sophisticated software, among others (Akpo & Akpo, 2006; Chima, 2006; Maduabum, 2001; Ogbonna, 2001).

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 an increase due to lack of employability skills among graduates. Government, administrators, social organizations, 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." Others range from rustication of students, suspension and even dismissal of lecturers, demotion and payment of half salaries 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 indices could be responsible for this problem and it was on this basis that this study was carried out to assess the influence of students' attitude to examination and self-concept on cheating tendencies in universities in Cross River state.

Paul (2000) investigated the relationship between self-concept and attitude. The study was a six year longitudinal programme involving about 500 American high school students aged between 15 and 20 years, who were given questionnaire on self-concepts; analysis of the data reveals that self-concept and attitude were positively correlated in all grades. In addition the researcher found out that improvement in the student's self-concept resulted in a parallel improvement in their behavioural manifestations. This implies that as the self-concept of the students increases, their performance level also improves.

Similarly, Ekuri and Egbai (2018) investigated incidences of academic dishonesty among post-graduate students in federal universities in south-south Nigeria. The sample of the study consisted of 930 respondents of three federal universities in the zone (440 males and 490 females), with age range of 20 and 50 years, and a mean age of 38.35 from the universities of Calabar, Port Harcourt, and Benin. The sample was selected through stratified random sampling technique. A valid and reliable 61 item scale (Academic Dishonest Behaviour Questionnaire) with a cronbach Alpha reliability of .68 was used to measure the frequency of occurrence of each type of dishonest behaviour identified among students. The final version of the questionnaire was administered to graduate students in the respective universities with the help of trained research assistants. Frequency and percentage count of rampant academic dishonest behaviour was calculated, while factor analysis technique was used to isolate the underlying factors associated with academic dishonesty among the target group. The summary of the findings indicates that students tended to have been greatly involved in most aspects of academic dishonest behaviours including examination and non-examination cheating behaviours. Generally, the underlying factors of academic dishonest behaviours include impersonation, plagiarism, unruly behaviour, concoction, copying and colluding.

Self-concept is a "composite of a person's thoughts, feelings, strings, and hopes, fears and fantasies, his view of what he is, what he has been, what he might become and his attitude pertaining to his wealth". This implies that an individual's behaviour is an expression of his/her personal assessment. Self-concept may be perceived as what the individual thinks of his/her actual self. Accordingly, Arthry (2006) noted that self-concept consists of real self (the self we believe we are) and an ideal self (the self we think we ought to be). From these, a person who sees these two selves as being similar will more likely have a strong and healthy self-concept and will be better behave

during test taking or examination than one who sees the real self as being inferior to the ideal self. The concept of self is also said to be the core of personality. Therefore, it was concluded that, how one perceives a situation depends on how he perceives himself.

James (2000), in a study on the influence of self-concept and student behaviour in school examinations, adopted a descriptive research design with purposive sampling technique to select a total of 200 students. Data were collected using a questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The result was reported to show that students' behaviour depends on the students' self-concept and the confidence they have in themselves before examination.

Anderson (2007) conducted related study to find out reasons for cheating or not cheating. The study involved 300 undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. The study made use of stratified and simple random sampling technique to collect the sample. A set of questionnaire consisting of 21 cheating behaviour on students was administered to 300 students; the respondents were asked to indicate which of the behaviour they had engaged in. The result shows that cheating consist of a number of different types of behaviour rather than a unitary concept. Reasons for cheating or not cheating, were given in frequency and expressed in percentages. The result also shows that about 49% indicated that they did not cheat because of their academic self-concept. They indicated that cheating in examination would devalue their academic achievement. This group of student who fell that cheating would devalue their academic achievement may be seen as being motivated internally. Internally motivated students believe that their success or failures are their responsibilities whereas the externally motivated students believe that their success or failure depend on factors outside themselves, such as fate, luck, chance and godfathers. This group has low academic self-concept and is more prone to cheating.

Dexuus (2005) carried out a study of self-concept to determine its relationship with attitude among secondary school student's tendencies to cheat. The study used a sample of 125 students who responded to 180 items that represent 11 factors of self-concept. Analysis of the data using factor analysis and correlation revealed that students with positive self-concept displayed positive attitudinal dispositions than those with negative or low self-concept. This result clearly shows that self-concept would influence students' behavioural manifestation during test taking.

In another study, Gregory (2008) investigated the influence of students' attitude on cheating tendencies in examination among secondary school students in Ondo state. The study adopted a survey research design with a purposive sampling technique to collect a sample of 380 students. Data were collected through a self-developed

questionnaire. Data were analyzed using independent t-test. The result showed that students who have a negative attitude to examination are the ones that cheat more. It was opined that students who engage in cheating have negative attitude to study. They stressed that a student's development of negative attitude towards study is as a result of personal variable and that a student whose academic performance is externally rather than internally motivated will always have negative attitude to study. This implies that a student who knows that he or she does not take his or her study seriously, is bound to develop negative attitude toward his studies hence exhibit negative behaviour during test taking.

Koton (2009) studied self-concept, attitude on student's tendencies to cheat in public examinations. The researcher identified two dimensions of self-concept, namely, the model and mirror self-concepts both of which emphasize the interplay between the environment and the individual. In another study on Test-taking skills of secondary school students, the relationship with motivation, attitudes, anxiety and attitudes towards tests, Hamzeh, Abdelfattah and Alshumran (2014) randomly selected 626 (372 males and 254 females) secondary school students for the study. The instruments used in data collection included Test-taking Skills Scale (TSS), the Mathematics Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MMSLQ), the Mathematics Anxiety Scale-Revised (MAS-R), the Mathematics Attitude Inventory (MAI), and the Attitude towards Tests Scale (ATS). A positive and significant relationship was reported between students' test-taking skills and each student's motivation to learn mathematics, attitudes towards mathematics, and attitudes towards tests; while mathematics anxiety was shown to have a significant negative relationship with test-taking skills.

Prompted by these findings, the current researchers sought to ascertain how students' attitudes and self-concept influence students' cheating behaviours in the universities.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- i. What is the influence of students' attitude on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students?
- ii. How does self-concept influence cheating tendencies among undergraduate students?

### **Hypotheses**

The hypotheses were formulated as follows:

**Ho1:** There is no significant influence of students' attitude towards examination on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students.

**Ho2:** There is no significant influence of self-concept 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 scales and the coefficient ranging from 0.73 to 0.89 was obtained and the instrument was adjudged as reliable. The instrument was made up of three parts of Self-Concept, (made up of 5 items), Students’ Attitudes (made up of 5 items) as the independent variables and Cheating Tendencies (made up of 10 items) which is the dependent variable. A four point Likert scale response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) was adopted. The responses on the instruments were manually scored. This provided the initial raw data for the study. Each response was measured on a weighted value of four through one (Strongly Agree = 4; Agree = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1. Data were analyzed using independent t-test and One way analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

### **Presentation of results**

**Ho1:** There is no significant influence of students’ attitude towards examination on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is students’ attitude towards examination categorized as positive and negative attitude while the dependent variable is cheating tendencies measured continuously. To test this hypothesis, independent t-test analysis was used and the result is presented in table 1. Table 1 showed  $t=2.90$ ,  $p<.05$ . Since  $p(.000)$  is less than  $.05$ , the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of students’ attitude towards examination on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students.

**Table 1:** Independent t-test analysis of the influence of students’ attitude to examination on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>S.D</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>t-cal</b>	<b>p-val</b>
Positive attitude	454	12.23	3.22	998	2.90	.000
Negative attitude	546	17.13	2.14			

**Ho2:** There is no significant influence of students’ self-concept on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is students’ self-concept categorized as high, moderate and low; while the dependent variable is cheating tendencies measured continuously. To test this hypothesis, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used and the result is presented in table 2. Table 2 showed that F-ratio is 18.83, while  $p < .05$ . Since  $p(.000)$  is less than  $.05$ , the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of self-concept on cheating tendencies among undergraduate students.

**Table 2:** One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the influence of students’ self-concept on cheating tendency among undergraduate students

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>S.D</b>
High	222	13.11	2.32
Moderate	455	14.14	3.11
Low	323	17.12	2.76
Total	1000	16.78	4.23

  

<b>Variable</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Regression	603.303	1	603.303	18.83	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	31962.29	998	32.026		
Total	32565.59	999			

**Discussion of findings**

Hypothesis one which stated that there is no significant influence of students’ attitude on cheating tendencies among students was rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of students’ attitude on cheating tendencies among students. The findings were in line with that of Gregory (2008) who carried out a study on influence of students’ attitude on cheating tendencies in examination among secondary school students in Ondo State, and reported the result as showing that students who have a negative attitude to examination are the ones that cheat more. It was opined that students who engage in cheating have negative attitude to study. The researcher stressed that a student’s development of negative attitude towards his or her study is as a result of personal variable, asserting that a student whose academic performance is motivated externally rather than internally will always have negative attitude to

study. This implies that a student who knows that he or she does not take his or her study seriously is bound to develop negative attitude toward his studies hence exhibits negative behaviour during test taking.

Hypothesis two which stated that there is no significant influence of self-concept on cheating tendencies among students was rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of self-concept on cheating tendencies among students. This could be due to the fact that when students do not have confidence on what they can do in the exams as well as having knowledge of their limited capacity to pass examination very well, there is every tendency that they may cheat in the examination hall. Also, when the students do not believe in themselves and what they know about that examination, they tend to prepare themselves to cheat in and outside the examination hall. The findings of the study were in line with that of Anderson (2007) that carried out a study on reasons for cheating or not cheating, and reported the result to show that about 49% indicated that they did not cheat because of their academic self-concept.

### **Conclusion/recommendation**

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that students' attitude towards examination and their self-concept significantly influence their cheating tendencies. Based on the conclusions, it was recommended that students should develop a positive attitude towards examination in order to forestall issues of malpractices that have beclouded assessment practices and that students should be encouraged to develop a high self-image and concept that will make them believe in themselves, and their ability to pass examinations without cheating.

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