

Correlates of Academic Dishonesty among Trainee Teachers of Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Nigeria: Implications for Educational Measurement

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Abstract: *Education in Nigeria is highly compromised by a deep rooted cheating culture that appears to even enjoy the impetus of those who should save it from the brink of total collapse. This study examined the correlates of academic dishonesty among trainee teachers of Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Nigeria. Two null hypotheses were developed and tested at .05 significance level. Data for analysis were collected through a well-structured questionnaire and the statistic used to test each of the two hypotheses was the independent t-test. The results indicated that dishonest tendencies and academic commitment of trainee teachers do not significantly influence their academic dishonesty. The researchers equally explored the implications of this study for educational measurement.*

Keywords: Academic dishonesty, educational measurement, dishonest tendencies

1. Introduction

Academic dishonesty is any form of misconduct that distorts the true measurement of a learner's competence when assessed. It reports a feedback about the examinee or student that reflects a misleading and false picture of what he or she is worth in learning. UNESCO (2003) defines academic dishonesty as the deliberate behavior or action that interferes with or hinders the pursuit of knowledge and results in misrepresentation of academic-materials, taking credit or recognition for academic-work (including papers, lab-reports, quizzes, examination, etc.) that is not one's own, or fabricating-data, records or tampering with university-documents. Though the phenomenon of dishonesty in matters of school learning, as noted by Hamani, Chalhaf, Maaloul and Azaiez, 2013, is not peculiar to a specific geographical hemisphere or cultural enclave, the Nigerian situation really calls for great concern.

Education in Nigeria, at all levels, is highly comprised by a deeply rooted cheating culture. Perhaps, what is most worrisome is that, Nigerians themselves, are apparently yet to find a clear line between the concepts of honesty and dishonesty. For instance, the incidence of examination misconduct in Nigeria has become so widespread that there is almost no examination anywhere at all levels of the formal school system, without one form of sharp misconduct or the other (Exam Ethics Marshals International, 2013; Folarin, 2013; Oluremi, 2014, Olatunbosun, 2009). The situation has got so appalling that, according to Omeri (2012), Nigeria occupies the number one position in the world's examination malpractice index. Results from a nationwide study by Boris and Awodun (2012) indicated that 62% of secondary school students in Nigeria practiced one form of examination misconduct or the other before leaving secondary school. Academic

dishonesty is not about examination misconduct alone, Hamani, et al, 2013, generally equates it with cheating of any form. Teixeira and Rocha (2010), defines it as "acts which cover areas identified as illegal, unethical, immoral or that go against the rules either in the course or in the Universities" and believe that countries where cheating is most prevalent are highly corrupt countries at different levels of a society. The Canadian Council on learning (2010) describes academic dishonesty as covering cheating, forgery, identity theft, plagiarism and counterfeiting.

Academic dishonesty is a social problem that has taken a huge toll on the credibility of tertiary education in Nigeria. Teachers in training, as an integral part of this level of education, are no exception, in this endemic menace in the Nigerian context. Studies abound on the prevalence of academic dishonesty in colleges and universities. Reports from multi-institutional studies showed that respondents between the range of 39% and 70% acknowledged involvement in academic dishonesty during their college years (Aluede, Omoregie & Osa-Edoh, 2005; Pino & Smith, 2003).

In the report of a thirty years follow up study on student's cheating, Wotring (2007) remarked that the population of students' cheaters increased from 63% to 70%. He declared further that the cheaters of 1990s compared to those of 1960s have advanced in variety of cheating behaviors and cheated more often.

Similarly, some researchers (based on survey studies) reported that almost one-third of the six thousand students from thirty one colleges and universities had indulged in cheating (McCabe, 1999); more than 30% plagiarized on all their papers (Bloomfield, 2005); and one hundred and seventeen fresh students used emails to exchange answers

in an examination (Wilson, 1999). The aforesaid reports depict the dangerous dimensions that academic dishonesty has assumed on a global scene. Olatunbosun (2009) remarked that the last two decades of the Nigerian educational institution have witnessed an increase in the rate of examination malpractices. In tandem with Olatunbosun, several news reports from the Nigerian daily newspapers had decried the rate of involvement of students, parents and teachers in the pervading examination imbroglio (Daily Independent, 2004; Nigerian Tribune, 2009; Vanguard, 2005; Weekend Pointer, 2005 [all cited in Olatunbosun, 2009]).

Academic dishonesty in our school systems have been blamed on a wide range of factors, which include the behavioural disposition of the student and his overall environment. Odunayo and Olujuwon (2010), noted that corrupt practices in the Nigerian society are deeply rooted in the negative values and attitudes propagated by members of the society. Imran and Ayobami (2011) corroborate that it makes some sense to fashion a link between the prevalent social orders in the society and the moral conducts of the grown-up youth.

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of student teachers' dishonest tendencies and their learning commitment on academic dishonesty in the Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Nigeria.

2. Method

In view of the nature of the explanatory variables of the study, *expo facto* design was adopted. In *expo facto* research design, independent variables are not manipulable as they were already inherent in the subjects being studied prior to the investigation. This is essentially true of the independent sub-variables of the study: dishonest tendencies and academic commitment. The sample for the study comprised 205 student teachers of the Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Nigeria. The students cut across various levels of the University's Faculty of Education which is saddled with training teachers for learners of both primary and post-primary levels of education. The sampling was done purposively. A questionnaire was used for data collection and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Independent t-test statistic was applied in testing the hypotheses at .05 significance level. The two explanatory sub-variables: dishonest tendencies and academic commitment were each categorized "high" and "low" based on the respondents' scores on the variables in the research instrument. Those with scores ranging from the Mean to the maximum score were categorized "high" while those who scored below the Mean were categorized "low".

3. Results

Hypothesis 1: Dishonest tendencies do not significantly influence academic dishonesty of trainee teachers.

Table 1: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of dishonest tendencies on academic dishonesty of trainee teachers

Dishonest tendencies	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
High	119	18.05	3.74	-0.621	.535
Low	86	18.38	3.82		

From Table 1, trainee teachers with high dishonest tendencies had a mean of 18.05 lower than those with low dishonest tendencies whose mean is 18.38. The p-value (.535) associated with the computed t-ratio (-0.621) is higher than the chosen level of significance (.05). Based on this outcome, the hypothesis, which is stated in the null,

is retained. This means that dishonest tendencies by trainee teachers do not significantly influence their academic dishonesty.

Hypothesis 2: Academic commitment of trainee teachers does not significantly influence their academic dishonesty

Table 2: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of academic commitment of trainee teachers on their academic dishonesty

Academic commitment	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
High	126	18.38	3.60	.911	.363
Low	79	17.89	4.07		

In Table 2, the p-value of .363 is greater than .05, which is the chosen level of significance for the study. On the basis of this, the null hypothesis as stated, is not rejected. This implies that, the academic commitment of trainee teachers does not significantly influence their academic dishonesty.

4. Discussion

The test results of the first hypothesis indicated that dishonest tendencies of trainee teachers do not influence their academic dishonesty. This outcome apparently negates the trend of empirical literature, especially when

viewed in the light of contemporary studies and views, such as those of Obimba, 2002; Fuandai, 2006; Nnachi, 2006; and others who have found a link between corrupt practices/negative values of members of the Nigerian society and academic misconduct in our institutions of learning. Academic dishonesty is, by no means, an exclusive function of a person's dishonest tendencies. Odunayo and Olujuwon (2010) cite a learner's environment as playing a key role in his disposition to academic dishonesty. In other words, one may not necessarily have a tendency to cheat in an examination but the environment predisposes him to do so. A teacher who does not take his job serious, probably knows little or

nothing about his subject area, and has an assessment bias, may push his learners into academic dishonesty, not necessarily because they have a tendency to it.

The results obtained from the test of the second hypothesis stated that academic commitment of trainee teachers does not significantly influence their academic dishonesty. Student teachers who are committed to their studies can equally be prone to academic dishonesty. Szabo and Underwood (2004), for instance, noted that learners who are afraid to fail engage in unlawful acts. This is without prejudice to their probable disposition to hard work or high level of commitment to academic work. Therefore, by the outcome of this investigation, that a trainee teacher is dedicated to hard work or high level of academic commitment does not preclude his being academically dishonest.

5. Implications for Educational Measurement

Students who engage in academic misconduct do so to attract scores or performance ratings that they do not deserve. This has far reaching implications especially where high-stake assessments are involved. It is a situation in which there is a distortion or misrepresentation of the measurement of the learner's attributes or characteristics that are being tested. Measurement, according to Nkomo and Ojating (2018), refers to the numerical observation or score that is derived from the testing process. When students successfully engage in irregular academic activities that give them undue measurement advantage, they only lay claim to attributes or characteristics that they do not possess. According to the Academic Integrity Tutorials (2018), when students cheat or plagiarize, instructors cannot accurately assess their performance or evaluate their mastery of the knowledge, skills and applications in respective fields of study. As a result, institutions may grant credentials to those who do not deserve them and this situation eventually takes a huge toll on the workplace and the wider society.

6. Conclusion

Academic dishonesty among school learners of all levels is a global phenomenon. The Nigerian situation, however, calls for great concern, as the menace has eaten deep into its fabrics. This study found no significant link between dishonest tendencies, academic commitment of trainee teachers and their academic dishonesty.

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