

**PEER GROUP INFLUENCE AND SELF- CONCEPT AS CORRELATES OF  
EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
STUDENTS IN ABIA STATE**

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**Abstract**

This study determined the extent peer group influence and self-concept correlates with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State. The study adopted a correlational research design. Two research questions guided the study while two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The sample of the study consisted of 1,036 senior secondary school class II students drawn through simple random sampling technique from the entire population of 10,365 SSII students in Abia State. Peer group influence and self-concept on examination malpractice questionnaire (PGISCQ) was designed and validated by three experts in the College of Education and was used for data collection. The data generated for the study were analyzed using Pearson,  $R^2$  (coefficient of determination) to answer the research questions while linear regression was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that peer group influence predicted 72.9% of examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State. The study also revealed that self-concept was a positive and significance correlate of examination malpractice as it predicted 46.9% of the examination malpractice among senior secondary school students. Based on the findings it was recommended among others that students should be provided with necessary information by psychologist and guidance counsellors about the different psychosocial variables and how they could lead academic adjustment for effective learning outcomes and reduce their propensity to engage in examination malpractice.

**Keywords:** Peer Influence, Self-Concept, Examination Malpractice, Secondary School Students.

## Introduction

The growing menace of examination malpractice in our schools is becoming a worrisome and disturbing phenomenon on daily basis. In Nigeria, cases of cheating before, during and after examinations at different levels of education abound (Adamu, 2016). In 2010, 324 secondary schools in Nigeria were blacklisted and banned by the Federal Government from registering or serving as venues for senior secondary certificate examination (SSCE) and University Matriculation Examination (UME), due to their involvement in different forms of examination malpractices (FME, 2017). Abia State was ranked high on the rate of examination malpractice. Hence, Iruoje (2019) stated that the rate of examination malpractice in Abia State is alarming.

In an attempt to determine why some students indulge in cheating during examination, Obe (2015) identified poor preparation of candidates for examination and the compromising attitude of the entire society as being responsible for students' involvement in examination malpractice. Chaminuka and Nudzo (2014) identified fear of failure and inadequate preparation for examinations, shortage of learning and teaching resources among other factors as possible causes of examination malpractice. Most Nigerian students exhibit some nefarious activities such as gambling rather than going to school to learn. This type of activities tend to lure them into maladjusted behavior like examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice in the Nigerian educational system is widely discussed as a cankerworm that poses a great threat to authenticity of educational qualifications. It is a major challenge to the government of Nigeria, school administrators, parents and examination bodies.

Examination is the measurement of proficiency in knowledge and skills, either in oral or written forms and evaluating the adequacy of these properties possessed by candidate. This is the pivot around which the whole system of education revolve (Ajibola, 2021). Denga and Denga (2018) opined that school examinations are a tool for measuring learners' mastery of content and instructors' effectiveness in delivering the content at different levels of schooling in education system all over the world. Any negative view about examination in Nigeria nowadays seems to point towards examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice is defined as any irregular behavior exhibited by candidates or anybody charged with the responsibility of conducting examination in or outside the examination hall, before, during or after such examination (WAEC, 2020). Ajibola (2021) viewed examination malpractice as any action carried out by stakeholders such as educational administrators, teachers, parents or students that is likely to render the assessment or examination ineffective or useless. Examination malpractice in its technical term is an act that contravenes the rules and regulations of a particular examination body set at a particular period of time. Not only that, it is an immoral and illegal factor which also undermines the creditability of the education system (The Ghanaian Times, 2021).

The hue and cry about examination malpractices which seem to take place in Nigerian educational system is nothing but a reflection of a corrupt society. It has been discovered that students cheat from primary to tertiary institutions (Animasahuz & Ogunniran, 2014). All sorts of misconducts take place in and around examination venues in order to achieve success such as smuggling of examination questions out of the examination hall, refusal to hand over suspected incriminating material to the authorities among others (Ivor, 2020). It is saddening that examination bodies, government functionaries, school authorities, invigilators, parents and students all seem to participate in the iniquitous examination malpractice (Saxe, 2021).

Recently, it was reported by the media that a man was caught taking Joint Admission and Matriculation (JAMB) examination for his child in 2024 JAMB examination. This level of examination malpractice has been a source of worry to the researchers and other well meaning Nigerians. Government has stipulated penalties for examination malpractice culprits, yet the method of cheating continued to increase in strength and sophistication. The continuous engagement of students in examination malpractice especially during the West African Examination Councils' (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) tends to give indication that such efforts have proved ineffective. Literature reports from outside Nigeria tend to suggest that psychosocial variable such as peer group influence and self-concept have the potentials for correlating with examination malpractice among students.

Vigdor (2021) defined peer group as collections of adolescents identified by interest, attitudes, abilities and personal characteristics they have in common. Psychologists such as Bature and Bature (2015) have observed that peer approval or disapproval is one of the major factors that can account for good conduct or misconduct among adolescents. If a particular behavior is sanctioned by a group, members tend to avoid it. On the other hand, if the behavior is approved, whether considered positive or negative by the society, it becomes a norm or mode of conduct among the peers. The relationship between students' belief about their peers' attitude towards examination malpractice and the likelihood of their engagement in dishonest behaviour was thoroughly explored by Andeman and Murdock (2017). They found out that students with the perception that their peers condemn academic dishonesty were less likely to cheat. This result led to the conclusion that peer disapproval could be the most important determinant of changes in cheating behavior.

Self-concept is a construct which means the image one built for oneself. Oladele in Nafor (2014) defined self-concept as the sum of what an individual believes to be true about him or her and the importance he or she attaches to these beliefs. This means that what a person thinks and feels about him or herself becomes his or her self-concept. How the student sees him or herself in terms of ability, social skills, behaviours, potentials, qualities, shortcomings, achievement or failure may constitute his or her individual self-concept. Okorodudu and Okorodudu (2023) stated that the adjusted individual is likely to demonstrate self-confidence and courage in examination while the maladjusted individual may tend to manifest strong sense of inferiority or insecurity, which he or she tries always to protect. Consequently, it could be said that individuals who have strong feelings of inferiority are likely to be prone to examination malpractice. This is yet to be established in Abia State.

### **Statement of Problem**

Students are supposed to show great enthusiasm for school and overall school activities by being positively involved in classroom work and show value for what they are learning. Parents provide the needs of their children and encourage them to read and pass their examinations. There seem to be serious indications that our nation's secondary school students are in a state of crisis associated with examination malpractice. Examination malpractice seems to have grown from more stretching of neck (giraffing) to see another candidate's work to more sophisticated methods such as the use of micro-computer, mobile phones and even use of gun to intimidate those concerned with the administration of the examination.

Efforts have been made by various stakeholders in education to curb the incidence of examination malpractice in Nigerian but the incidence continued and every examination season witnesses the emergence of new ingenious ways of cheating. This suggests that the problem of

examination malpractice needs serious remedy. Literature reports from outside Nigeria tend to suggest that peer group influence and self-concept have a serious relationship with examination malpractice among students. However, the extent peer group influence and self- concept, correlates with examination malpractice to the best of our knowledge among secondary school students in Abia State is yet to be established. It is against this background that the researchers were motivated to investigate the extent peer group influence and self-concept correlates with examination malpractice in Abia State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do peer group influence correlates with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State.
2. To what extent does self-concept correlate with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

### **Hypotheses**

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

1. Peer group influence does not significantly correlate with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State.
2. Self-concept does not significantly correlate with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The sample of the study was 1,036 SSII students drawn through a simple random sampling from a population of 10,365 senior secondary class II students in Abia State. The instrument used for data collection was the researchers made rating scales titled: Peer Group Influence and Self- Concept rating scales on Examination Malpractice (PGISEM). It adopted a four-point scale which was validated by three experts in Guidance and Counseling, Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation for both face and content validity. The rating scale has three sections viz: section A elicited demographic data from the respondents. Section B comprised ten items on Peer Group Influence on examination malpractice while Section C has ten items on Self-concepts relationship with examination malpractice. The instrument was on a 4-point rating scale ranging from Very High Extent (VHE) 4 points, High Extent (HE), 3 points, Low Extent (LE) 2 points, Very Low Extent (VLE) 1 point. The researchers administered the instrument on the respondents used for the study and was immediately retrieved to avoid losses. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient  $R^2$  was used to answer the research questions while linear regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

The results were presented in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses as shown in the tables below.

**Research Question One:** To what extent does peer group influence correlates with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

**Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Peer Group Influence and Examination Malpractices among Senior Secondary School Students**

Source	PG1	EM
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PG 1	Pearson correlations	1	0.854
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1,286	1,286
EM	Pearson correlations	0.854	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	
	N	1,286	1,286
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.729	

PG 1= Peer Group Influence, EM = Examination Malpractice among senior secondary school students, N= Number of respondents \*Correlation significant at 0.05 level.

Data in Table 1 indicated a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.854 which was positive and with the coefficient limit of =0.81-.1.00. This indicates that peer group influence to a very high and positive extent correlated with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students. This indicated that an increase in peer group influence was associated with an increase in examination malpractices of the student sampled and vice versa. The coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) 0.729 indicates that 72.9% of the variance observed in examination malpractice among senior secondary school students was accounted for by peer group influence. Consequently, peer group influence predicted 72.9% of examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

**Hypothesis One:** Peer group influence does not significantly correlate with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students.

**Table 1.1: Linear Regression o Peer Group Influence and Examination Malpractice among senior secondary school students**

Variables	Term	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-Critical	Sig.	Dec.
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PG 1 &	1264.625	1264.625			
EM					
		1		1.96	
Regression	14737.665	11.469	116.265	.000	S
Residual					
Total	16002.290	1.286			

Df=degree of freedom, F=f-calculated, correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The data in table 1.1 showed that peer group influence significantly correlated with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students. The calculated f-value of 110.265 in respect of the correlation between peer group influence and examination malpractice among senior secondary school students was greater than f-critical value of 1.96 with degree of freedom of 1 and 1,285 at 0.05 levels of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant correlation between peer group influence and examination malpractice among senior secondary school students was rejected. Therefore, peer group influence significantly correlated with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

**Research Question Two:** To what extent does self-concept correlates with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

**Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Self-Concepts and Examination malpractice among Senior Secondary School Students**

Source		SC	EM
SC	Pearson correlations	1	0.685
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1,286	1,286
EM	Pearson correlations	0.685	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	

N	1,286	1,286
R <sup>2</sup>	0.469	

SC=Self-concept, EM= Examination Malpractice among senior secondary school students, N=Number of respondents \* Correlation significant at 0.05 level.

Data in Table 2 indicated a correlation coefficient (r) of -0.685 which was positive and within the coefficient of limit =0.1-0.80. This indicates that self-concept to a high and positive extent correlated with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students. The coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>).469 indicates that 46.9% of the variance observed in examination malpractice among senior secondary school students was accounted for by self-concept. Consequently, self-concept predicted 46.9% of the examination malpractice among senior secondary school students.

**Hypothesis Two:** Self-concept does not significantly correlate with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students.

**Table 2.1: Linear Regression on Self-Concept and Examination Malpractice Among Senior Secondary School Students.**

Variables	Term	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-Critical	Sig.	Dec.
SC & EM	Regression	1214.657		1214.65				
	Residual		1	7		1.96		
		14237.233		11.080	109.626		.000	S
	Total	14451.890	1,286					

Df=degree of freedom, F=F-calculated, correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The data in Table 2.1 showed that self-concept significantly correlated with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students. The calculated  $f$ -value of 109.626 in respect of the correlation between self-concept and examination malpractice among senior secondary school students was greater than  $F$ -critical value of 1.96 with degree of freedom of 1 and 1,285 at 0.05 levels of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significance correlation between self-concept and examination malpractice among senior secondary school students was rejected. Therefore, self-concept served as a significant correlate of examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The finding of the study on peer group influence as correlate of examination malpractice revealed that peer group influence predicted 72.9% of examination malpractice among senior secondary school students. This shows that peer group influence significantly correlated with examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State. The findings of this study is in agreement with the findings of the study by Grace (2015) on influence of peer pressure and socioeconomic status and student's attitude toward examination malpractice in Nigeria. The result showed that peer pressure significantly predicted students' attitude to examination malpractice. Consequently, students should invest sufficient time to their studies and engage in group discussion for effective learning. Students should equally avoid keeping bad and inprofitable association so that they will not be lured into examination malpractice. They should associate with people of integrity who will positively influence their value systems and behaviours.

The findings of this study still indicated that self-concept was a positive and significant correlate of examination malpractice as it predicted 46.9% of the examination malpractice among senior secondary school students. This indicates that an increase in self-concept was associated with

a decrease in examination malpractice among senior secondary school students sampled and vice versa. The findings of this study is in conformity with the findings of the study by Bakar and Musa (2015) which investigated the relationship between academic self-concept and examination malpractice of Junior High School (JHS) students in Ghana. The results showed a positive relationship between academic self-concept and examination malpractice of students. The agreement between the finding of the present study and former study suggest that students should be encourage and reinforced in order to help them enhance their self-concept. This is because self-concept could play a significant role in the examination malpractice of secondary school students. The self-image of a student whether positive or negative may indicate the direction of pendulum towards his or her school adjustment and examination malpractice. Negative self-concept during adolescence may be associated with examination malpractice.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, peer group influence had the highest percentage contribution of 72.9% while self-concept with 46.9% are predictive index in the examination malpractice among senior secondary school students in Abia State. They are significantly and positively correlated with examination malpractice among senior secondary students. This indicates that the type of peers one keeps and the type of self-concept exhibited by a student may increase or decrease students involvement in examination malpractice.

## **Recommendations**

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

1. Students should be guided on the type of peers they keep and their implications regards examination malpractice especially by psychologists and counsellors. This can be done through group counselling and during moral instructions in the school.

2. Teachers, psychologists, counsellors and parents should have avenues to encourage and reinforce the students on the ability to improve their self-concept through involvement in school activities like drama and sports. Parents can encourage good self-concept on their child by making out time to be with them and always have positive interactions with them.

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