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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' SELF-ESTEEM AND THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN IMO STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between secondary school students' self-esteem and their attitude towards examination malpractice in Imo State. Two research questions were answered, and one null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance to guide the study. Correlation research design was adopted for this study. The population for this study consisted of 33,922 senior secondary school (SS2) students. Research sample consisted of 3,520 students selected through multi-stage sampling technique. The instruments used for the study were Hare Self-esteem Scale (HSS) and Examination Malpractice Attitude Scale (EMAS). Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used for data analysis. Results obtained from the study indicated that majority of the students in Imo state have high self-esteem. The result also showed that most of the students in Imo state have negative attitude towards examination malpractice. More so, the result revealed high positive significant relationship between secondary school students' self-esteem and their attitude towards examination malpractice. The study recommended, among others that Counsellors, teachers and researchers should strengthen their efforts in creating programmes that will help boost students' self-esteem, so that they would feel worthy and able to face examination without any need to indulge in any form of malpractice.

Keywords: Relationship, Self-esteem, Students, Attitude, Examination malpractice.

Introduction

Contemporary academics have acclaimed that every society worldwide, whether big or small has a system of education (Oguzie, Ani, Obi & Onyegirim, 2018). Perhaps, this is basically because education has been identified and recognized as a strong pillar upon which the social, economic and technological advancement of the society depend. Hence, many countries

including Nigeria have acknowledged and adopted education as a vital medium for empowering their citizens morally and intellectually so as to produce individuals of worthwhile personality with relevant skills, aptitudes and competences needed for optimum national growth and sustainable development. This therefore underscores the generally acclaimed axiom that "no society or nation can develop more than the level and standard of education available for her citizens". Little wonder the Federal Republic of Nigeria emphasis on education as an instrument per excellent for national development and social change (FRN, 2013).

Currently, the Nigeria system of education makes use of certificates to indicate the level of knowledge acquisition. However, before certificates are awarded, students have to be assessed or examined in the field they have been trained. On this note, examination becomes a yardstick against which students' competence and progress are formally measured and appraised in the Nigerian education sector. According to Emaikwu (2012), examination as major part of evaluation in education is aimed at determining a student's level of skill acquisition or intellectual competence and understanding after a given training. Evaluation usually enables the teacher to be effectively ready for further teaching as this forms a feedback. In line with this, George and Ukpong (2013) observed that examination is the most common tool around which the entire system of education revolves. George and Ukpong further noted that examination is the instrument used to decide who is permitted to move to the next academic level.

Similarly, examination does not only function as a process of assessing the progress of students, rather it could also motivate and help students to know their academic strengths and weaknesses. It may also serve as a medium for providing teachers with opportunities to try new methods of teaching. Conversely, when examination is not properly conducted, the expected feedback may not be accurately achieved. As a result of this, the outcome of such examination may lead to wrong decisions and judgement which could negatively affect the students, teachers, entire education community, as well as the society in general (Oguzie, Oguzie, Nnadi, Mokwelu & Obi, 2019). However, the success of the Nigerian education system in achieving its noble goals as the bedrock of national development has been greatly marred by various maladaptive behaviours, among which examination malpractice is included (Ajaja, 2012).

Examination malpractice may be defined as any form of dishonesty perpetrated by a person or group of persons in an examination. It is an academic dishonesty involving any act of omission or commission which compromises the reliability of any assessment or evaluation system (Muhney, Gutmann & Schniedeman, 2008). According to Anyamene, Nwokolo and Maduegbuna (2015), examination malpractice is defined as anything done by an examination candidate, examination administrator, teacher, parent or any person, that goes against stipulated examination ethics and laws. Examination malpractice may be seen as an illegal or unethical behaviour by somebody in the process of testing the ability or knowledge of a candidate. In the context of this study, examination malpractice is defined as any act or behaviour by any person or group of persons before, during or after an examination targeted to influence positively the outcome of such examination.

The problem of examination malpractice in Nigeria seems to have turned into a monster which is gradually destroying the education system. Examination malpractice could have serious consequences on the individuals, institutions of learning and the entire country. Examination malpractice may lead to great loss of credibility. A country that becomes notorious in examination malpractice could lose international credibility. The implication is that documents or certificates emanating from such countries will be treated with suspicion as is the case of Nigeria presently (Animasahun, 2013). Oguzie, Oguzie, Nnadi, Mokwelu and Obi (2019) stressed that the prevalent rate of bank failures, building collapse, economic sabotage, vandalism, kidnapping, drug trafficking, fake drug manufacturing, among others, may be practical effects of moral decadence emanating from examination malpractice. Hence, the negative impacts of examination malpractice are been felt in virtually all sectors of Nigerian economy such as the education sector, filling stations, churches, homes, hospitals and markets.

More so, the instances of examination malpractice vary. Examination malpractice may sometimes be perpetuated in form of impersonation, cheating, copying from one another, theft of other students' work, smuggling of answer scripts in examinations halls, fabrication of results and disregard to examination regulations. Also, examination malpractice may come up in other forms such as bringing of un-authorized materials into the examination hall, collusion, swapping of answer booklets, examination score trading or assault on examination administrators. Although examination malpractice has become widespread in all levels of education in Nigeria, students' attitude towards examination malpractice may greatly determine their likelihood to indulge in the crime or not (Anierobi, Madike, Unachukwu & Ebenebe, 2016). Hence, students' attitude may influence their views, feelings and opinions about examination malpractice.

Attitude may be defined as the predisposition or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain idea, object, person, or situation (Ezunu, Oguzie, Aigbokhaode & Ezunu, 2020). It may be described as a person's posture, mood, feelings, disposition or position about an issue, event, idea, or something. Attitude influences an individuals' choice of action and response to stimuli. Fanseca (2010) opined that attitude is the key to success. Fanseca further observed that students' attitude towards examination is a factor that indicates whether or not students will participate in the crime. Attitude towards examination malpractice is therefore referred to as a student's feelings, mood, disposition or position towards examination malpractice. An individual's attitude could be either positive or negative. Students who exhibit negative attitude towards examination malpractice may see it as a crime, and perhaps may not indulge in examination malpractice.

In contrary, students who exhibit positive attitude towards examination malpractice may see it as something worthwhile, and this possibly could make such category of students prone to examination malpractice. However, for the purpose of this study, attitude towards examination malpractice is referred to as students' inclinations and feelings, preconceived notions, opinions and convictions about examination malpractice. Many factors may be correlated to students' attitude towards examination malpractice. Among the factors that may correlate with students' attitude towards examination malpractice is self-esteem.

Self-esteem refers to the perception of an individual's abilities, skills, and overall qualities that guide and motivate specific cognitive processes and behaviours in the individual (Juth, Smyth & Santuzzi, 2008). It is an overall reflection of an individual's self-worth, which encompasses beliefs about the individual as well as the emotional responses to those beliefs. According to Molly (2010), self-esteem is the ability to cope with life's challenges, the feeling of being worthy and deserving; and the right to enjoy the product of hard work. Dedmond (2011) described self-esteem as the complication of feelings about oneself that guides one's behaviours, influences one's attitudes and drives one's motivation. One's confidence in one's ability to compete, perform, and satisfactorily complete a task may have a positive or negative effect on an individual (Okafor, Obi & Oguzie, 2018). In the context of this study, self-esteem is defined as the belief, perception and opinion people have about themselves which influence their behaviours and consequently affects their performance and achievements in life. It is the amount of realistic respect that one has for oneself. Self-esteem could serve as a very important determinant of a student's actions and behaviour, as it represents the capacity to feel worthy of happiness and be able to successfully address life challenges. Okafor, Obi and Oguzie pointed out that self-esteem may be high or low.

Subsequently, research has shown that students with low self-esteem display characteristics such as excessive self-criticism and dissatisfaction, hypersensitivity to criticism with resentment against critics, chronic indecision and exaggerated fear of mistake, excessive willingness to please others, perfectionism, dwelling on the magnitude of past mistakes, pessimism and a general negative outlook (Shaffer, 2011). Again, students with low self-esteem may feel inadequate and incapable of scaling through examinations without external help. This may lead such category of students to develop positive attitude towards examination malpractice as they seek for easier and dubious means of achieving examination success. In the other hand, students with high self-esteem are usually self-confidence, thereby believing that they can achieve academic success without indulging in any form of examination malpractice (Okafor, Obi & Oguzie, 2018). Supporting the above statement, Ukpepi, Ndifon and Enukoha (2012) observed that students with low self-esteem participate more in examination malpractice than students with high self-esteem. Similarly, Onyibe, Uma and Ibina (2015) found that students' self-esteem is significantly correlated with their level of participation in examination malpractices. In addition, students with high self-esteem tend to have strong interest in academic activities, perform better in classroom, and have strong belief on their personal capability to learn or perform optimally in examinations. Such students may also be intrinsically motivated to successfully achieve their desired academic goals (Ozuome, Oguzie, Mokwelu & Anyamene, 2020).

Undoubtedly, examination malpractice has been one of the problems facing the Nigerian education system for decades, but the rate and manner at which this crime is been perpetrated recently has raised a serious concern to teachers, parents, counsellors, government, researchers, and other stakeholders. Anzene (2014) lamented that examination malpractice is common and many examinations witness the emergence of new and ingenious ways of malpractice. The rate of examination malpractice has become so widespread that there is virtually no examination that does not record one form of examination malpractice or the other (Nnam & Inah, 2015). Okon and Petters (2014) observed that most examinations in Nigeria are usually marked by complaints of various forms of malpractice.

Examination malpractice perhaps, constitutes the greatest problem, which in effect threatens and has eaten deep into the Nigeria education system. Furo (2015) lamented the issue of examination malpractice has become endemic in the Nigerian education system. In fact, the incidences of examination malpractice in Nigeria has become so widespread that there is virtually no examination anywhere at all levels of the formal school system, without one form of malpractice or the other (Ofodile, Odiato, Adenugba & Edun, 2019). In-line with the Folarin and Oluremi's assertions, Oguzie, Oguzie, Nnadi, Mokwelu & Obi (2019), observed that there are incidences of examination malpractice in many external and external examinations in Imo state, and stressed that examination malpractice is fast eroding the culture of hard work, diligence and honesty among students in the present society. The most perturbing aspect of it all is that parents, administrators and teachers who are supposed to be actively involved in fighting against examination malpractice are ironically aiding the menace directly or indirectly, thereby encouraging their children and wards to hold positive attitude towards examination malpractice (Anakwe, 2016).

Since education is the bedrock of development of any nation, and examination is the key to which the success of all educational programmes in Nigeria are measured, it then becomes very necessary to explore important variables that predispose secondary school students to actions and behaviours which could mar the validity of examination results. Currently, it appears that no single empirical study documented the effect of students' variables such as self-esteem as per its relationship to attitude towards examination malpractice in Imo State. Hence, the relationship between self-esteem and attitude towards examination malpractice among secondary school students in Imo state has not been empirically ascertained. To this end, the present study examined the relationship between secondary school students' self-esteem and their attitude towards examination malpractice in Imo State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the self-esteem scores of secondary school students?
2. What are the attitudes towards examination malpractice scores of secondary school students?
3. What is the relationship between secondary school students' self-esteem and their attitude towards examination malpractice?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

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

Method

This study adopted the correlation research design. According to Nworgu (2015), this type of study seeks to establish the relationship that exists between two or more variables. Usually correlation studies indicate the direction and magnitude of the relationship between the variables. The result of a correlation study is expressed in correlation coefficients, that is, the degree of relationship is expressed in numerical forms, between -1.00 to +1.00 (Okafor, Obi & Oguzie, 2018). Agu (2014) observed that researchers use correlation when they wish to discover if any relationship exists between two or more variables, how strong the

relationships appear to be and whether one variable of primary interest can be effectively predicted from information on the values of the other variables. The population of the study comprised 33,922 students, while the sample size consisted of 3,520 SS2 students drawn through multi-stage sampling procedure.

The first instrument used in the study for data collection was the Hare Self-esteem Scale (HSS) was developed by Hare in 1985. The instrument contains thirty items on a four point scales, ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The Hare Self-esteem Scale for this study has two sections: A and B. Section A is an introductory part that solicited the bio-data of the respondents and section B is directed towards measuring students' level of self-esteem. Good psychometric properties has been attributed the Hare Self-esteem Scale (HSS). Hare in 1985 obtained 0.83 reliability coefficient by correlating Hare Self-esteem Score with Rosenberg Self-esteem, and a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.74 in an interval of three months. Secondly, the Examination Malpractice Attitude Scale (EMAS) developed by Muyiwa, Idoko and Akindele in 2017 was used to measure secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice. The instrument contains thirty items on a four point scales, ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. EMAS has two sections: A and B. Section A is an introductory part that solicited the bio-data of the respondents and section B is directed towards measuring attitude towards examination malpractice. It has been reported to exhibit high and acceptable psychometric properties (Muyiwa, Idoko & Akindele, 2017). The reliability of the scale was established at 0.77 coefficient cronbach alpha. Using the spearman brown, EMAS yielded a reliability coefficient value of -51. Thus, the instruments were considered reliable enough to be used for this study.

The researchers administered copies of the instruments through direct delivery method. In each school, a letter of introduction was presented to the principal for approval. Then the researchers with the help of five research assistants who were duly briefed about the study served copies of the instruments to the students and also retrieved the completed copies of the instruments for scoring and analysis. The instruments completed for this study were scored following the scoring instructions. All data collected for this study were organised in tables and analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

Results

Table 1: Range of scores on students' self-esteem

Range of scores	N	%	Remarks
30 – 89	648	18.4	Low self-esteem
90 – 120	2873	81.6	High self-esteem

Table 1 reveals that 2873(81.6%) of the students with the scores ranging from 90 to 120 have high self-esteem, while 648(18.4%) of the students who scored between 30 and 89 have low self-esteem.

Table 2: Range of scores on students' attitude towards examination malpractice

Range of scores	N	%	Remarks
30 – 74	2103	59.7	Negative attitude towards examination malpractice
75 – 120	1417	40.3	Positive attitude towards examination malpractice

Table 2 indicates that 2103(59.7%) of the students with the scores ranging from 30 to 74 have negative attitude towards examination malpractice, while 1417(40.3%) students who scored between 75 and 120 have positive attitude towards examination malpractice.

Table 3: Pearson r on students' self-esteem and their attitude towards examination malpractice scores

Source of Variation	N	Self-esteem r	Attitude r	Remark
Self-esteem	3520	1.00	0.68	High Positive Relationship
Attitude	3520	0.68	1.00	

In table 3, it was observed that there is high positive relationship of 0.68 between the secondary school students' self-esteem and their attitude towards examination malpractice.

Table 4: Significant of Pearson r on the students' self-esteem and their attitude towards examination malpractice using probability table of r

N	cal. r	df	pvalue	Cal.pvalue	Remark
3520	0.68	3519	0.05	0.00	S

S = Significant

Table 4 shows that at 0.05 level of significance and 3519df, the calculated r0.68 has pvalue 0.00 which is less than the critical pvalue 0.05. Therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected. This signifies that there is significant relationship between secondary school students' self-esteem and their attitude towards examination malpractice.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed that majority of secondary school students (81.6%) in Imo state have high self-esteem. This finding therefore shows that despite the various life challenges encountered by the students at the course of their day to day life activities in this modern day society, many students still view themselves as unique, capable and worthy individuals. This finding is consistent with the reports from previous researchers (Dramanu & Balaraba, 2013; Igbo, Ezegbe, Mbagwu & Odo, 2016; Helm, 2017; Okafor, Obi & Oguzie, 2018) that majority of secondary school students have high self-esteem. However, this finding goes contrary with the findings of Iheawuchi and Iruloh (2017) and Emeji (2019) who reported that majority of secondary school students have low self-esteem. The finding also contradicts the report from the previous study conducted by Edeh (2019) who observed that many secondary school students experience low self-esteem especially those who are victims of domestic violence.

One possible reason for the finding of this study contradicting the report of Iheawuchi, Iruloh, Emeji and Edeh may be as a result of the various self-esteem enhancing programmes being provided to the students by their counsellors and researchers who may have worked in one way or the other to encourage high self-esteem among students in Imo state. More so, it may be possible that students in Imo state have access to self-esteem enhancing Bibliotherapic texts which could have helped to increase their sense of self-value and self-worth. Guindon (2012) observed that people with high self-esteem focus on growth and development. Since majority

of the students have high self-esteem, it could possibly indicate that majority of students in Imo state feel good about themselves for whom they are and appreciate their own worth, take pride in their abilities and accomplishment. Erol and Orth (2011) maintained that students with high self-esteem are able to act according to what they think to be the best choice, trusting their own judgments and not feeling guilty when others do not like their choice. This could possibly indicate that Imo state secondary school students may not feel guilty even if they have positive attitude towards examination malpractice.

The findings of this study equally showed that most of the secondary school students (59.7%) in Imo state have negative attitude towards examination malpractice. This shows that majority of the students would not like to indulge in examination malpractice. This finding to some extend is unexpected, considering the high rate of examination malpractice prevalent in Imo state and Nigeria in general. Perhaps, students' involvement in examination malpractice may not be an indication that they have positive attitude towards the crime. Possibly, what causes students to indulge into examination malpractice may come from external factors such as peer influence, pressure from parents and ever-emphasis on certificates in the Nigerian society or inability to comprehend contents taught by the teachers. Based on the researcher's personal interaction with some of the students, the students revealed that if they had the ability to comprehend what their teachers taught them, they would have no reason to indulge in examination malpractice. This finding is in accordance with the findings of previous researchers (Nwankwo, 2017; Onyekuru & Barituka, 2017) who reported that many students have negative attitude towards examination malpractice. This particular finding of the study shows that many secondary school students who engage in examination malpractice actually do not view the act as something worthwhile but found themselves in the act probably as a result of pressure and frustration. Perhaps, peer influence, pressure from parents, the desire to satisfy the prerequisites for entry into higher institutions and quest to avoid failure were basically responsible for increasing rate of examination malpractice among secondary school students.

However, the above finding contradicts the findings of previous researchers (Ajaja, 2012; Anierobi, Madike, Unachukwu & Ebenebe, 2016) who in their researches found that many students have positive attitude towards examination malpractice. It also contradicts the assertion by Joshua, Ekpoh, Edet, Joshua and Obo (2011) that for every 100 candidates in examinations, 65 of them show positive attitude towards examination malpractice while 16 to 17 of them were caught cheating, most of which are not even recorded and reported. Moreover, Ofodile, Odiato, Adenugba and Edun (2019) pointed out that the large number of students with positive attitude towards examination malpractice and the high rate of incidence of the crime have become a source of worry for all stakeholders as well as adherents of moral and ethical uprightness in the Nigerian society. The possible reason for the contradiction between the findings of the above researchers and that of this study may as a result of location or human error at the course their research. People's philosophy and moral value in a particular location may influence their attitude towards something.

The result of the study also revealed that the students' self-esteem has high positive significant relationship with their attitude towards examination malpractice. This finding indicates that students' self-esteem is clearly linked to their predisposition to examination malpractice. This finding agrees with the report by previous researchers (Erol & Orth, 2011; Ukpepi, Ndifon &

Enukoha, 2012; Okorodudu, 2013; Wilayat, 2013; Naliaka, Odera & Poipoi, 2015; Oguzie, Ani, Obi & Onyegirim, 2018). Crowl, Kamisky and Podell (2017) pointed out that the development of self-esteem depends on the individual's sense of significance, competence and power, and students with low self-esteem are liable to hold faulty beliefs about examination malpractice. Low self-esteem students may develop a sense of inadequacy, incapability and failure. Ukpepi, Ndifon and Enukoha (2012) maintained that once false beliefs are established, they become self-perpetuating because those holding these false beliefs seek out individuals or group who share the same false beliefs. Dedmond (2011) viewed self- esteem as the complication of feelings about oneself that guides one's behaviours, influences one's attitudes and drives one's motivation. Ikura (2014) observed that students with low self-esteem cheat more than those with high self-esteem. The implication is that they may resort to dubious means of achieving academic excellence. Oko and Adie (2016) concluded students' self-esteem is significantly correlated with their attitude towards examination malpractice.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers therefore concluded that majority of secondary school students in Imo state have high self-esteem. Secondly, most of the students in Imo state have negative attitude towards examination malpractice. It was also concluded that, there is significant relationship between secondary school students' self-esteem and their attitude towards examination malpractice

Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Counsellors, teachers and researchers should strengthen their efforts in creating programmes that will help boost students' self-esteem, so that they would feel worthy and able to face examination without any need to indulge in any form of malpractice.
2. Parents and care-givers should try their best possible to instil good moral values among their children and wards and avoid any action or behaviour capable of encouraging positive attitude towards examination malpractice among them.
3. Counsellors, teachers and other staff should create programmes that will help discourage positive attitude towards examination malpractice among students.
4. Guidance Counsellors and researcher should focus more attention on building students' self-esteem since they are highly linked to students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

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