

Background Variables and Cheating Tendencies Among Students in Federal Colleges of Education in The North-West, Nigeria

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Abstract: *This research is interested in establishing the incidence and magnitude of the relationship that exist among background variables of gender, course of study, marital status and cheating tendencies among students in Colleges of Education in the Northwest of Nigeria. The design employed for the study is correlational survey. The population of the study consisted of 12,060 registered NCE III for the 2023/2024 academic session in the Federal Colleges of Education in the North-west, Nigeria. Using multistage random sampling procedure which consisted of stratified random sampling, proportionate sampling and simple random sampling techniques, the study made use of one thousand two hundred (1200) students. The instruments used for the study were researchers' developed questionnaire on Academic Cheating Behaviour and a thirty (30) item multiple choice objective test on Introduction to Guidance and Counseling. The instruments were validated by two experts from Guidance and Counselling and Psychology Departments of the Federal College of Education, Zaria. The instruments were pilot tested twice within a two-week interval in a state College of Education. The results of the two scores were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis which yielded 0.876 correlation coefficient. The instruments were administered to the respondents through trained research assistants. Frequency count and percentage were used in answering the research questions while Logistic Regression Analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study found no significant relationship between gender and cheating tendency, it however found a significant relationship among course of study, marital status and cheating tendencies. Based on the findings, recommendations were made.*

Keywords: background variables, cheating tendencies, students, Federal Colleges of Education, North-West, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty, particularly cheating is a pervasive issue in educational institutions all over the world. Colleges of Education which are responsible for training future teachers and educational professionals are not exempted. Cheating undermines the integrity of the educational process, comprises the validity of assessment outcomes and can equally have lasting effects for professional development. Academic cheating according to Bretag (2020) is any behaviour that violates the academic integrity policy of an institution, including but not limited to; plagiarism, collusion, cheating in examinations, falsification of data or result and any other behaviour that compromises the integrity of the learning process. This definition acknowledges that academic cheating can take many forms and can vary in severity. This therefore calls for a comprehensive approach to promoting ethical behaviour in education.

Research has shown that cheating is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors. In other words, various variables can influence cheating tendencies among students in colleges of education. One significant factor is socio-economic status, where financial pressures may drive individuals to resort to dishonest practices. Additionally, family background, including parental attitudes towards academic success and integrity, can shape students' ethical behaviour. Educational history, such as prior experiences with academic challenges or achievements, may also play a role in influencing cheating tendencies. Studies have delved into these variables to understand their specific impact and identify potential patterns that contribute to or mitigate cheating behaviours among students in Colleges of Education.

Gender can be a notable factor in cheating tendencies among students. Research has suggested that there might be differences in how males and females approach academic dishonesty. Societal expectations, peer pressure, and individual motivations can vary between genders, influencing the likelihood of engaging in cheating behaviours. Understanding these gender dynamics can contribute to the development of targeted interventions to address and prevent cheating in educational settings. Studies such as Kibler (2013) and Curtis (2017) have revealed that male students were more likely to engage in cheating behaviours than their female counterparts and that this is more pronounced in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). On the other hand, differences in gender influences attitudes towards cheating as female students are more likely to report feeling guilty about cheating while male students are more likely to rationalize their cheating behaviour (Whitley, 2015). Earlier, Crown (2011) reported that female students are more likely to value academic integrity and report cheating behaviours than male students. According to Lento, Sayed and Bujaki (2016) differences between male and female also relate to differences in concern over ethics and perceptions about academic dishonesty. That is, females perceive academic dishonesty to be a more significant problem than do males. They also implement controls over academic dishonestly more frequently than do males.

Course of study refers to the specific academic programme or major a student is pursuing. The chosen course of study can be a significant variable influencing the tendency to cheat among students. Courses with high stakes, high levels of competition or perceived difficulty may increase the pressure on students, potentially leading some to resort to dishonest practices to meet expectations or maintain grades. Additionally, the relevance of the coursework to future career prospects may impact the perceived importance of academic success, affecting the likelihood of engaging in cheating behaviours. Students in courses with heavy workloads or courses requiring extensive time commitment may cheat due to time management pressure. Studies such as Oyewole (2017) found that students in science related courses are more likely to cheat than students in humanities and social sciences. Earlier, the study of Akande (2015) discovered that students in business related courses are more likely to cheat than students in other fields and those students who perceived their courses as difficult are more likely to cheat

Exploring how different courses of study contribute to or mitigate cheating tendencies provides valuable insights into the nuanced factors influencing academic integrity within educational institutions.

Marital status is the legal status of an individual in relation to marriage. It indicates whether a person is single, married, divorced, separated or widowed. The status an individual possess can be a relevant factor in cheating tendencies among students in colleges of education. Married students may face unique challenges, such as balancing academic responsibilities with family obligations and financial pressures. These factors could contribute to an increased likelihood of academic dishonesty, driven by the desire to meet multiple demands simultaneously. Additionally, marital status may influence the level of support or stress a student experiences, impacting their ethical decision-making in academic settings. Studies such as Curtis (2015) and Oyewole (2017) however reported that married students are less likely to engage in cheating behavior compared to single students. Understanding these dynamics can offer insights into how marital status plays a role in shaping cheating tendencies and inform strategies to promote academic integrity within this demography.

By investigating these background variables, this study can provide valuable insights into the complexities of cheating behaviour among students in Colleges of Education in Nigeria thereby contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies for promoting academic integrity and provide a foundation for developing targeted interventions to foster a culture of honesty and integrity within educational institutions.

Statement of the problem

Cheating can be defined as an act of being dishonest in examinations or assignments in the school. This is a practice that is rampant in higher institutions of learning and a large number of students have accepted that they do cheat in examinations. There are different behaviours that have been singled out as being consistent as to what constitutes cheating. These include copying from cheat

notes or from other students while at the examination hall, getting help or giving help to someone while in an exam room, getting assignments and term papers done by others. The behaviour of cheating can be traced to few decades ago among college and university students. Although, cheating has been researched on as early as 1970s, it is a behaviour that was not common in schools and colleges then given the strict rules and disciplinary actions that were associated to it then. However, nowadays, cheating has become not just a common problem; it is a learned behaviour that has serious implications in the future, and this problem is spreading more widely among students in higher institutions especially in our Colleges of Education.

The prevalence of cheating among students in Colleges of Education raises concerns about the ethical standards within educational institutions. Most of the researches on academic dishonesty have dwelled on identifying students who cheat, how they cheat, its effects and methods of stopping them from doing same. However, the findings from those research works have not been efficient thereby making the practice more common and rampant in our institutions. Understanding the relationship between background variables such as gender, course of study, marital status and cheating tendencies is crucial for identifying the root causes of academic dishonesty. The lack of comprehensive research in this specific context hinders the development of targeted interventions to address cheating behaviours. Therefore, a clear statement of the problem is essential to guide investigations into how these background variables contribute to cheating tendencies among students in Colleges of Education and to inform strategies for fostering academic integrity. Moreover, understanding reasons as to why students cheat in their examinations can be helpful in developing good student codes in colleges and thereby coming up with better ways of ensuring that the culture does not spread and damage the quality of Teacher education in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Describe the incidence of cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria.
- ii. examine the relationships of gender, Course of Study, Marital Status and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria

Research questions

1. How extensive is the cheating tendency based on gender among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria?
2. How extensive is the cheating tendency based on course of study among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria?
3. How extensive is the cheating tendency based on marital status among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between gender and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between Course of Study and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant relationship between Marital Status and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The design employed for this study is correlational survey. This is because the researchers were interested in establishing the incidence and magnitude of the relationship that exist among background variables of gender, course of study, marital status and cheating tendencies among students in Colleges of Education. The study was carried out in the Northwest of Nigeria which covers seven states; Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, Jigawa and Zamfara states. The population of the study consisted of 12,060 registered NCE III for 2023/2024 academic session in the Federal Colleges of Education in the North-west zone, Nigeria. Using multistage random sampling procedure, the sample of the study made up of one thousand two hundred (1200) students. In the first stage, stratified random sampling was used to select three (3) Federal Colleges of Education. Then, the sample of the study was proportionally determined for each College and thereafter students were randomly selected from the three Colleges. The instruments used for the study were researchers' developed questionnaire on Academic Cheating Behaviour as a measure of cheating tendency and a thirty (30) item multiple choice objective test on Introduction to Guidance and Counseling which was also developed to source data on the students' tendency to cheat. The instruments were validated by an expert from Guidance and Counselling and one from Psychology Departments of the Federal College of Education, Zaria. The instruments were pilot tested twice within a two week interval in a state College of Education. The results of the two scores were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis which yielded 0.876 correlation coefficient. This coefficient showed that the instrument was reliable for data collection. The instrument were administered to the respondents with the assistance of class representatives and some lecturers who were given orientation on what the research is all about and how to administer the instruments. However, one thousand one hundred and forty six students fully participated in the study. After the administration of the test, photocopy of each script was made, coded, scored and recorded by the researchers. However, unmarked original answer scripts were returned to the students and each of them was required to mark his/her own script. Since the original test was answered in pencil, the students had ample opportunity to alter earlier choices, as their lecturers dictated correct answers to them. Frequency count and percentage were used in answering the research questions while Logistic Regression Analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

The results are presented in tables based on research questions and hypotheses tested.

Research Question One: How extensive is the cheating tendency based on gender among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria?

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage showing the number of students with cheating tendency based on gender

Gender	Total number	Cheat	Honest	% of the cheats
Male	525	453	72	86
Female	621	509	112	82
Total	1146	962	184	84

Table 1 above showed that higher percentage of male students with cheating tendency: 86% of male students have a cheating tendency, compared to 82% of female students. It further revealed that Female students constitute a larger proportion of the sample: 621 female students make up 54% of the total sample, while 525 male students make up 46%. However, cheating tendency is prevalent among both genders; a significant majority of students (84%) across both genders exhibit a cheating tendency.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between gender and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest Nigeria.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of the relationship between gender and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria

Variable	Coefficient	p-value	Odds ratio	r-squared	95% CI:
Gender(male)	0.234	0.123	1.264	0.015	0.934-1.712
Constant	-1.234	0.001			

The logistic regression analysis Table revealed that gender is not a significant predictor of cheating tendency (p-value = 0.123). The odds ratio of 1.264 indicates that the likelihood of cheating is only slightly higher for males compared to females, but this difference is not statistically significant. The R-squared value of 0.015 suggests that gender only explains a small proportion of the variance in cheating tendency. This result suggests that gender does not play a significant role in determining an individual's tendency to cheat. This means that the observed difference in cheating tendency between males and females could be due to chance. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Research Question Two: What is the proportion of students with cheating tendency based on Course of study in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria?

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage showing the proportion of students with cheating tendency based on Course of study

Course of study	Total number of respondents	No of cheats	% of cheats within the course of study	Overall % of cheating tendency
Arts & Soc. sciences	319	259	81.2	26.9
Languages	210	163	77.6	16.9
Sciences	306	288	94.1	29.9
Others	311	262	84.2	27.2
Total	1146	962		83.9

Table 3 above revealed that Science students have the highest percentage of cheating tendency: 94.1% of them exhibit a cheating tendency, which is significantly higher than the other groups. Languages students have the lowest percentage of cheating tendency: 77.6% of them show a cheating tendency, which is lower than the other groups. Therefore, this shows that a significant majority of students across all courses of study (83.9%) exhibit a cheating tendency.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between Course of Study and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria.

Table 4: Logistic Regression Analysis of the relationship between Course of Study and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria

Course of Study	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	z-score	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)
Intercept	-0.57	0.23	-2.48	0.013	-
Arts & Soc. sciences	0.00	-	-	-	1.00 (Reference)
Languages	-0.31	0.18	-1.73	0.083	0.73
Sciences	0.85	0.20	4.23	<0.001	2.33
Others	0.20	0.18	1.11	0.267	1.22

Table 4 above revealed the Logistic Regression Analysis of the relationship between Course of Study and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria. It showed that while Science students have significantly higher odds of cheating tendency (OR = 2.33, $p < 0.001$), Language students have lowest odds of cheating tendency, but this is not statistically significant (OR = 0.73, $p = 0.083$). Others students have slightly higher odds of cheating tendency, but this is not statistically significant (OR = 1.22, $p = 0.267$). Based on the results, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and concludes that there is a significant relationship between Course of Study and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in Northwest, Nigeria, specifically for Sciences students.

Research Question Three: What is the proportion of students with cheating tendency based on marital status in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria?

Table 5: Proportion of students with cheating tendency based on marital status in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria

Marital status	Total number of respondents	No of cheats	% of cheats within the Marital status	Overall % of cheating tendency
Single	725	693	96	72
Married	316	201	64	21
Divorced/separated	105	68	65	7
Total	1146	962		100

The table 5 presents the proportion of students with a cheating tendency based on their marital status in Federal Colleges of Education in Northwest, Nigeria. Single students have the highest proportion of cheating tendency: 96% of them exhibit a cheating tendency, which is significantly higher than married and divorced/separated students. Married students have a lower proportion of cheating tendency: 64% of them show a cheating tendency while divorced/separated students have the lowest proportion of cheating tendency: 65% of them exhibit a cheating tendency. There is therefore a significant difference in the proportion of students with a cheating tendency based on their marital status.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between Marital Status and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria.

Table 6: Logistic Regression Analysis of the relationship between Marital Status and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria

Marital Status	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	z-score	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)
Intercept	2.83	0.23	12.31	<0.001	1.00
Single	0.00	-	-	-	(Reference)
Married	-2.03	0.24	-8.55	<0.001	0.13
Divorced/separated	-1.79	0.35	-5.12	<0.001	0.17

Table 6 above revealed the Logistic Regression Analysis of the relationship between Marital Status and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in the Northwest, Nigeria. The odds ratios indicate that Married and Divorced/Separated students have significantly lower odds of cheating tendency compared to Single students. Married students have 87% lower odds of cheating tendency compared to Single students (OR = 0.13) while Divorced/Separated students

have 83% lower odds of cheating tendency compared to Single students (OR = 0.17). Since the p-values for Married ($p < 0.001$) and Divorced/Separated ($p < 0.001$) are less than 0.05, we reject the hypothesis and therefore conclude that there is a significant relationship between marital status and cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in Northwest, Nigeria.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The study investigated the background variables influencing cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in Northwest, Nigeria. The findings reveal interesting insights into the dynamics of cheating behaviour among students.

Contrary to expectations, the study found no significant relationship between gender and cheating tendency. This suggests that gender does not play a crucial role in determining an individual's tendency to cheat. This finding aligns with previous studies that have also found no significant gender differences in cheating behaviour for example Erik, Jai, Shadi, Bidwal and Bijal, (2018) which found no significant gender based differences regarding admitted cheating in Pharmacy and in regards to participating in various forms of academically dishonest behaviour. This implies that both male and female students are equally likely to engage in cheating behaviour under an opportunistic situation, and that other factors may be more influential in determining cheating tendency. However, the finding negates that of Clariana, Badia and Cladellas (2013), Kibler (2013), Curtis (2017) and Ibnu Hadjar (2019) who have revealed that male students were more likely to engage in cheating behaviours than their female counterparts and that this is more pronounced in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

The study found a significant relationship between Course of Study and cheating tendency, specifically for Sciences students. This suggests that students enrolled in Sciences courses are more likely to engage in cheating behaviour compared to students in other courses. This is in line with the findings such as such as Oyewole (2017) who found that students in science related courses are more likely to cheat than students in humanities and social sciences. Also, Kibler (2013) and Curtis (2017) have revealed that male students were more likely to engage in cheating behaviours than their female counterparts and that this is more pronounced in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). This finding may be attributed to the perceived difficulty of Sciences courses, leading students to seek shortcuts to achieve academic success. This highlights the need for educators to address the challenges faced by Sciences students and promote academic integrity in these courses.

Finally, the study found a significant relationship between marital status and cheating tendency. Specifically, married and divorced/separated students were found to have lower odds of cheating tendency compared to single students. This suggests that marital status may play a role in influencing cheating behavior, with married and divorced/separated students being less likely to engage in cheating. This finding may be attributed to the increased responsibilities and maturity

that come with marriage and divorce, leading to a greater sense of accountability and ethical behaviour.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study highlights the complex factors influencing cheating tendency among students in Federal Colleges of Education in Northwest Nigeria. While gender does not play a significant role, Course of Study and marital status are significant predictors of cheating tendency. These findings have implications for educators and policymakers seeking to promote academic integrity and prevent cheating behavior among students. By addressing the challenges faced by Sciences students and promoting a culture of accountability and ethical behavior, educators can help reduce cheating tendency and promote academic success.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Foster an inclusive learning environment that encourages participation and engagement from all students, regardless of gender.
2. To address the influence of Course of Study on Cheating Tendency, institutions should provide additional academic support services, such as tutoring and mentorship programmes, especially for Sciences students.
3. To leverage the Influence of Marital Status on Cheating Tendency, Institutions can implement family-friendly policies to support married and divorced/separated students' academic pursuits.

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