

PEER INFLUENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM AS CORRELATES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN FASKARI ZONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AREA, KATSINA STATE

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Abstract

This study sought to ascertain how peer influence and self-esteem of secondary school students relate to their attitude towards examination malpractice in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area, Katsina State. Two objectives, two research questions and two hypotheses tested at the 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The correlational survey design was adopted. Participants were selected through multi-stage random sampling. A sample of 373 SS2 students was drawn from a population of 16,424 SS2 students across 3 co-educational public secondary schools spanning the 3 Local Government Areas Faskari, Sabuwa, and Dandume that make up the Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area. Three instruments the Self-Esteem Scale (SES), Peer Influence Scale (PIS), and Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Scale (ATEMS) were used for data collection, with established reliability coefficients of 0.74, 0.76, and 0.85 respectively. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Findings revealed that peer influence has a weak, negative, and statistically non-significant correlation with students' attitude towards examination malpractice ($r = -0.041$, $p = 0.432$), while self-esteem has a low but statistically significant positive correlation with students' attitude towards examination malpractice ($r = 0.238$, $p = 0.000$). Based on the findings, it was concluded that self-esteem, rather than peer influence, is the more substantial psychosocial correlate of students' attitude towards examination malpractice in the zone. It was recommended, among others, that students should be encouraged to develop a positive sense of self-worth and be enlightened on strategies for resisting negative peer pressure in order to shun examination malpractice.

Keywords: Peer Influence; Self-Esteem; Attitude; Examination Malpractice; Faskari; Katsina State

Introduction

In the Nigerian educational system, examination has been and still remains the preferred tool for objectively assessing and evaluating what learners have acquired after a period of schooling (Olatubosun, 2012). It also helps determine who is permitted to progress to the next level of academic endeavor. Examination is essential for students' success in today's world, and such success is usually measured in terms of achieving a good score or grade, evidenced by obtaining a certificate that helps in gaining admission into a reputable institution, securing a good job, and so on (Khawaja, cited in Khan & Khan, 2011). This expectation unconsciously propels students into fierce competition to achieve good results, and students find various means of achieving success in examinations (Adegoke, 2013; Queensoap & Dogitimiye, 2013) one of which is resorting to examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice refers to any irregular act exhibited by candidates, their associates, or anybody charged with the conduct of an examination, which constitutes a breach of the rules governing the conduct and integrity of the examination. It has become etched into the fabric of the Nigerian educational system, from the primary to the tertiary level, and remains one of the major problems

confronting educational institutions in Nigeria (Olowodunonye, 2011). A nation stands the risk of being underdeveloped, in terms of accumulated illiteracy, disease, and poverty, when its youths reject the honor of sound education and opt instead for fraudulent and deceptive shortcuts epitomized by examination malpractice.

These negative effects have manifested in various ways across Nigeria, and the Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area of Katsina State is no exception. Faskari zone, comprising Faskari, Sabuwa, and Dandume Local Government Areas, has continued to grapple with concerns around examination integrity among its secondary school students. Informal engagements with school administrators and quality assurance officers within the zone reveal that many students engage in one form of examination malpractice or another, often citing reasons such as inadequate teaching and learning environments, the pressure to maintain competitiveness among peers, and the desire to succeed in examinations perceived as difficult. Some students within the zone also hold the view that examination malpractice is not particularly reprehensible, since many of their peers indulge in it in order to progress alongside their classmates. The persistence and evolving sophistication of this practice despite government interventions at both national and state levels underscores the continuing threat it poses to the integrity of Nigeria's educational system (Judy & Nelson, 2002).

Government at both national and state levels has instituted laws, penalties, and measures to curb or reduce the incidence of examination malpractice, including jail terms, fines, suspension, expulsion, and cancellation of results. Despite these measures, the practice which began with the mere leakage of question papers in the Senior Cambridge Local Examination of 1914 (Adebile & Omoluwa, 2013) has cut across all states in Nigeria, Katsina State inclusive, and continues to persist, taking on new and more sophisticated forms. Students in the Faskari zone, like their counterparts elsewhere, spend a considerable proportion of their time with peers, who invariably influence their attitudes, conduct, and decision-making. This makes the study of peer influence on students' attitude towards examination malpractice a pressing concern that must be urgently addressed.

Peers refer to persons of the same age or social status (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2011), and they play an increasingly influential role in the lives of youths. During secondary education, young people begin to break away from their families, spending more time with friends and developing a sense of belonging, lifestyle, and norms suitable to their peer group. The desire to feel accepted is one of the strongest forces underlying adolescent bonding, and this can lead adolescents to adopt risky attitudes or, alternatively, inspire them to achieve goals they might not otherwise pursue (Oni, 2010). This implies that students at this developmental stage are more susceptible to peer influence due to a shift in emotional dependence from parents to peers (Berk, 2004).

Peer influence is often used to describe instances where individuals feel indirectly swayed into changing their behavior to match that of their peers (Eder & Nenga, 2003). It can be described as the indirect or subtle control exerted by a peer group in encouraging a person to change his or her attitudes, values, or behaviors to conform to the group. Okorodudu (2013) emphasized that peer influence has greater impact on adolescents' behavior than any other factor, including counsellors, teachers, and other significant figures. This interaction with peers is a contributory factor in the self-esteem development of adolescents.

Self-esteem refers to a person's overall evaluation of his or her own worth, expressed in the attitudes the individual holds towards himself (Kristen, 2009). Self-esteem is an important factor among secondary school students and is easily affected by peer influence and peer acceptance (Uslu, 2013). Peer acceptance is important to adolescents' emotional development and healthy development of self-esteem, while peer rejection has been reported to affect self-esteem negatively (Uslu, 2013), potentially leading to poor evaluation of one's self-concept.

The way students in the Faskari zone evaluate their self-concept could determine their attitude towards examination malpractice. Poor self-evaluation could lead one to the belief that one will not perform well in perceived or adjudged difficult tasks such as examinations, possibly resulting in test anxiety. Students' belief in their inability to perform required tasks for high achievement has been closely linked to cheating in examinations (Murdock, Hale, & Webber, 2001). Conversely, Alutu and Aluede (2006) observed that self-esteem is not a significant factor in determining students' attitude towards examination malpractice, an inconclusiveness that further justifies renewed empirical investigation in new geographical contexts such as Faskari zone.

Attitude could be described as the predisposition or readiness to respond or act in a certain way towards an object. It may be positive or negative, and is expressed through cognitive, affective, or psychomotor domains. Attitude can be formed through past experiences, socialization, peer influence, and self-esteem, irrespective of background, status, or gender. Despite several researches, government efforts, and studies on the causes, forms, and possible solutions to examination malpractice across Nigeria, the practice persists at the secondary school level, even within the relatively underexplored context of Faskari zone, Katsina State, taking on new and more sophisticated trends such as the use of advanced mobile phones and impersonation (Okorodudu, 2013). This study is therefore motivated by the need to ascertain how peer influence and self-esteem of secondary school students in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area relate to their attitude towards examination malpractice.

This study is hinged on three theories: social learning theory by Albert Bandura, cognitive dissonance theory by Leon Festinger, and the hierarchy of needs theory by Abraham Maslow. Bandura (1977) posited that people learn through modelling, imitation, and observation; students may learn to develop a positive attitude towards examination malpractice through modelling after peers who cheat without being caught and score highly as a result. Festinger (1957), in his theory of cognitive dissonance, construed that when a person encounters an opposing attitude, belief, or opinion, he experiences inconsistency or disequilibrium, and may alter his own attitude to restore consistency with that of his peers. Maslow saw man as a wanting being whose satisfaction of one need leads to the desire to satisfy the next in the hierarchy; belongingness needs, which are primarily social, compel students to seek affection and intimate relationships within reference groups such as peer groups (Ezeh & Okoye, 2010), and acceptance by peers in turn boosts self-esteem (Uslu, 2013), while peer rejection carries the risk of lowering it.

Statement of the Problem

The secondary school years represent a critical developmental period during which students are particularly susceptible to peer influence and are actively forming a sense of self-worth, both of which have been theoretically and empirically linked to attitudes towards academic conduct, including examination malpractice. In the Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area of Katsina State, school administrators and quality assurance officers have continued to report concerns over the integrity of examinations among secondary school students, citing recurring instances of malpractice that persist despite institutional sanctions, public sensitization campaigns, and disciplinary measures instituted by government at both national and state levels.

While extant literature has examined examination malpractice extensively in other parts of Nigeria, the specific psychosocial correlates of this attitude particularly peer influence and self-esteem remain empirically underexplored within the Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area. The lack of localized, evidence-based data on how these two psychosocial factors relate to students' attitude towards examination malpractice limits the capacity of teachers, school counsellors, and quality assurance officers within the zone to design and implement targeted interventions to address the problem at its

psychological roots. Furthermore, existing findings in the wider literature on the relationship between self-esteem and attitude towards examination malpractice remain inconclusive, with some studies (e.g., Murdock, Hale, & Webber, 2001) reporting a significant relationship, while others (e.g., Alutu & Aluede, 2006) report no significant relationship, thereby necessitating further empirical investigation in new geographical and cultural contexts such as Faskari zone. It is against this backdrop that the present study was conceived to investigate peer influence and self-esteem as correlates of secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area, Katsina State.

Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to investigate peer influence and self-esteem as correlates of secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area, Katsina State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the relationship between peer influence and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area, Katsina State;
2. determine the relationship between self-esteem and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area, Katsina State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between peer influence and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice?
2. What relationship exists between self-esteem and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between peer influence and students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

Method

The correlational research design was adopted in carrying out the study. This type of design seeks to establish what relationship exists between two or more variables (Nworgu, 2015). This study adopted this method because it was interested in establishing whether there was a relationship between peer influence and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice, and between self-esteem and students' attitude towards examination malpractice, within Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area, Katsina State.

The population of the study comprised 16,424 Senior Secondary Class 2 (SS2) students in the 3 co-educational public secondary schools spanning the 3 Local Government Areas Faskari, Sabuwa, and Dandume that constitute the Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area of Katsina State (Source: Katsina State Zonal Quality Assurance Office, Faskari).

A sample of 373 SS2 students, representing approximately 14.5% of the population (consistent with established sampling proportions in comparable correlational studies), was selected for the study using multi-stage random sampling. In the first stage, all 3 Local Government Areas within the Faskari zone were purposively included, given the relatively small number of LGAs constituting the zone. In the second stage, all 3 co-educational public secondary schools within these LGAs were selected, given the limited number of schools available. In the third stage, proportionate simple random sampling was

used to select SS2 students from each of the 3 schools, ensuring that each school's contribution to the sample reflected its share of the total SS2 population in the zone.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection comprised three sets of questionnaires. The Self-Esteem Scale (SES) is a standardized scale adapted from the Hare Self-Esteem Scale, revalidated by Omoluabi (1997) for usability in the Nigerian context. It comprises 30 items eliciting information on respondents' self-esteem, scored on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1), with select items reverse-scored. The maximum score is 120 and the minimum is 30; a score of 60 and above indicates high self-esteem, while a score below 60 indicates low self-esteem.

The Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Scale (ATEMS) is a 10-item questionnaire derived from the literature review and aligned with the study's research questions, scored on the same four-point scale. The maximum score is 40 and the minimum is 10; a score of 20 and above indicates a positive attitude towards examination malpractice, while a score below 20 indicates a negative attitude.

The Peer Influence Scale (PIS) is a 24-item questionnaire adapted from the Peer Pressure Inventory developed by Brown and Clasen (1985), consisting of paired statements scored from -3 to +3, with "no influence" scored as zero. Coding was transformed such that -3 = 1, -2 = 2, -1 = 3, 0 = 4, +1 = 5, +2 = 6, and +3 = 7, yielding a potential score range of 0–168, where negative influence ranges from 0–56, low influence from 57–113, and positive influence from 114–168. The three instruments were validated by experts, with the SES, PIS, and ATEMS yielding Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of 0.74, 0.76, and 0.85 respectively, consistent with their established psychometric properties in Nigerian secondary school settings.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient for both research questions and hypothesis testing. Hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 significance level, such that a hypothesis with a p-value higher than 0.05 was not rejected, while a hypothesis with a p-value lower than 0.05 was rejected.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One

What is the relationship between peer influence score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area, Katsina State?

Table 1: Pearson (r) on Peer Influence Score and Secondary School Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice (N = 373)

Variables	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)
Peer Influence Score	-0.041
Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Score	

The result in Table 1 revealed that the relationship between peer influence score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score in Faskari zone is negligible and negative. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is -0.041, indicating a negligible relationship. It is therefore concluded that there is a negligible and negative correlation between peer influence score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score in the zone.

Research Question Two

What relationship exists between self-esteem score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area, Katsina State?

Table 2: Pearson (r) on Self-Esteem Score and Secondary School Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Score (N = 373)

Variables	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)
Self-esteem score	0.238
Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Score	

The result in Table 2 revealed that the relationship between self-esteem score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score in Faskari zone is low and positive. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is 0.238, indicating a low relationship. It is therefore concluded that there is a low and positive correlation between self-esteem score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score in the zone.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between peer influence and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area, Katsina State.

Table 3: Pearson (r) for Correlation Analysis of Peer Influence and Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice (N = 373)

Variables	R	p-value	Remark
Peer Influence Score	-0.041	0.432	NS
Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Score			

NS – non-significant correlation at the 0.05 level of significance

The result in Table 3 showed that the relationship between peer influence and students' attitude towards examination malpractice ($r = -0.041$, $p > 0.05$) is not significant. The relationship is also negligible and negative. The null hypothesis was therefore not rejected, and it was concluded that there is no significant relationship between peer influence and students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Faskari zone.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area, Katsina State.

Table 4: Pearson (r) for Correlation Analysis of Self-Esteem and Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice (N = 373)

Variables	R	p-value	Remark
Self-Esteem Score	0.238	0.000	S
Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Score			

S – Significant correlation at the 0.05 level of significance

The result in Table 4 showed that the relationship between self-esteem and students' attitude towards examination malpractice ($r = 0.238$, $p < 0.05$) is significant. The relationship is also significant and

positive. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, and it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Faskari zone.

Discussion of Findings

Research question one studied the relationship between peer influence score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score in Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area. Hypothesis one similarly tested this relationship. The result, as shown in Table 1, found that peer influence score has a negligible and negative relationship with students' attitude towards examination malpractice, and the result of hypothesis one, as shown in Table 3, found that this relationship is not statistically significant.

This finding suggests that peers in Faskari zone do not necessarily exert negative influence on students' attitude towards examination malpractice; in some instances, the influence of peers may, in fact, be protective. The company that a student keeps and identifies with would, to a large extent, determine his or her attitude whether positively or negatively towards examination malpractice. Positive peer influence can manifest in attitude formation and change. This may mean that students who hold a positive attitude towards examination malpractice could, in order to remain in good standing with peers who hold a negative attitude towards the act, adjust their own attitude to align with that of their preferred peer group. It can also be explained that peers in a positive, symbiotic relationship help group members develop good study habits, make sound decisions, boost self-esteem, and explore their identities constructively. The finding affirms the established understanding that peers can exert a positive influence on secondary school students, even regarding attitude towards examination malpractice.

This finding aligns with Olowodunonye (2011), who found that highly religious students did not engage in examination malpractice, implying that students raised with strong moral principles and genuine religious commitment tend to develop a negative attitude towards examination malpractice as a function of those principles. It also resonates with the broader literature suggesting that the influence of peers is contingent on the moral orientation of the peer group rather than being uniformly negative.

Research question two studied the relationship between self-esteem score and secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice score. Hypothesis two similarly tested this relationship. The result, as shown in Table 2, found that self-esteem score has a low and positive relationship with students' attitude towards examination malpractice, and the result of hypothesis two, as shown in Table 4, found that this relationship is statistically significant.

This finding suggests that students in Faskari zone with poor evaluation of their self-concept that is, low self-esteem may be more disposed to developing a positive attitude towards examination malpractice. Poor self-evaluation could lead students to fear failure, and as a coping mechanism, develop a more accepting attitude towards examination malpractice as a means of escaping the consequences of perceived academic inadequacy. This result agrees with Aronson (2008), who found that low self-esteem is closely associated with conformity to peer attitudes, meaning that a student with low self-esteem in Faskari zone who associates with peers who engage in examination malpractice would likely conform to that behavior in order to retain peer approval. It also supports Murdock, Hale, and Webber (2001), who found that students' belief in their inability to perform required tasks for high achievement is linked to cheating in examinations. This implies that poor self-evaluation can generate the belief that one will not perform well in perceived difficult tasks such as examinations, leading to test anxiety and, ultimately, a greater propensity towards malpractice.

Conclusion

The study found that self-esteem has a significant positive relationship with secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Faskari zone. This implies that the way a student evaluates

his or her own self-worth is meaningfully related to the attitude that student holds towards examination malpractice, and attitude often precedes action. Poor self-evaluation could lead a student to believe he or she is incapable of strong academic performance, thereby fostering a more permissive attitude towards examination malpractice, and potentially leading to actual engagement in the practice. This does not, however, preclude the possibility that some students with positive self-esteem may still hold negative attitudes towards examination malpractice yet ironically engage in it.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings and conclusions of this study:

1. Government, non-governmental organizations, and private-sector actors operating within Faskari Zonal Quality Assurance Area should sponsor information services such as posters, billboards, jingles, and debates in secondary schools and other strategic locations to raise students' self-esteem, encourage positive peer association, and steer them away from examination malpractice.
2. Parents, significant others, teachers, and guidance counsellors within the zone should provide emotional support to students to foster a more positive orientation towards self-esteem and a healthier attitude towards examination malpractice.
3. Schools within Faskari zone should organize regular in-school programmes, seminars, or workshops geared towards modifying students' attitude towards examination malpractice.
4. Parents, teachers, and other significant adults within the zone should encourage positive peer association among students and help reinforce a negative attitude towards examination malpractice by consistently expressing disapproval of the act.

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