

## **SELF-REGULATED LEARNING, MORAL COMPETENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM AS PREDICTORS OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The study examined the influence of self-regulated learning, moral competence, self-esteem and some demographic factors (gender and academic level) on self-reported examination malpractices among undergraduates. Survey research method was employed. Using convenient sampling technique, participants, 119 males (43.3%) and 156 female (56.7%) were selected from two universities in Ondo State. They completed self-report measures on self-regulated learning, moral competence, self-esteem and examination malpractices. The hypothesis tested using simple linear multiple regression. The results showed independent significant influence of self-esteem ( $\beta = -.15, p < .05$ ) and gender ( $\beta = .19, p < .01$ ) on examination malpractices. Further results showed that self-regulated learning, moral competence, self-esteem, gender and academic level contributed jointly to examination malpractices [ $R = .24, R^2 = .06, F(5, 269) = 3.37, p > .05$ ]. They accounted for 6% variance in examination malpractices. Based on these findings, it is recommended that counseling services which promote self-esteem and help orientate on examination malpractices be made available to students in tertiary institutions in Ondo state to curb this menace.

**Keywords: Self-regulated learning, moral competence, self-esteem, examination malpractices.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Examination malpractice has become a hydra-headed problem that pervades the entire educational system in Nigeria. Examination malpractices are deviant behaviour discovered among the university students, which of course has high consequences on the students indulging in the act. It has been observed that undergraduates who indulge in this act usually are not well groomed for employment after school and this has implications for development of the emerging adults, the economy of the nation, security and virtually all sectors of the country. This is because effects of literacy on a nation cannot be overestimated. In light of this, the factors upon which attention is focused in this study and which literature attests to that could be responsible are self-regulated learning, self-esteem and moral competence, although not previously combined in studies.

Education is the inevitable key to the socio-economic development of every nation of which Nigeria is not excluded. Eneh (2016) emphasizes this has led to an unquenchable desire by most citizens to get themselves fully educated, and will therefore do everything under the sun either fair or foul means to achieve their aim. This desire seems to have some sort of backing as the institutions at the labour front have also put premium on qualification (certificates) before one can be offered a job in any reputable organization. Miranda and Freire (2011) believe the major aim of every educational system is to create responsible and respectful citizens. For the training to be deemed effective and efficient, the educational system makes provision for periodic assessment and evaluation of its products in the name of examination to know their capabilities, competence and readiness for the job market. As opined by Badejo (2010), the premium placed on certificates has led to the quest by Nigerian students to achieve these through myriad forms of examination malpractices.

Examination malpractices can be regarded as an unfair, illegal, and unethical act against examination regulations. An aspect of it is referred to as “Expo” which is used to describe a situation of exposing the examination question papers to the candidates before they actually sit for the examinations. Other forms of it exist and include such things as impersonation, introduction of relevant extraneous materials, copying from fellow students, asking other candidates questions inside the examination hall, sneaking out question papers and answer script, use of minicomputers, organizer and calculators, textbooks, lecture notes, body writing or tattoo and conniving with supervisors.

Examination malpractices are widespread problem in higher education. Cheating in examination includes, plagiarizing, falsifying bibliographies, turning in work done by someone else, receiving improper assistance on assignments, and intentionally facilitation cheating on the parts of others are common place in Nigeria higher education (Tinubu, 2017). All of these behaviours comprise academic dishonesty, a widespread problem at colleges and universities. Dishonor academic behaviour occurs at all types of institution and involves a wide array of students. The act of cheating in an examination hall is a conscious behavior by the student. Examination malpractices also includes anything that is done at any stage of examination process to give some examinees an undue advantage over others in the score or grade assigned to them. This process includes favoritism, or aiding and abetting cheating when handling examination script (Tinubu, 2017) and it also entails using unauthorized materials, fabrication of information and plagiarism. Examination malpractices and other issues associated with juvenile delinquency are global social problems with serious implications highlighted by several studies (Akaranga & Ongong, 2013; Ayinde, 2012; Fibersima, 2001; Judy & Eileen, 2002; McCrae & John, 1992; Omonijo, 1995; Oniye & Alawaye, 2008).

In Nigeria, over the years, several ways of cheating in all levels of education is prevalent and have caused a lot of grief to educational stakeholders (Adegoke, 2010; Nsisong, 2013; Okorodudu, (2013). Consequently, the problem has continued to generate more discussion within and outside Nigeria (Jimoh, 2009). Examination malpractices are no doubt an embarrassing practice that has eaten deep into the country educational sector. It has stared authorities in education on the face, threatening the credibility of the entire sector. Even though examination malpractices can be traced back to the inception of formal education in Nigeria, it became more pronounced in the late sixties (60's). No wonder in 1967 the attention of the Federal Government was drawn to it. This resulted to a tribunal being set up known as Alexander Tribunal to handle leakages of examination question papers which was alarming. The Special Tribunal

Miscellaneous Offences decree no 20 of 1984 confers a 21 year jail term on candidates found guilty of examination malpractice.

Within the country, the seriousness of examination malpractices has provoked extensive studies in the past and in recent times (Abdlrazaq & Aminullahi, 2006; Eneh, 2016; Khan & Khan, 2011; Kobiowu & Alao, 2005; Komolafe, 1989). The previous studies in Nigeria have looked into examination malpractices vis-à-vis personality type ('A' and 'B'), socio-demographic factors like age, gender, birth order and likewise, self-efficacy. However, there is dearth of literature on the influence of self-regulated learning, self-esteem and moral competence jointly studied on "examination malpractices" in the country. Literature attests to the correlation of these variables to examination malpractices.

Self-regulated learning is a process that assists students in managing their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions in order to successfully navigate their learning experiences. This process occurs when a student's purposeful actions and processes are directed towards the acquisition of information or skills. Generally, models of SRL are separated into phases. One popular cyclical model discusses three distinct phases: Forethought and planning, performance monitoring, and reflections on performance (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002; Zimmerman, 2000 & 2008). Thus, Montague, (2008) submitted that self-regulation strategies like self-instruction, self-questioning, self-evaluation, self-monitoring and self-reinforcement, help learners in gaining access to cognitive processes that facilitate learning, guide learners as they apply the processes within and across domains, and regulate their application and overall performance task. Self-regulated learning is therefore the process by which a student willfully involves actively in the learning process during which he plans, monitors, evaluates and adjusts his learning. Low self-regulated learning can lead to examination malpractices. Robert (2016) concluded from his study findings that when students are low on self-regulated learning, a large number of them resort to various forms of examination malpractices such as the use of textbooks, written information on pieces of papers and the use of other extraneous devices in examination halls while others are involved in sorting.

Self-esteem reflects a person's overall subjective emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs about oneself, for example, "I am competent", "I am worthy", as well as emotional states, such as triumph, despair, pride and shame.

Yamasaki, Yokoshima, and Uchida (2017) have recently developed new concepts of self-esteem which are autonomous and heteronomous self-esteem after the conceptualizations of "fragile high self-esteem" and "secure high self-esteem, and "true self-esteem" and "contingent self-esteem by Kernis and Deci (cited in Yamasaki, Uchida, Yokoshiman, & Kaya, 2017). According to Yamasaki et al. (2017), autonomous self-esteem consists of self-confidence, confidence in others, and intrinsic motivation; these three components are in sum termed "autonomy" and that any of these three components cannot be missing for autonomous self-esteem to be complete. Murdock, Hale, and Webber (2001); Petters and Okon (2013) opined that students' self-concept- self-esteem and academic self-efficacy have significant roles to play in students' decision to cheat or not and Ikura (2004), submitted that students with low self-esteem cheat more than those with neutral or high self-esteem. Afari, Ward, Myint, and Khine (2012) also claimed that students who attain high grades develop positive self-concept and self-confidence and are less likely to indulge in cheating in examination

whereas those who could not obtain high grades develop a sense of failure and rejection, with subsequent examination malpractices

Moral competence is the capacity to apply moral principles to one's own values, goals and actions (or the ability to see what is right and integrate it into one's life and actions). It involves integrity, responsibility, compassion and forgiveness Lennick and Kiel (2010). (Borba, 2001) defines moral intelligence as the capacity to understand right from wrong, to have strong ethical convictions and to act on them to behave in the right and honorable way. Suliamon (2010) was of the opinion that moral teachings are detailed information, which concerns the principles of right and wrong behaviours. This in essence means that students that are trained in self-discipline and fed with useful instructions will reflect it in their everyday conduct. Since moral values involves applying ones principles into action, then we can then see that it correlates with cheating in examinations.

In the academe setting, the results obtained in the study done by Hoseinpoor (2013) on the relationship between moral competence and academic progress of third year high school students indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between moral competence and students' achievement. In line of this, Olusola (2015) studied the moral competence of students in Nigeria and it was found that moral competence is significantly correlated with students' perception of examination malpractices. The results showed a negative correlation between the two, which means that moral competence aids students to do what is right and resist any pressures that may resist the habits of good character. These two findings suggest that moral reasoning correlates with examination malpractices. Nwankwo (2012) opined that the morality of students has a lot to tell on how pupils behave toward examination. When its low, the pupils will be motivated indulge in examination malpractice so that they can easily pass examinations, and vice vasa for those with high of moral competence.

The biosocial factors of the students such as gender and academic level will also be studied as they influence examination malpractices. There has been no consensus on the findings regarding gender influence on examination malpractices. Badejo and Gandonu (2001) asserted that there is no significant difference between male and female with respect to their level of cheating. On the contrary, Omonijo, Rotimi, Abidemi and Uche (2014) asserted that there is a significant difference between men and women attitude to cheating. Also, Olabisi, Olabisi and Alabi (2011) found that more females engaged in cheating behaviour at any given point in time than males. Anderson (1968) cited by Hill (1972) also reported that females cheat more than males. The author reiterated that girls tended to cheat more frequently in some subjects like mathematics while boys cheat more frequently in vocabulary test.

In view of the foregoing, it will be worthwhile to ascertain the combined influence of these variables- self-regulated learning, moral competence, self-esteem, gender and level of study on examination malpractices among Nigerian undergraduates. The research questions therefore asked are: Do self-regulation, moral competence and self-esteem of Nigerian undergraduates predict malpractices that they habitually indulge in? What influence do the socio-demographic variables of gender and level of their studies have on the dependent variable? It is hoped that the findings of this study will help to fill the gap in knowledge.

### **Hypothesis**

Self-regulation, moral competence, self-esteem, gender and academic level will significantly predict examination malpractices among undergraduates.

## **METHODS**

**Design:** Expo-facto survey research was adopted and the setting was lecture halls of the two universities used in Ondo state.

**Participants:** Using convenient sampling technique, participants, of 275 students from the two institutions were selected; 119 males and 156 female. The distribution on academic level indicated 20 (7.5%) respondents were in 100 level, 39 (14.2%) in 200 level, 138 (50.2%) in 300 level and 78 (28.4%) in 400 level.

### **Instruments:**

A self-report questionnaire was administered to collect information on demographic variables- gender and level of study in addition to four variables.

**Learning Self-regulation Questionnaire (L-SRQ).** The scale was developed by Williams and Deci (1996) for older students. It was adapted to measure the participants' level of self-regulation. The scale is composed of two subscales- controlled regulation and autonomous regulation originally had 14 items, 12 items were however adopted for this study. The 12 items require the respondents to indicate their response option ranging from 1= not at all true to 7= very true. The scale had alpha reliability coefficient of 0.75 (controlled regulation) and 0.80 (autonomous regulation) and for this study, it has Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the two sub-scales as .69 for autonomous regulation learning and .58 for controlled regulation learning. A composite score is nonetheless obtained with low scores on the scale indicating that students are low on learning self-regulation, while high scores depict otherwise. Examples of items are (I am likely to follow my lecturer's suggestions for studying their courses): (a) Because I would get bad grades if I don't do what they suggest, (b) Because I am worried that I am not going to perform well in the courses.

**Moral Competence Inventory (MCI) for Employees.** The scale developed by Martin and Austin (2010) was adapted for this study. Example of items are, (a) People who know me would say that my behaviour is very consistent with my beliefs and values, (b) I am willing to accept the consequences of my mistakes. A pilot study was conducted, using convenient sampling technique, 50 undergraduate (different from participants of the main study) responded to the scale. Factor analysis was used to analyze the scale and indicated that 11 items were not loaded on the theme and were thus removed. The 29 items left on the scale had a cronbach alpha coefficient of .98 for the pilot study and for the field study, has the reliability coefficient of .94. High score on this scale implies that students have high level of moral competence, while low scores imply low/poor moral competence in students.

**Rosenberg self-esteem scale.** The scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) was used to measure the participant level of self-esteem. The scale contains 10 items answered on a four likert format, where 0= strongly disagree, 1= Disagree, 2= Agree and 3= strongly agree. Rosenberg obtained a reliability of .86. The present study had a Cronbach's alpha of .54. Low score on this scale indicated that students have low self-

esteem, while high score state otherwise. Examples of items are (a) I wish I could have more respect for myself; (b) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

**Examination malpractice scale.** The scale was developed by Alarape (2003). It is an 18 item scale, that is rated on a five (5) point likert, ranging from 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= undecided, 4= agree and 5= strongly agree. The scale has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .92. In this present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained showed .91. High score on this scale showed students had high tendency to get involved in examination malpractice, while a low score states otherwise. Example of items is (a) Being under pressure makes me to ask for assistance from other students in an exam, (b) I will use any available means to get good grades even if it means asking my friends for the answer during an examination.

### Procedure

Using convenient sampling technique, self-reported questionnaires were administered on different groups of students in selected lecture halls in all faculties on campus by reason of their availability after lectures. Instructions were stated on the questionnaires to help the respondents fill correctly. The questionnaires were distributed to participants that consented to participate in the study. Collection of data was within six weeks. Out of the 300 questionnaires administered, 275 were eventually analyzed.

### Data analysis

Person Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to check the relationships among the variables, while Multiple Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis.

## RESULTS

### Correlation matrix showing relationship of study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	SD
1. Gender	1						1.57	.50
2. Academic Level	-.06	1					3.00	.85
3. Self-Regulated Learning	.03	.03	1				-2.48	8.38
4. Moral Competence	-.06	-.12*	.09	1			109.39	22.77
5. Self-esteem	-.04	-.10	.16**	.57**	1		18.84	4.50
6. Examination Malpractices	-.18**	-.06	-.02	-.06	-.13*	1	43.10	15.52

Note: \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ ,  $N=275$

Results indicated positive linear correlations between self-regulated learning and self-esteem [ $r(273) = .16, p < .01$ ], and moral competence and self-esteem [ $r(273) = .57, p < .01$ ]. The relationship between self-esteem and examination malpractices is negatively significant [ $r(273) = -.13, p < .05$ ]. This implies that as student's self-esteem increases, their tendency to get involved in examination malpractices decreases. Results also indicate a significant relationship between gender and examination malpractices [ $r(273) = -.18, p < .01$ ], implying that male students report more examination malpractice tendencies than their female counterparts.

**Multiple Regression Analysis showing prediction of examination malpractice by self-regulation learning, moral competence, self-esteem, gender and academic level**

Variables	$\beta$	t	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
Self-regulated learning	.02	0.25	.24	.06	3.37	< .01
Moral competence	.00	-0.01				
Self-esteem	-.15	-2.07*				
Gender	-.19	-3.18**				
Academic level	-.09	-1.51				

\*\* p < .01, \*p < .05

The results revealed that examination malpractices was significantly predicted by self-esteem ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $t = 2.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and gender ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $t = -3.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ), respectively. In contrast, self-regulated learning ( $\beta = .02$ ,  $t = 0.25$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and moral competence ( $\beta = .00$ ,  $t = -0.01$ ,  $p > .05$ ) did not examination malpractices. All variables-self-regulated learning, moral competence, self-esteem, gender and academic level significantly jointly predicted examination malpractices,  $R = .24 = R^2 = .06$ ,  $[F(5, 269) = 3.37, p < .05]$ . This implies that all the variables jointly contributed 6% of the variations in examination malpractices. The hypothesis is thus partially accepted.

## DISCUSSION

This study investigated the extent to which self-regulated learning, moral competence, self-esteem and demographic factors (gender and academic level) will predict examination malpractices.

The only hypothesis of this study, which stated that self-regulated learning, moral competence, self-esteem and demographic factors (gender and academic level) would significantly predicted examination malpractices, was partially accepted. The result indicated that self-regulated learning had no significant prediction on examination malpractices. This does not support the research of Robert (2016) who concluded from his study findings that when students are low on self-regulated learning, a large number of them resort to various forms of examination malpractices such as the use of textbooks, written information on pieces of papers and the use of other extraneous devices in examination halls while others are involved in sorting. Also, Santrock (2003) affirmed that self-efficacy which is a component of self-regulated learning influences students' choice of activities. Persons with high perceived self-efficacy try to accomplish and persist longer at tasks than those with low self-efficacy. Those who have low self-efficacy are more likely to engage in examination malpractices and perform low in academics, and their belief in their inability to carry out tasks required for high performance is closely linked with cheating.

Also, the result indicated that moral competence had no significant prediction on examination malpractices. This contradicts the body of research findings. Olusola (2015) who studied the moral competence of students in Nigeria found out that moral competence is significantly correlated with students' perception of examination malpractices. In this study, even though not significant, results showed a negative correlation between the two, which implies that as moral competence increases, tendency to get involved in examination malpractices decreases. Also, Amadi and Opuiyo, (2018)

opined that the morality of students has a lot to tell on how they behave toward examination. When it is low, students will be motivated to indulge in examination malpractices.

However, self-esteem significantly predicted examination malpractices. This supports previous research; for instance Bette (2014) in their study found out that low academic self-concept; especially student's belief in their inability to carry on tasks required for high performance is closely linked with examination cheating tendency. For Petters and Okon (2014), students with low self-esteem cheat more than those with neutral or high self-esteem. That is why the earlier submission by Bette (2014) that students who attain high grades, develop positive self-concept and self-confidence and are less likely to indulge in cheating in examination whereas those who could not obtain high grades develop a sense of failure and rejection. The implication is that they may resort to all measures to ensure achievement.

Also, gender significantly predicted examination malpractices in this study. As earlier mentioned in this study, there hasn't been consensus on the findings of gender influence on examination malpractices. This study however supports the group of research which found gender difference in examination malpractices and further revealed that male undergraduates engage more in examination malpractices. Academic level did not significantly predict examination malpractice either.

## CONCLUSION

Self-esteem and gender were found to independently predict examination malpractices while contrary to literature, self-regulated learning and moral competence did not. Nonetheless, all the variables were significant in joint contribution to examination malpractices.

### Recommendation

As much as possible, parents should rear children in such a way that they have healthy and positive self-esteem. Every university should be equipped with a counseling unit to help students with issues bothering on self-esteem and orientation on this and examination malpractices should be given to students on entry to the universities and also periodically.

### Limitation and direction for future research:

This study was restricted to two tertiary institutions in Ondo state out of over eleven higher institutions (both public and private) in the state. Hence, future studies should make use of more tertiary institutions and even take the research beyond just a state, having larger sample for generalization purpose. The number of items in the scales which were numerous, may have caused the respondents to fill without which could be responsible for the inconsistent findings on self-regulated learning and moral competency. Further research may allow students to go with the scales, fill at their leisure and they are later retrieved.

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