https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jgcs ISSN: 1596-1141

JOURNAL OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING STUDIES

SELF-CONCEPT AND SELF-EFFICACY AS CORRELATES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE TENDENCY AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OBOLLO-AFOR EDUCATION ZONE, ENUGU STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated self-concept and self-efficacy as correlates of examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study, while two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The population comprised 2,022 Senior Secondary two (SS II) students in the 50 public secondary schools in the three local government areas of the education zone for the 2025/2026 academic session. A sample of 300 SS II students was selected through cluster sampling and simple random sampling, out of which 275 copies of the instruments were retrieved and analysed. Data were collected using the Self-Concept Questionnaire (SCQ) adopted from Reynolds, Ramirez, Magrina and Allen (1980), the Self-Efficacy Scale (SES) adopted from Sherer et al. (1982) and the Examination Malpractice Tendency Questionnaire (EMTQ) adapted from Anyanwu (2020). The EMTQ was face-validated by three experts, and its reliability, established with Cronbach alpha, was 0.76. Data were analysed using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The findings revealed that a strong negative and significant relationship existed between students' self-concept and examination malpractice tendency ($r = -0.716$, $p < .001$), and also between students' self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency ($r = -0.601$, $p < .001$). It was recommended, among others, that school administrators should adopt teaching strategies that build students' academic self-concept and self-efficacy, such as mastery learning, timely and specific feedback, and scaffolding of topics, so that examination malpractice tendency among students will be reduced.

Keywords: Self-concept, Self-efficacy, Examination malpractice, Secondary school, Students.

Introduction

The integrity of public examinations in Nigeria appears to be under constant threat from widespread examination malpractice. Examination malpractice is any deliberate act of wrongdoing contrary to the rules and regulations of examination administration, aimed at giving a candidate an undue advantage (WAEC, 2023). It manifests in copying, giraffing, impersonation, collusion, leakage of question papers and the use of electronic devices, and has become endemic in the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and National Examinations Council (NECO) examinations because of pressure for grades and the quest for certificates at all costs (Nwosu, Okeke & Nwosu, 2022). Beyond violating academic ethics, examination malpractice threatens national development because it produces graduates who lack the knowledge and skills their certificates suggest (Onyema, Obafemi & Sen, 2019).

Examination malpractice begins with the tendency to cheat in an examination. Olatunji and Dada (2020) defined examination malpractice tendency as the measurable disposition of students toward engaging in acts that violate examination rules and regulations in order to obtain scores they do not legitimately deserve. Bassey and Iruoje (2016) observed that examination misconduct has progressed from mere stretching of the neck to see what another examinee is writing to sophisticated methods such as the use of mobile phones and other electronic devices. The seriousness of the problem prompted the enactment of the Examination Malpractice Act of 1999 (Udebuana & Onwugbufor, 2021). Despite this legislation and repeated calls for attitudinal change, the tendency to engage in examination malpractice does not appear to have abated among secondary school students.

Several psychosocial factors have been linked to students' examination malpractice tendency, including test anxiety, peer pressure, parental pressure, fear of failure and lack of preparation. Two of the most prominent are self-concept and self-efficacy, which are the concern of this paper. Self-concept refers to an individual's perception of themselves, encompassing beliefs, feelings and thoughts about personal attributes, competence and worth (Ackerman, 2018). In the educational domain, academic self-concept refers to students' perceptions and evaluations of their own abilities and performance in school-related tasks (Kuscuoglu & Hartas, 2023). Students with a high self-concept believe in themselves and approach academic challenges with diligence, while those with a low self-concept doubt their capabilities.

Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is more task-specific. Bandura (1997) defined it as an individual's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. In the academic setting, it relates to a student's confidence in the ability to succeed in learning tasks, prepare adequately for examinations and overcome academic challenges (Omolewa & Ogunleye, 2022; Okonkwo, 2023). Adebayo (2021) noted that students with high self-efficacy are more likely to invest effort in preparation and rely on their own abilities. Students with low self-efficacy, in contrast, are more likely to feel overwhelmed by academic demands and may come to view cheating as a necessary or justified solution to avoid failure or shame. Ajayi and Fashola (2020) averred that interventions that enhance self-efficacy, such as mastery experiences and positive feedback, can play a crucial role in promoting academic integrity.

The study is anchored on Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which holds that human functioning is best understood in terms of a triadic reciprocal interaction among personal factors, behaviour and environmental events. Self-efficacy is a key personal factor in the theory, and the theory also stresses self-regulation and observational learning. From this perspective, students who hold positive beliefs about their academic competence are likely to prepare and to rely on legitimate means, while students who doubt their competence, and who observe peers cheating without consequences, may model such behaviour. The theory therefore offers a useful lens for examining how internal self-beliefs relate to examination malpractice tendency.

Empirical evidence from different parts of Nigeria supports this view. Okonkwo and Nwafor (2023) found a significant negative correlation between self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among senior secondary school students in Owerri Municipal, Imo State. Similarly, Eze and Okoroafor (2022) reported that students with high academic self-concept had significantly lower cheating tendency in Enugu State, while Okafor and Chidi (2020) found a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.40$) between the two variables in Asaba, Delta State. With respect to self-efficacy, Adebayo and Chukwu (2021) found that students with higher academic self-efficacy demonstrated lower tendency to engage in examination malpractice, and Bello and Yusuf (2018) reported that high self-efficacy and a positive school climate were associated with lower tendency toward cheating. However, the evidence is not entirely consistent. Olanrewaju and Ogunlade (2024), for instance, reported that academic self-efficacy positively and significantly influenced examination malpractice among students in Oyo metropolis.

Although these studies have examined self-concept and self-efficacy in relation to examination malpractice, they were conducted in other states and the findings are mixed. There is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which self-concept and self-efficacy relate to examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone of Enugu State. This gap provided the justification for the present study.

Statement of the Problem

Examination malpractice has become one of the most persistent challenges confronting the Nigerian educational system. Despite the efforts of government agencies to curb the menace, cases of examination malpractice continue to be reported at different levels of education. Much of the attention given to the problem has focused on legal sanctions and examination administration, while less emphasis has been placed on the psychological characteristics of students. Self-concept reflects how students perceive their own academic abilities and worth, which can influence their motivation, persistence and resilience in learning. Self-efficacy represents the confidence students have in their capacity to perform specific academic tasks successfully, and this may determine the level of effort and persistence they apply to their studies.

Studies conducted elsewhere have reported negative relationships between these self-beliefs and examination malpractice, but the findings are not uniform, and there is limited empirical evidence on the situation among secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone of Enugu State. This gap makes it difficult for educators, counsellors and policy makers in the zone to design effective programmes that address the psychological factors underlying examination malpractice. The problem of this study, therefore, was to determine self-concept and self-efficacy as correlates of examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to determine self-concept and self-efficacy as correlates of examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone of Enugu State. Specifically, the study determined:

- The relationship between self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.

- The relationship between self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What relationship exists between students' self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone?
- What relationship exists between students' self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- **$H0_1$:** There is no significant relationship between self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.
- **$H0_2$:** There is no significant relationship between self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.

Method and Procedure

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described correlational research as a non-experimental quantitative approach used to examine the statistical relationship between two or more variables as they naturally occur, without manipulation or control by the researcher. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the direction and strength of the relationship of self-concept and self-efficacy (independent variables) with examination malpractice tendency (dependent variable) among public secondary school students without manipulating any of the variables.

The study was carried out in Obollo-Afor Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria. The zone is one of the six education zones in the State and comprises three local government areas, namely Igbo-Eze North, Igbo-Eze South and Udenu. It is located at the boundary between the South-East and North-Central geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The zone was chosen because of its

substantial number of public secondary schools spread across urban and rural communities, and because of the paucity of research on the psychological correlates of examination malpractice tendency in the area.

The population of the study comprised all the 2,022 SS II students in the 50 public secondary schools in the three local government areas of Obollo-Afor Education Zone for the 2025/2026 academic session (Source: Post-Primary Schools Management Board, Zonal Office, Obollo-Afor, 2026). SS II students were used because they are nearing the examination class and are at a stage where academic pressure and self-evaluative beliefs intensify ahead of the Senior School Certificate Examinations.

The sample comprised 300 SS II students, selected through cluster sampling and simple random sampling. First, cluster sampling was used to select 30% of the public secondary schools in each of the three local government areas, which gave 15 schools: seven from Igbo-Eze North, three from Igbo-Eze South and five from Udenu. Cluster sampling is a probability sampling technique in which elements of the population are selected randomly from naturally occurring groupings (Sarfo, Debrah, Gbordzoe & Obeng, 2022). Second, simple random sampling by balloting without replacement was used to select 20 students from each of the 15 schools, giving a total of 300 students. Balloting without replacement ensured that no student could be selected twice (Shorten & Moorley, 2014).

Three instruments were used for data collection, namely the Self-Concept Questionnaire (SCQ), the Self-Efficacy Scale (SES) and the Examination Malpractice Tendency Questionnaire (EMTQ). The SCQ was adopted from the Academic Self-Concept Scale by Reynolds, Ramirez, Magrina and Allen (1980). It has 30 items on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree, scored 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively for positively worded items, while negatively worded items were reverse scored. The SES was adopted from the Self-Efficacy Scale of Sherer et al. (1982). It has 11 items with four response options: Not at all true (1), Hardly true (2), Moderately true (3) and Exactly true (4). The EMTQ was adapted from the Fresher Undergraduates' Tendency to Participate in Examination Malpractices Questionnaire (FUTPEMQ) by Anyanwu (2020). The original 15-item questionnaire was modified by personalizing the items and removing the word "undergraduate" to suit the respondents of the present study, which gave a 13-item questionnaire with four response options of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

To establish the validity of the EMTQ, the title, purpose, research questions and hypotheses of the study, together with the draft instrument, were given to three experts: two from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and one from the Department of Educational Foundations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. They were requested to scrutinize the items for relevance to the purpose of the study, suitability of language and appropriateness of the instructions, and their inputs were adhered to. The validity of the SCQ was established through internal consistency validity, which yielded a value of 0.75, while the validity of the SES was reported by Ayodele (1998) as a concurrent validity coefficient of .23.

The reliability of the EMTQ was established by administering it to 30 SS II students in a public secondary school in Nsukka Education Zone, which is outside the study area but shares similar characteristics with it. Cronbach alpha statistic yielded a coefficient of 0.76, which is adequate because it exceeds the minimum threshold of 0.70 recommended by Shrestha (2021). The reliability of the SES was reported by Sherer et al. (1982) as 0.86 using Cronbach alpha, while that of the SCQ was reported by Reynolds et al. (1980) as 0.86 using the test-retest method.

Data were collected through the direct-delivery approach with the help of research assistants, in order to ensure maximum retrieval of the instruments. The researcher visited the sampled schools with a letter of introduction to the principals and, after permission was granted, briefed 15 teachers (one in each sampled school) who served as research assistants on the administration of the instruments. The administration was done under the supervision of the researcher and spanned three weeks. Out of the 300 copies of the instruments administered, 275 were retrieved, representing 91.67% recovery.

Data were analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to answer the research questions and to test the null hypotheses. The correlation coefficient was interpreted using the guide of Nwana (as cited in Nworgu, 2015): ±0.00–0.19 = very low relationship; ±0.20–0.39 = low relationship; ±0.40–0.59 = moderate relationship; ±0.60–0.79 = high/strong relationship; and ±0.80–1.00 = very high/strong relationship. For the hypotheses, the p-value was compared with the 0.05 level of significance. A null hypothesis was rejected where $p \leq 0.05$ and not rejected where $p > 0.05$.

Result and Discussion

The data collected from the field were analysed and the summaries are presented in tables to highlight the findings, which are then discussed.

Research Question 1

What relationship exists between students' self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone?

Table 1: Pearson r on relationship between students' self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone

Variables	n	r	Remark
Self-Concept and Examination Malpractice Tendency	275	-0.716	Strong negative relationship

Note. n = number of respondents; r = Pearson correlation coefficient.

Table 1 shows a strong negative relationship between students' self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone, as indicated by a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.716. The negative sign shows that the two variables vary in opposite directions. This implies that students with higher levels of self-concept tend to exhibit lower levels of examination malpractice tendency, and vice versa.

Research Question 2

What relationship exists between students' self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone?

Table 2: Pearson r on relationship between students' self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone

Variables	n	r	Remark
Self-Efficacy and Examination Malpractice Tendency	275	-0.601	Strong negative relationship

Note. n = number of respondents; r = Pearson correlation coefficient.

Table 2 shows a strong negative relationship between students' self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.601. This implies

that students with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to exhibit lower levels of examination malpractice tendency, and vice versa.

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.

Table 3: Test of significance of Pearson correlation between self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students

Variables	n	r	p-value	Remark
Self-Concept and Examination Malpractice Tendency	275	-0.716	< .001	Significant

Note. Significant at $p < .05$.

Table 3 shows that the calculated r of -0.716 has a p-value of less than .001, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore not accepted. There is a significant relationship between self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.

Table 4: Test of significance of Pearson correlation between self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students

Variables	n	r	p-value	Remark
Self-Efficacy and Examination Malpractice Tendency	275	-0.601	< .001	Significant

Note. Significant at $p < .05$.

Table 4 shows that the calculated r of -0.601 has a p-value of less than .001, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore not accepted. There is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.

Discussion of Findings

Relationship between self-concept and examination malpractice tendency.

The finding revealed that a strong negative and significant relationship existed between students' self-concept and examination malpractice tendency. This suggests that as students' self-concept increases, their tendency to engage in examination malpractice decreases. Students who hold a positive view of their academic abilities, worth and competence appear less likely to consider examination malpractice, while those with a low self-concept appear more likely to do so. This is in line with Social Cognitive Theory: students with a positive self-concept tend to set higher academic goals, use better learning strategies and attribute success to internal factors, and they are therefore likely to see examination malpractice as inconsistent with their self-image. The finding agrees with that of Okonkwo and Nwafor (2023), who found a significant negative correlation between self-concept and examination malpractice tendency, indicating that students with a positive self-concept were less likely to engage in malpractice. Similarly, Eze and Okoroafor (2022) found that students with high academic self-concept had significantly lower cheating tendency, and Okafor and Chidi (2020) found a significant negative correlation between the two variables. The finding is also consistent with the view of Nwokolo (2022) that students in Enugu State with diminished academic self-worth internalize a failure identity, which makes them more susceptible to seeking illicit means to avoid the shame of failure.

Relationship between self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency.

The finding revealed that a strong negative and significant relationship existed between students' self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency. This suggests that as students' self-efficacy increases, their tendency to engage in examination malpractice decreases. When self-efficacy is low, students doubt their capacity to pass through legitimate means, and this may be associated with anxiety and desperation which, in turn, may be related to examination malpractice tendency. The finding is supported by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which states that self-efficacy influences the choice of activities, effort, persistence and emotional reactions. Students with high self-efficacy are likely to study harder and persist when tasks are difficult, whereas students with low self-efficacy are likely to avoid challenging tasks, procrastinate and seek shortcuts. Poor preparation, in turn, may be associated with a higher tendency toward examination malpractice. The result is in tandem with that of Adebayo and Chukwu (2021), who

found a significant negative correlation between self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency, and who concluded that high academic self-efficacy serves as a protective factor against examination malpractice. It also agrees with Bello and Yusuf (2018). In contrast, Olanrewaju and Ogunlade (2024) found that academic self-efficacy positively and significantly influenced examination malpractice among students. This contrast could be attributed to differences in sample characteristics, setting and the way the variables were measured.

Taken together, the findings suggest that self-concept and self-efficacy function as internal resources which are associated with students' confidence to succeed through their own effort. Examination malpractice tendency therefore appears to be not only a moral or disciplinary matter but also a psychological one, which is often a coping response to perceived inability.

Summary of the Findings

From the analysis, the following findings were made:

- A strong negative relationship existed between students' self-concept and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone, and the relationship was significant.
- A strong negative relationship existed between students' self-efficacy and examination malpractice tendency among public secondary school students in Obollo-Afor Education Zone, and the relationship was significant.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that students' self-beliefs play a critical role in their tendency to engage in examination malpractice. Specifically, low self-concept and low self-efficacy are associated with a higher tendency to engage in examination malpractice, while high self-concept and high self-efficacy are associated with a lower tendency. Examination malpractice among public secondary school students is therefore not only a disciplinary problem but also a psychological one.

Implications of the Study

The findings imply that teaching in secondary schools needs to go beyond content delivery. Teachers have a role in building students' self-concept and self-efficacy. When students receive

mastery experiences, constructive feedback and encouragement, they develop the belief that they can succeed without cheating. Teaching that emphasizes fear, comparison and punishment, on the other hand, may lower self-concept and self-efficacy and thereby increase examination malpractice tendency.

The findings also highlight the need for guidance and counselling services that build students' self-beliefs. Screening students for low self-concept and low self-efficacy can help counsellors identify those at risk of examination malpractice early and provide group and individual counselling for them. Finally, the findings imply that students need to work on their mindset. Students who believe in their abilities are less likely to cheat and are more likely to focus on preparation than on shortcuts.

Recommendations

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

- School administrators should adopt teaching strategies that build students' academic self-concept and self-efficacy, such as mastery learning, timely and specific feedback, and scaffolding of different topics. That way, examination malpractice tendency among students will be reduced.
- School counsellors should organize group counselling sessions and programmes that help students challenge negative self-perceptions and build a positive academic self-concept and strong self-efficacy.
- Curriculum planners should incorporate lessons on academic integrity, growth mindset and self-regulation into the secondary school curriculum, to help students develop academic identities and ethical values from an early stage.
- The Ministry of Education should fund psychological support services in schools and organize training for teachers on motivational strategies that strengthen students' confidence in their abilities.

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