

ATTITUDE, PERCEPTIONS AND TENDENCIES TOWARDS CHEATING ON EXAMS OF UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION SCIENCE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The major purpose of this study was to compare university and college of education science students' attitudes, perceptions, and tendencies towards cheating with the intention of identifying areas of differences. The samples of the study consisted of 250 universities and 175 college of education science students-bringing the total sample of subjects to 425. The design of the study was survey while the instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire. The data collected were analysed with chi-square and t-test statistics. The major findings of the study indicate that university and college science students had significantly different positions on examination malpractices. They also have different impressions on whether or not cheating had occurred. University and College students again had significantly different beliefs about cheating on exams. While 30.1% of university science students were assumed to cheat in exams, 51.6% of college students are most likely to cheat in exams. It is concluded that the high incidence of cheating on exams as indicated among colleges of education science students is due to the inability of the college authorities to enforce serious punishments on exam cheats.

The Chinese have been concerned about cheating for longer than most civilizations have been in existence (Lopton and Chapman, 2003). Chinese civil servants were given entrance exams in individual cubicles to prevent cheating and searched for crib notes as they entered the cubicles. The penalty for being caught at cheating in ancient China was not a failing grade or expulsion but death which was applicable to both the examinees and examiners (Brickman, 1961). Today while we do not execute students and their teachers when cheating is discovered, it appears we may not be doing enough to deter cheating in our classes (Collison, 1990; Mc Cable and Trevino, 1996; Paldy, 1996).

Today, in Nigeria, "examination malpractices" is a household word, and virtually everybody, knowingly or unknowingly, seems to be involved in it (Kpangban, Ajaja and Umudhe, 2007). Examination malpractice is one of the features of a society that nurtures cheats and mediocre and turns them into celebrities. Jibril (1991) in his contribution on incidence of examination malpractice in our society, noted that it is a reflection of the moral decadence of our country.

Although examination malpractice is as old as the western education itself and takes many forms in manifestation, and that there is hardly any examination where no form of malpractice occurs, what however, makes the differences is the prevalence, scale, magnitude and dimensions. In Nigeria, the scale and dimensions have taken a frightening look that the quality of our certificates are now questioned both locally and internationally. The issue of examination malpractice is a big scandal in Nigeria ((Kpangban, Ajaja and Umudhe, 2007). Although a lot of efforts are being made by all, government, institutions, organizations and even individuals, the war is far from being won. Even with the establishment of exam ethics project and the promulgation of examination malpractice decree which stipulates 25 years jail term for offenders, the attitude towards cheating has not changed.

The history of examination malpractice in Nigeria is not recent. It dates back to the colonial era ((Kpangban, Ajaja and Umudhe, 2007). The first incidence of examination malpractice in Nigeria was reported in 1914; when there was a leakage of question paper in the senior Cambridge Examination. Since then, the incidence of examination malpractice has been on the increase and yearly reported.

The forms, means and strategies employed in carrying out examination malpractices are varied and numerous. Eze and Ezeani (1991), Dare (1994), Wollherm (1996) and West African Examination Council (2005) identified the following: (i) candidates bringing books or cribs into the examination hall; (ii) insulting or assaulting any supervisor or invigilator (iii) replacing their answer

scripts with another one during or after the examination; (iv) swooping of scripts in an examination hall; and (v) impersonation, as the major strategies employed in examination malpractice.

The Nigerian studies on cheating behaviours are disturbing since they indicate a widespread, insidious problem. Cheating devalues the educational experience in a number of ways. First, cheating behaviour may lead to inequitable grades and misrepresentation of what a student may actually have learned and can use after graduation. Additionally successful cheating behaviour in tertiary institution may carryover as a way of life after graduation. That is, students may believe that if they can get away with cheating now, they can get away with cheating later. Obviously, academic dishonesty is not to be taken lightly, yet cheating seems to be prevalent, at least in Nigeria.

The fight against examination malpractice in Nigeria is far from being won. In most tertiary institutions, the battle is tense and the casualties are high both on the students and lecturers sides but the practice still thrives. In the face of rustication and expulsion of students and instant dismissal of lecturers involved in examination malpractice, the incidence in tertiary institutions is still high. It is reasoned that examination malpractice in Nigeria persists because of the caliber of people involved. Studies by FAQ (2006) and Alutu and Aluede (2006) indicated that; students, parents/guardians, school management, teachers, supervisory officials, examination officials, examination bodies, and security agencies are involved. The lecturers who are zero tolerant to cheating in examinations are always at risk of being attacked or even killed by cultists. Six days ago, the car of the chairman of Delta State University examination monitoring team was blown off with car bomb. The team has been able to restore some degree of order in the conduct of university examinations.

The national literature on examination dishonesty provides general evidence on incidence of examination malpractice and has few comparative research efforts. Although cross-institutional comparative studies are appearing more often in academic literature, it is quite apparent that a major chasm in our knowledge still exists regarding cross-institutional attitudes, perceptions and tendencies towards cheating at the post-secondary education level. Moreover, to date, no cross-institutional study has been conducted comparing university and college of education student's perceptions, attitudes and tendencies towards cheating in examinations. It is this gap that this study intends to fill.

The damage examination malpractice has done and is still doing to our educational system is better imagined than told. The most painful of them all is that most individuals and institutions who use the products from schools no longer have faith in products of Nigerian schools. To this end, it is therefore necessary to expose the perpetrators of this evil practice wherever they are. The purpose of this study therefore was to compare university and college student's attitudes, perceptions and tendencies towards examination malpractice.

Statement of the Problem

This study was conceived by the fact that only a handful of studies have investigated cross-institutional differences related to academic dishonesty. This study is unique and timely in that cheating is linked to institution-oriented and learning-oriented attitudes. It appears from experience that university students are more likely to attend school for the sake of learning whereas college of education students tend to be much more focused on the joy of being in the tertiary institution. Thus, what motivates university students to cheat is different from that of college students. The statement of the problem therefore is, will the evaluation of university and college of education science students' attitudes, perceptions, and tendencies towards cheating show significant differences between the two institutions?

Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions were asked and answered.

1. Do science students in the university and colleges of education have different conceptions about cheating behaviours?
2. Does the rated beliefs of university and college of education science students about cheating differs?

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Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were stated and tested at 0.05 level of significance to further direct the study.

- H_{o1}. There is no significant difference in conceptions between university and college science students on cheating behaviours.
- H_{o2}. There is no significant difference between university and college of education science student's beliefs about cheating.

Methodology

Design of the Study

The design used in carrying out this study was survey. The design was the best for the study since questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Any study where questionnaire is used was major instrument for data collection; the most appropriate design for it is survey. The response from a segment of the society was used to generalize for the entire population of study.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of 2500 300 level science students in Delta state university, Abraka, College of education Warri, and college of education Agbor. In Delta state university, Abraka, there are 1280 300 level science students in faculties of science, Basic medical sciences, Engineering and department of science education, while in the colleges of education schools of sciences at Agbor and Warri have 650 and 570 science students respectively in year three.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample of the study consisted of 425 science students in 300 level out of the population of 2500 students. The sample showed that 250 undergraduates were drawn from Delta state university Abraka, 100 students from college of education Agbor, and 75 students from college of education, Warri. A proportionate random sampling technique was employed in the collection of samples. The samples were collected from the various institutions to reflect the populations of their science students.

Instruments

The major instrument, used for data collection modeled from the one used by Lupton and Chapman (2003), is a questionnaire called Science Students Cheating Tendencies Questionnaire (SSCTQ). The questionnaire was a self-reporting type used in the collection of responses from science students on attitudes, perceptions and tendencies towards academic cheating. The instrument consisted of 29 items (questions) developed on a series of dichotomous (yes/no) and scalar questions, as well as a question that asked students to assess what proportion of their peers they believe cheat. Most of the yes/no questions specifically asked the students about cheating behaviours e.g., "Have you cheated during exams?" "Have you received information about an exam from students in earlier sections of the class?". In addition, students were asked to respond to a series of statements using a four-point scale anchored with strongly agree to strongly disagree. These scalar questions asked students about their attitudes and belief about cheating (e.g., cheating on one exam in really not that bad. I believe telling someone in a later section about an exam you just took is ok"). Students were also given two scenarios and asked to decide whether cheating had occurred. Each scenario was intentionally left rather vague. This was aimed at making the students not to easily conclude that cheating had or had not occurred. In this form, students were left more to their own personal interpretations of trying to decide if cheating had or had not occurred. The first scenario (Scenario A) was:

Ufoma took ISE 213 in sandwich programme. His friends, Okoro, took ISE 213 in the second semester regular programme. Ufoma gave Okoro all his prior work from the course. Okoro found Ufoma's answers to prior exams and uses these to prepare for tests in the course.

Students were then asked to decide if Ufoma and Okoro had cheated. The second scenario (Scenario B) was:

Okoro also discovered that Ufoma had received good grades on some written assignments for the class. Many of these assignments required Ufoma to go to the library to look up articles about various topics. Okoro decides to forgo the library work and uses Ufoma's articles for his papers in the class.

After reading scenario B, students were asked to decide if Okoro had cheated.

The questionnaire was validated by a jury of two experienced science lectures, one from the university and the other from the college of education and an expert in Measurement and Evaluation. Since content validity was what was determined, the choice of a jury and its composition was right and agreed with the recommendations of Wiseman (1999) and Johnson and Christensen (2000). The reliability of the questionnaire was found to be 0.72 using the inter-rater reliability method. As a rule, a high reliability of 0.70 or higher shows that the instrument is reliable and accurately measuring the characteristics it was designed to measure.

Procedure for Data Collection

To collect data for the study, three research assistants were employed, one from each institution. The questionnaires were administered in the classes. Given the sensitive nature of the questions, respondents were repeatedly told, orally and in writing, that their responses would be anonymous and confidential. The respondents were asked to answer as many questions as possible, as long as they felt comfortable with the particular question. 425 questionnaires were randomly distributed among science students in the university and the two colleges of education. Three days was spent for the administration and collection of questionnaire. All the questionnaires were collected from the respondents as soon as they finished with their responses. Their responses were scored and analysed with chi-square and t-test statistics.

Result and Discussion

Result

Table 1: Percentage of University and College Science Students responding "Yes" to questions about cheating

	Percentage "Yes"	responding
	University students	College students
	n = 250	n = 175
Cheating at some point in secondary school	47	53**
Cheated in current class	2.2	20.2*
Know students who have cheated on an exam at university/college	76.3	82.4**
Know students who have cheated on an exam in current	23.3	57.3*

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class		
Seen a student cheat on an exam at the university/college	67.4	79.1**
Seen a student cheat on an exam in current class	10.1	58.4*
Used past questions and answers from previous semesters to study for current exam	83.2	81.3**
Given students in a later class information about an exam	73.4	97.2*
Received exam information from a student in an earlier class	83.2	90.1**
Scenario A: Ufoma cheated by giving Okoro his past exams	3.2	39.4*
Scenario B: Okoro cheated by using Ufoma's articles	87.5	72.7**

**X² = test of differences between institution types significant at P < 0.05.

*X² = significant at P < 0.01.

Shown in Table 1, university and college science students had significantly different positions at 0.05 level of significance on their self-reported cheating behaviour, on haven cheated before in secondary school, know students who have cheated in university/college, seen a student cheat on an exam at university/college, used past questions and answers of previous semesters to study for current exam, received exam information from a student who earlier read the class, and on the two case scenarios.

Highlights in Table 1 indicate significant differences in self-reported cheating behaviour between university and college science students. A larger proportion of college students agreed that they cheated at some point. While 47% of university students reported that they cheated at some point during secondary school, as high as 53% of college students agreed to having cheated. The table shows that college science students are much more likely to report cheating in the class, known students who have cheated in exams, seen students cheat in an exam, given information to students about an exam and received information about an exam.

Also shown in Table 1, university and college students have different impression of whether or not cheating had occurred in the scenarios. In scenario A, the college students were much more likely to believe that Ufoma and Okoro had cheated. For example, only 3.2% of the university students felt that Ufoma had cheated by giving Okoro his past exams materials, while 39.4% of the college students felt the same. In addition, 10.5% of university students as against 59.3% of college students felt that Okoro cheated by using Ufoma's past exams materials. In scenario B as high as 87.5% of university students as against 72.7% college students felt that Okoro cheated by using Ufoma's articles. With all the above findings, H₀₁ was therefore rejected.

Table 2: University and College Science Students Belief about Cheating

	University Students	College Students
	n = 250	n = 175
Percentage of students believed to cheat on exams	30.1	51.6*
Most students cheat on exams	2.1	3.2*
Most students cheat on out-of-class assignment	2.8	3.5*
Cheating on an exam is not so bad	1.8	3.0*

Right to tell someone in later section about an exam	2.9	3.7*
Giving someone your past exams materials in cheating	1.9	2.6*
Using an exam material from a previous semester is cheating	1.7	2.5*
Teacher must make sure students do not cheat	3.4	2.9*
School taking tough stand on cheating reduces cheating	3.8	2.7*

Note. 1st item in the table is percentage estimate. All other items are mean rating using a four-point scale of strongly agree through to strongly disagree. * = t-test of mean differences between institution types.

Table 2 shows that university and college science students have significantly different beliefs about cheating. On the estimation of the percentage of their peers who cheat on exams, university students felt that 30.1% of them cheat while the college students stated that 51.6% cheat.

In a series of strongly agree through to strongly disagree belief statements, the college students than the university students believed that most students cheat on exams, most students cheat on out-of-class assignments, cheating on our exam is not so bad, right to pass on exam information to someone, university students do not believe that giving someone your past exams and using exam materials from a previous semester is cheating as against the higher ratings of college students tending towards a belief that they are cheating.

Also shown in Table 2, university students believe that the teacher and a tough stand of the school authority can reduce cheating on exams. The college students however have contrary beliefs on the roles of teachers and school authorities in reducing cheating. With all these significant differences, H_{02} was therefore rejected.

Discussion

This study has been able to expose institutional variations on attitudes, beliefs and tendencies towards examination malpractices. This study has moved our knowledge of what people believe and feel about cheating on exams from single institution type to cross institutional dispositions.

Although a number of differences were found based on institutional types, it is possible that these differences may be due to some other factors. Aina (1991); (Eze and Ezeani (1991); Denga (1993); and Kpangban, Ajaja and Umudhe (2007) all agreed that the central factor responsible for examination malpractices in Nigeria is our orientation and the value we place on certificates. Other factors identified include: lack of proper teaching of students before examination, poor state of infrastructure, poor admission and promotion policies, inadequate staffing of schools, poor attitude of students towards studies and a host of others.

This is the first study to many knowledge that compared the attitudes, beliefs, and tendencies towards cheating on examinations of university and college of education science students. The findings of the study indicated that university and college students hold vastly different attitudes, perceptions, and tendencies towards cheating. The findings indicated that the college students reported a much more higher frequencies of cheating than the university science students. This tends to portray college students as cheating more than the university students. Or is it face saving device by university students for ego sake? If however, it is right that college students cheat most than university students, it follows that they have sharply different attitudes, beliefs, and definitions regarding cheating. Some responses clearly indicated the positions, attitudes and tendencies of varying institutions towards cheating on exams. The college of education students felt that it was not so bad to cheat on one exam or tell someone in a later section about an exam. This therefore means the college

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authorities do not take cheating on exams as seriously as university authorities. Penalties for cheating in exams in universities ranging from rustication to total expulsion from school. This may be the explanation for the differences in the frequencies of cheating between college and university science students.

College students were more inclined than university students to feel that it was not the responsibilities of teachers and school authorities to create environments that can reduce the likelihood that cheating could occur. This tends to reflect on how issues and offences of exam cheats are treated by college authorities. This agree with the finding of Kpangban, Ajaja and Umudhe (2007) that most schools and teachers nurture examination malpractices and perpetuate it in their institution through their actions and deeds.

Conclusion

The findings of this study tend to portray the colleges of education, as institutions where examination malpractices thrive. This is shown by the high incidence of exam malpractice among college students and their declaration that cheating in one exam was not bad. Their disposition, attitude and belief about exam malpractices may have been influenced by the conception of students about what exam cheating means and the seriousness of the school authorities on matters relating to examination malpractice.

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