

**Academic Corruption: Development of an Inventory for Measuring the Perceived Reasons for Academic Cheating among Nigerian Undergraduates**

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*The present study focused on the phenomenon of corruption in the academic setting, with special reference to academic cheating. Specifically, the study attempted to identify the perceived reasons why students engage in academic cheating. An inventory designed to assess the perceived reasons for academic cheating was developed and factorially validated. An initial pool of 32 items which formed the preliminary version of the scale was administered on a sample of university students. The data generated were subjected to factor analysis and four valid factors emerged. On the whole, a total of 25 pure and valid items were found to be significantly loading on the four factors. It was concluded that academic corruption plagues the academic setting and that several reasons or factors account for academic cheating among university students.*

Corruption has been defined as using public goods or capacity for private benefits (Rose-Ackerman, 1978). It rears its ugly head in many forms including bribery, bureaucratic or administrative, syndicated or criminal, political, moral, judicial, economic corruption and money laundering as well as academic corruption relating to corruption in the school or educational system such as sexual favours demanded by teachers in exchange for grades, "sorting" for scores, and examination malpractice (Ukpong, Essien, & Abiama, 2004).

Corruption is a multi-dimensional- concept (Ukpong et al., 2004), and the aspect of corruption which is the primary focus of this paper is academic fraud. Specifically, this study examines the phenomenon of academic fraud or corruption in the educational system and explores the reasons why students engage in academic cheating. In recent years, academic fraud has become a major topical issue as academic dishonesty of various forms occurs in academic institutions at different levels just as in various sectors of the larger society beyond the academic world (Eckstein, 2003). According to Eckstein (2003), academic fraud appears to be on the increase across the world, in developing and developed countries alike, and what was once regarded as series of individual infractions has expanded to a veritable industry of academic corruption. It encompasses, among other aspects, degree and paper mills, system-wide bribery, facilitation of impersonation, plagiarism, and many other forms of academic misconduct (Eckstein, 2003).

The current explosion of academic fraud has been facilitated by advances in modern technology as electronic means of communication have revolutionized cheating methods by students who nowadays have access to electronic devices such as miniature receivers and computers as aids to cheating, replacing the old-fashioned trick of writing notes on shirt cuffs. Modern technology makes it possible to import information in small electronic

devices and even to transmit examination questions and answers within seconds to candidates in an examination hall as well as to other locations within and even outside the country (Eckstein, 2003).

Academic cheating has become one of the major problems plaguing the education industry today (Hassan, 1986) and student cheating on examinations has become so prevalent that some researchers (e.g., Croucher, 1997) have described it as an epidemic if not a pandemic. Fraudulent and corrupt practices abound in academic settings such as theft and sale of examination papers, bribery of invigilators and examiners, plagiarism (making use of somebody's work without giving credit or acknowledgement to him or her), academic mercenary or impersonation (candidates hire replacement to take examinations in their place), leakage of information on examination papers, smuggling of information into the examination hall, exchanging of ideas and answers between students, solving examination questions from outside and handing in the scripts in the examination hall. Other forms of academic cheating include direct copying of answers from other students, forgery and falsification of the results, as well as tampering with academic records. The perpetrators of these corrupt and fraudulent practices and their accomplices have been identified to include not only students, but also parents, teachers, invigilators, administrators, examination officials, as well as entrepreneurs at large, who profit from the sale of questions and answers to individual candidates wishing to beat the system (Eckstein, 2003).

Different researchers have documented in the literature how students cheat on examinations and how frequently academic cheating or examination malpractices occur. For instance, Johns (2003) reports among other things how massively the Ukraine university students cheated on the examination he administered on them. He stated that he was for a moment shocked as he could not quite believe what he was seeing. He noted that with the exception of two students who proceeded to write the examination, the others immediately set about discussing it, copying from one another, looking up answers in the textbook, and rummaging through notes. Johns (2003) remarked that something was fundamentally corrupt about the Ukraine academic system; and that the university must create a culture of appropriate behaviour for educated people. It is the system that sets the standards and boundaries of student behaviour.

Eckstein (2003) observes that researchers in the USA have also described in detail how students cheat and how frequently they do so. McCabe and colleagues' studies (as cited in Eckstein, 2003) of high school students in the USA has revealed high levels of academic cheating or misconduct, and provide a major contribution to knowledge of the forms and incidence of academic misconduct by students. They found that 75- 80 of students admit to copying from others or taking forbidden materials into tests or exams. Almost as many admitted that they had plagiarized work by others in written assignments (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1999).

Adomako (2005), in an article titled "examination malpractices: Universities' shame, student burden," reports that the recent spree of examination leakages of the University of Ghana and that of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology has

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awakened the questioning minds of many Ghanaians about the calibre of graduates coming out from their public universities. He cautions that if something is not done hurriedly to stop this cancerous act that is eating into the vital part of the Ghanaian educational system then certificates awarded by Ghanaian academic institutions would wane both in the local and international levels. Adomako (2005) however observes that examination leakages are not restricted to the universities alone, and cites instances whereby the West African Examination Council (WAEC) conducted exams had leaked. For example, he states that in 1996, some of the SSCE papers conducted by WAEC leaked and had to be rewritten again. The 2002 Basic Education Certificate Examination conducted by the same WAEC also registered massive leakages causing innocent pupils to rewrite some of the papers again (Adomako, 2005).

The review of literature also shows that academic corruption occurs in Nigerian educational system. Corruption pervades and infects every structure and sector in Nigeria, including the academic environment. This may not be surprising given the research evidence that Nigeria is a perennial contender for the number one ranking on Transparency International's (TI) list of most corrupt countries (Hoyle, 2005). As stated by Hassan (1986), although no statistics exist in Nigeria as to the prevalence and incidence of cheating in secondary schools, colleges of education, polytechnics and the universities, reports of examination malpractices and cheating in high and low places are common. There have been occasions when candidates for an examination chased out supervisors and invigilators from examination halls to give them opportunity for large scale cheating. Newspapers report cases of people holding top managerial and security positions cheating at examinations (Hassan, 1986).

Commenting on the incidence of academic corruption in Nigerian university settings, Hoyle (2005) stated that paying lecturers for good grades is a common practice. A student hoping for an A might expect to pay 5,000 naira (\$35), while a student who can afford to pay 3,000 naira (\$22) can at least get a C. This is one of the ways lecturers supplement their income. Another common practice is making a certain textbook or packet of articles mandatory, and selling it at three times the normal price, while making sure the student bookshops do not supply any copies (Hoyle, 2005). In addition, Hoyle (2005) observes that University entrance examination (JAMB) leakages, selling of examination questions and answers through a chain of corrupt networks as well as academic mercenary are also common practices in Nigerian academic settings. In a society as steeped in corruption as Nigeria, morals are mortgaged and merit does not get one much in Nigeria (Hoyle, 2005).

From the foregoing, it seems evident that cheating or corruption in academic life is rife as corruption plagues most academic institutions transculturally, and this can have some disastrous effects on the credibility and validity of the entire assessment or evaluative procedure (Jacobs, 1972) and the economic development of a nation (Hassan, 1986). The main objective of university education is to furnish the students with the requisite knowledge and skills to enable them contribute effectively to the national development efforts. This training demands periodic assessment and evaluation in form of examinations in order to ascertain the level of knowledge and competence of students (Adomako, 2005). Examinations are a means to distribute limited opportunities for study,

employment, and advancement on the grounds that they are instruments for making objective and neutral judgements about candidates. Credentials, such as records of accomplishments, diplomas and certificates are relied upon as significant evidence of achievement, and thus have great value for the possessor as well as employers and admission officers in higher education (Eckstein, 2003). However, when students cheat their ways through in examinations, the validity of examinations as standardized and objective measures could be called into question, as examinations characterized by fraud may fail to select the best according to stated criteria, and certificates and diplomas fail to record the true quality and accomplishments of students. The confidence of employers and the general public in the system and in the competence of their qualified professionals is eroded (Eckstein, 2003).

As pointed out by Hassan (1986), the apparent consequences of unabated cheating behaviour call for urgent action to determine the factors that predispose people to cheating. This suggests the need for researchers to design studies to explore the reasons or motivational factors associated with academic cheating. The present research may serve as one of the studies.

It appears that there is no single cause of academic corruption as a number of authors have identified different causes or reasons for academic fraud. According to Eckstein (2003) the basic causes of academic fraud are rooted in human frailty, greed, and ambition; and the motivations are many and varied, as more and more people become involved in academic activities. Academic fraud is as a result of many factors, subjective and objective. Subjective causes of fraud are attitudinal and individual: the circumstances, ambitions, and competitive energies of participants in academic life. Objective causes include the pressures directed at individuals by society, family, and other external sources, as well as society's demand for skilled and educated workers and professionals. Students usually cheat in examinations because they are prompted by anxiety about their capacity to produce acceptable work, by fear of failure, by the demands and pressures made on them by such external sources as parents, and teachers, and the importance of the results of their efforts for their future. They also cheat because they are ill-prepared (Eckstein, 2003). Other reasons suggested in the literature explaining why students cheat in examinations include lower grades at previous examinations and the desire to upgrade them, initial failure (Millham, 1974) and the way the individual perceives the difficulty of the task before him (Hassan, 1986). In general, the most popular approach to the explanation of corruption is the moralist or ethical hypothesis which can also be used to explain why students engage in academic fraud. This hypothesis attributes corrupt or fraudulent practices to moral laxity, or decadence, lack of common standard of morality, growing cultural and religious decay (Dwivedi, 1967, as cited in Ezeani, 1998).

From the foregoing, it can be stated that a number of theoretical formulations have provided insight into the reasons why students engage in academic fraud, but it remains to establish whether these theoretical formulations will be supported by empirical studies or whether they are mere speculations. In the present study, an attempt was made to develop and validate an instrument that will tap the reasons why student engage in academic cheating as previously indicated. This provides the major impetus for the

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present study because only through understanding the reasons for academic cheating will educational administrators formulate effective policies and strategies for combating academic fraud. The development of this instrument as well as its factorial validation is described as follows:

### Method

#### Participants

Participants were 215 University of Nigeria, Nsukka, students (121 males and 94 females) randomly approached by the researcher and trained research assistants from various faculties (namely faculties of Arts, Agriculture, Biological Sciences, Social Sciences, Education, Engineering, and Physical Sciences). All participants from an initial pool of 250 students willingly agreed to participate in the study and provided informed consent. Twenty-three (23) students failed to return completed inventory, while 12 students failed to complete the inventory properly and were therefore excluded from the study. The ages of the participants ranged from 17 to 34 years, with a mean age of 25.5 years. A majority of the participants (80.9) were single or unmarried (18.1 were married and 1 widowed). Catholics made up 45.6% of the sample, 21.4% were Anglicans, 27.4% were Pentecostals, 2.3% were Moslems, while 3.3% identified themselves as members of other religious denominations. With respect to ethnicity, 80 of the sample were Igbos, 4.7% were Yorubas, 5.6% were Hausas, 2.8% were Tivs, while 7 identified themselves as members of other ethnic groups. All participants were literate, with 63.7 indicating that they were undergraduate students and 36.3 indicating that they were postgraduate students.

#### Instrument

##### ***Development of the Perceived Reasons for Academic Cheating Behaviour Inventory (PRACBI).***

The items for the PRACBI were identified from the review of relevant literature on academic fraud or cheating (e.g., Adomako, 2005; Eckstein, 2003; Hassan, 1986) and discussions with 37 psychology students of the Benue State University (BSU) Makurdi who suggested some of the items. An initial pool of 32 items was generated. Items were written in the form of statements that reflect perceived reasons why students engage in academic cheating. Each item is scored on a 3-points scale, with the response options of "A very good reason," "A good reason," and "Not a good reason" and corresponding values (raw scores) of 3, 2, 1 respectively.

An attempt was made by the researcher to establish how good and relevant the items are in tapping the information they were designed to measure. Thus in this preliminary stage of instrument development, both the face validity and content validity of the instrument were certified by giving the preliminary version of the PRACBI containing 32 items to five professionals (two psychologists, two educationists and one expert in mass communication) working independently. In addition, five postgraduate and five undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, who were not part of the

study sample were used for the same purpose. These judges were requested to critically assess the relevance of the items in tapping the information which they were designed to measure and to indicate any item which in their judgement they considered irrelevant and to suggest other items which they deemed relevant but not included in the inventory. From the feedback provided by these judges, all the items were vetted as relevant and were therefore retained.

## **Validation**

A preliminary version of the PRACBI containing 32 items were individually administered on 215 students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, who agreed to participate in the study by the researcher and research assistants either in their hostels or classrooms. The resulting data were subjected to a factor analysis in order to determine empirically the factor structure of the PRACBI, establish construct validity and to select items with satisfactory loadings. The data generated from the 32 items were fed into the University of Nigeria Computer equipped with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 10) using principal components analyses with varimax rotation.

From the results of the factor analysis, five (5) factors emerged. Items with factor loadings of .31 or higher were considered significant and are presented in Table 1. Out of the five factors that emerged, factor 5 does not have a minimum of four factorially pure items significantly loading on it. As pointed out by Meredith (cited in Ifeagwazi, 2004), it is not easy to explain factors with less than four items. Thus, factor 5 was discarded on grounds that factors with few items are difficult to explain.

Overall, four factors namely, factors 1, 2, 3, 4 were found to be factorially valid with each factor containing more than four factorially pure items. One item (item 10, "Desire to obtain academic qualifications despite obvious limited intellectual capabilities") was found to be factorially complex appearing or loading on more than one factor. It was therefore discarded on the ground that a valid item should appear or load on only one factor. According to Kline (1994) items are selected for scales which load significantly on only one factor. In the words of Kim (1975) if a variable loads on more than one factor, or its complexity is greater than 1, the meaning of that variable is no longer simple. It measures more than one theoretical dimension. On the whole, a total of 25 valid items were found to be significantly loading on the first four factors. Bryman and Cramer (1990) observe that this pattern of result should be expected, as the first few factors are the most important ones.

The isolated four factors and the valid items contributing to them as well as their corresponding factor loadings are presented in Table 1. These four factors had eigenvalues greater than unity.

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**Table 1. The Factor structure of the PRACBI**

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Item Statement</b>	<b>Factor loading</b>
<b>Factor 1 – Anxiety and grade pressure factor (10 items)</b>		
5	Examination anxiety and stress	.38
6	Students' inadequate preparation before exams	.38
8	Desire to obtain good or higher grades in order to upgrade lower grades at previous exams	.60
9	Desire to maintain or consolidate previous high grades/academic success	.53
13	Lack of confidence on the part of students	.46
14	Fear of failure	.64
15	Fear of carry over of courses	.62
16	Fear of consequences of failing exams such as shame to the family	.53
17	High expectations placed on students to pass exams by external sources (e.g., friends, teachers)	.39
25	Concern about performance in exams	.39

Item No.	Item Statement	Factor loading
<b>Factor 2 – Social Situational Factor ( 5 items)</b>		
18	Engaging in too many social activities that eat up study time	.58
19	Poor invigilation and active support of exam bodies or agents who leak exam questions	.58
21	Overlooking or inability to severely punish students	.36
23	Non attendance of lectures or truancy on the part of students	.53
31	Lack of integrity on the part of authorities (e.g., teachers, invigilators, exam officials) who demand and accept financial or other inducements from students in order to cooperate or assist them commit academic fraud	.52
<b>Factor 3 – Institutional-related factor ( 5 items)</b>		
26	Over admission of students into a particular course or programme	.50
27	The Universities inability to diversify methods of evaluating or assessing students but rather stick to exams as the major assessment method	.57
28	Because others do it	.58
29	Academic cheating is so common that not to do it is to put oneself at a disadvantage	.56
30	Academic cheating is not often (i.e., rarely) detected or punished	.40
<b>Factor 4 – Teaching/Learning-related factor (5 items)</b>		
7	Poor teaching on the part of lecturers	.69
11	Poor teaching and learning facilities (e.g., lack of current textbooks, journals)	.63
12	Lack of proper academic orientation of students by ill equipped teachers	.60
24	Low intelligence as some students are just dull and dumb	.42
32	Ambiguity and lack of clarity about what constitutes academic fraud or cheating	.50

As is evident from Table 1, Factor 1 contained 10 items and was labelled anxiety and grade pressure factor by the researcher. Factor 2 contained 5 items and was labelled social situational factors. Factor 3 contained 5 items and was labelled institutional-related factor. Factor 4 also contained 5 items and was labelled teaching/learning-related factor.



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Only factorially pure and valid items with factor loadings of .31 or higher were considered for labelling, since a common cut-off point for the factor loading of .31 was adopted by the researcher. Kerlinger (1986) states that there is no generally accepted standard error of factor loading; that some factor analysts in some studies do not bother with loadings less than .30, but that other analysts do. However, Kline (1994) specifically recommends the selection of items loading only on one factor above .30.

### **Reliability**

Internal consistency was determined using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha reliability for the total scale was .87. The values for the four subscales were .89, .83, .81, and .85 respectively, indicating good internal consistency for the scale as a whole, and for the subscales.

### **Construct Validity**

Evidence for the construct validity of the PRACBI has been demonstrated from the result of the empirical factor analysis as well as the internal consistency of the instrument using Cronbach's Alpha as previously discussed. Aiken (cited in Ifeagwazi, 2004) states that among the sources of evidence for the construct validity of a test include:

1. Expert's judgement that the content of the test pertains to the construct of interest
2. An analysis of the internal consistency of the test
3. Empirical factor analysis.

## Discussion

The results of the factor analysis are consistent with the view that the motivations for academic cheating are many and varied and that academic fraud is as a result of many factors (Eckstein, 2003). The results of the present factor analytic study appear to provide some empirical evidence about the motivational factors or reasons predisposing students to engage in academic fraud. As suggested by the findings of this study, anxiety and grade pressure factors (Factor 1) appears to predispose students to academic cheating. As shown in Table 1, some of the item contents of this factor •or• subscale included "examination anxiety and stress," "fear of failure," "fear of consequences of failing exams," "fear of carry over of courses," "desire to obtain good or higher grades in order to upgrade lower grades at previous exams," "desire to maintain or consolidate previous high grades/academic success," and "concern about performance in exams." These account for some of the reasons why students engage in academic cheating and are consistent with Eckstein (2003). This can be explained by the fact that taking examinations is the greatest single stressor (Omoluabi, 1985) and thus examinations could be regarded as major arenas for student fraud (Eckstein, 2003). The uncertainty and performance factors relate to some aspects of an examination which cannot be reliably predicted, including the questions to be asked, the state of the student's health during the examination make examinations stressful and anxiety-provoking for students (e.g., Omoluabi, 1985). Furthermore, grade pressures are common among university students,

and a central cause of grade-related distress is examination or test anxiety (Schafer, 1996). As pointed out by Ifeagwazi (2008), making good or high grades (e.g., A's and B's) during examinations are important to university students for making a good class of degree on graduation (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours or 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Upper Division), job applications, scholarships, postgraduate admissions, etc. One common difficulty with grades is fear of failure which sometimes becomes so extreme among students that it creates unnecessary emotional and physical distress (Schafer, 1996). Failure in an examination is ego-threatening and stressful to the Nigerian university student because it is a disappointment, humiliation, and shame, not only to the student, but to his or her entire family, community, village or clan (Omoluabi, 1985). This analysis may explain why some students resort to the unholy practice of "sorting" or paying lecturers for good grades as reported by Hoyle (2005).

The lack of integrity on the part of lecturers and other examination officials and invigilators/supervisors who demand and accept financial or other inducements from students in order to cooperate or assist them commit academic fraud is particularly one of the important reasons identified in Factor 2 (social situational factor) motivating students to engage in academic cheating. (See Table 1 for details of other reasons identified in Factor 2). This may appear surprising given the traditional roles of lecturers or teachers as educators and custodians of intellectual, moral and ethical values. Traditionally, educators and the educational system have been regarded as major purveyors of truth, honesty, integrity, and similar positive values and consequently as somehow 'above it all'. Yet from time to time, lecturers or teachers abuse and betray the trust placed on them (Noah & Eckstein, 2001, as cited in Eckstein, 2003) and indulge in unethical and unprofessional behaviours such as accepting cash payments from students for grades as one of the means of supplementing their income (e.g., Hoyle, 2005). Perhaps, this may be linked to greed and serious lack of moral integrity and could account for the ambivalent and contradictory attitudes of students toward lecturers nowadays: admiring and respectful toward those held to be bearers of truth and knowledge, and at the same time negative and cynical about their roles and unprofessional behaviour (e.g., Eckstein, 2003).

Another set of reasons why students engage in academic fraud were identified in Factor 3 (labelled institutional-related factor.) One striking reason identified in this subscale was "the universities inability to diversify methods of evaluating or assessing students but rather stick to exams as the major assessment method." Adomako (2005) insists that the universities inability to diversity its method of measurement and evaluation of students but rather stick to examinations is one of the main reasons why examinations malpractices have increased exponentially. This view has found empirical support in the present study. As pointed out by Adomako (2005), a critical study into our educational system reveals that the system is much focused on examinations. Examination has become a major potential tool available, and this has caused over-dependence on certificates as the key to employment. This means that students must pass exams by all available means.

Factor 4 (labelled teaching/learning-related factor) also identified a number of reasons why students engage in academic fraud including teacher or lecturer characteristics such

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as "poor teaching on the part of lecturers," "lack of proper academic orientation of students by ill equipped teachers," and student characteristics such as, "low intelligence as some students are just dull and dumb." (See Table 1 for details of other reasons identified in Factor 4). Lecturers or teachers should regard teaching not just as a profession but a calling or vocation and should provide proper and effective academic orientation, and should be able to stretch the minds and hearts of their students by adopting effective teaching techniques. As observed by Johns (2003), there may be a rigid teaching method of lecture/ drill that discourages active thinking, problem solving, and a challenging experience. It is all memorization with no responsibility or even opportunity to think as an individual. It is not teaching students to think as an individual. It is not teaching students to think, but rather teaching them not to think, to be robots. It is simply indoctrination (Johns, 2003). Students are committing things to memory just for the sake of examinations. Even some lecturers do not want students to paraphrase lecture notes when it comes in the examinations. They want it verbatim. Just after the examinations everything goes off from their memory (Adomako, 2005).

### Conclusion

The present study examined the phenomenon of academic corruption and attempted to contribute to the literature on academic fraud by exploring the reasons why university students engage in academic cheating. The study identified a number of reasons predisposing students to academic cheating by developing and empirically validating the PRACBI which appeared to be a psychometrically sound and potentially useful inventory.

It can be concluded from this study that academic corruption plagues the academic setting and that several reasons account for academic cheating among university students. The knowledge or awareness of these reasons or factors may have some implications for dealing with or curbing academic fraud in the educational system. As earlier pointed out, it is only through understanding the reasons or factors predisposing students to academic cheating will the government and educational authorities or administrators formulate effective policies and strategies that could be useful in combating academic fraud. A number of stiff measures and strict penalties are often invoked in the belief that they will deter academic fraud. However, this may not be supported by actual experience (Eckstein, 2003) as those who packaged those measures and penalties could have lacked knowledge of the antecedent conditions and motivating factors or reasons precipitating and maintaining the academic cheating behaviour of students.

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