



# Embarassability, psychoticism, and tendency to engage in examination misconduct among a Nigerian sample

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## Abstract

This survey study employed the correlational research design to explore the relationship among embarrassability, psychoticism, and tendency to engage in examination misconduct. 223 undergraduates aged between 17 and 30 years (mean of 22.79 and SD of 2.76) participated in the study, which tested two hypotheses: There would be a statistically significant relationship between embarrassability and tendency to engage in examination misconduct, and there would be a statistically significant relationship between psychoticism and tendency to engage in examination misconduct. Results indicate that embarrassability had a negative correlation with examination misconduct at  $P < .05$ ,  $F(1,222) = -.186$ , that is, as embarrassability increases, examination misconduct decreases. Also, psychoticism had a negative correlation with examination misconduct at  $P < .05$ ,  $(1,222) = -.420$ , that is, as psychoticism increases, the tendency to engage in examination misconduct decreases. It is possible that variables such as cult membership mediate psychoticism and tendency to engage in examination misconduct. From the findings, it is recommended that examination boards should consider using embarrassability test (among other psychological tests) for employee selection.

**Keywords:** Embarrassability; Examination; Misconduct; Psychoticism; Undergraduates

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## **1. Introduction**

Education is the key to the development of any nation and Nigeria is no exception. It has been described as the best legacy that any nation or individual could leave behind for generations yet to come. It is therefore an invaluable asset, to both the individual and the society; since it has also been used from time immemorial, as a veritable instrument of cultural transmission. According to the National Policy on Education (2004), the broad objectives of Nigerian education should emphasize such things as: Inculcation of the right type of value orientation for development of individuals and society, training of mind in building valuable concepts, generalizations, and understanding of the world; imbueing of appropriate mental and physical abilities, competencies, and skills to enhance proper adaptation of individuals in society, and acquisition of relevant and balanced knowledge of facts about local and international phenomena.

It is deducible from the foregoing that the goal of education in Nigeria is to produce citizens and people who would be capable of driving economic, political, social, and scientific development of the country, as well as live fulfilled lives as individuals. The questions however are: How valid and reliable are the measuring instruments {such as internal and external examinations}, what factors undermine their integrity, and to what extent can they predict inculcation of the desirable behaviours?

## **2. Literature review**

Examination misconduct is seen by Ukpei, Ndifon, & Erukoha (2012) as a deliberate action by examiner or examinee which violates examination rules, and places a candidate at an unfair advantage or disadvantage, any form of abuse of processes and rules at any stage from setting of examination questions to the release of results. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, misconduct is a wrong or illegal behavior exhibited by a person while discharging professional responsibilities. In light of this definition, examination misconduct is simply illegally obtaining an answer to examination question from any other source, other than the brain of the examinee. Shonekan (1986), views examination misconduct as any behavior whether willful or not that goes contrary to the rules and regulations set by an examination board, such that the value and integrity of certificate issued based on that is undermined.

The tendency to engage in examination misconduct is a person's inclination or likelihood to behave improperly during examination and to break the rules governing examinations. This tendency to cheat in examinations according to is very common and many Nigerian students see it as the smart way to pass examinations (Ruwa 1997; Ukpebi, Ndifon, & Erukoha, 2012). Many factors seem to be involved in shaping this behavior. Ojeikere (2004), opines that examination misconduct is a reflection of the corruption in the wider society, that the extent to which core values and rule of law are disregarded in the wider society reflects in the microcosm – the school system. Hence since cheating behaviors seem to be permissible in other spheres of life; it is only natural that through psychological contagion, the educational system will as well suffer corruption.

Okoro (2001) holds that examination misconduct has harmed the educational system seriously as it is a prelude to producing unemployable graduates restive student population, and has cast undeniable doubt on certificates issued by institutions in Nigeria.

APA (2007) state that embarrassment “is a self-conscious emotion in which a person feels awkward of flustered in other people’s company or because of attention of others, for example, when being observed engaging in actions that are subject to mild disapproval from others. It often has an element of self-deprecating humor and is typically characterized by nervous laughter, a shy smile, or blushing” p 323. The definition above suggests that people differentially experience embarrassment; that different situations embarrass people differently, and that even for the same person, level of embarrassment may depend on motivational, personality, or other variables.

Embarrassability is the propensity for an individual to experience embarrassment and has been frequently acknowledged as an important personality characteristic. While some people are easily and frequently embarrassed, others may not be affected by even major violations of decorum. This trait-like difference in people’s general susceptibility to embarrassment is called embarrassability (Modigliani, 1968). Miller (1996), implies that it a measure of the emotional response to a self presentational predicament: a measure of aversive state of abashment, nervousness and chagrin. Subjectively it entails a sense of exposure, of inadequacy, of awkward self consciousness. It is sometimes accompanied by such distressing symptoms as blushing, sweating, tremor, fumbling and stuttering. This psychological state of unease reflects a threat to one’s presented self or public image. It is generally precipitated by an awareness that one has failed to demonstrate the demeanor considered appropriate to a particular social interaction and hence is being perceived by others present as deficient, and as lacking certain collectively valued attributes. Because embarrassment is a powerful unpleasant emotion, associated with the violation of social control in face to face interactions, it a significant phenomenon to the student of social processes. Embarrassability is a link between the individual and the social environment which once established permits the environment to regulate his/her behaviour with relative ease (Modigliani, 1971).

Psychoticism according to Colman (2003), is one of the three major divisions of personality in the later writings of the psychologist Hans Eysenck characterized by traits such as aggressiveness, coldness, impulsiveness, antisocial behavior, tough mindedness, and creativity. Eysenck, Eysenck, and Barret (1985), implied that this trait should not be confused with psychotic pathology, but is used to describe the possessor’s preferred pattern of behavior which is enduring. However, there may be genetic predisposition to this trait, thus a relationship with the psychoses.

Boerex (1998) gave examples of such psychotic tendencies to include recklessness, disregard for common sense and inappropriate emotional expression. As stated by Heath and Martin (1990), It is conceptualized as a continuum of liability to psychosis (principally, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder) with ‘psychopathy’ (that is antisocial behaviour) defined as a halfway stage towards psychosis. It is characterized by traits as non-acceptance of cultural norms, immaturity and anti-authoritative attitudes, hence the psychoticism scale correlates significantly with other hostility and tough-mindedness scales.

A person with this type of personality is aggressive and assertive. It seems as if they try to annoy and harm others, they are manipulative, egocentric and completely full of themselves, with marked impulsivity and aloofness. (Howart, 1996; APA, 2007).

A study by Sharkey (1995) in which 508 Euro-American and Asian American university students completed the self-construal scale and embarrassability scale, strongly supported the three tested hypotheses: the strength of the independent self-construal is negatively correlated with embarrassability, the strength of the interdependent self-construal is positively associated with embarrassability, and Asian Americans are more susceptible to embarrassment than are Euro-Americans.

Edelmann (1990) carried out a research by studying self-reports of chronic blushers and self-reports regarding coping behaviors for embarrassment across culture. This descriptive study highlighted the importance of internal and external cues in embarrassability. The results indicated a possibility exists that in certain situations, attending to internal cues may generate embarrassment. This study supports the notion that locus of control may be related to embarrassability.

Seidner, Stipe, & Feshbach (1998), conducted a study on elementary Scholl-aged children's concept of embarrassment within the age range of five, nine and eleven years .results supported the hypotheses that most five year olds understood feelings of embarrassment occur primarily from outcomes controlled by and dependent upon one's own behavior or characteristics. Seidner et al (1998). From the results of these studies, it is reasonable to hypothesize that participants with an internal locus of control will feel they control the events that occur in their lives. It is possible then that the responsibility of controlling what happens will turn to guilt when an undesirable situation arises. A person will feel embarrassed if he or she feels he or she caused the event. Participants with an external locus of control, however will tend to see events that occur in their lives as controlled by external factors, (gods, fate, destiny or other powers). A person possessing an external locus of control will not feel responsible for an undesirable event.

Another study was carried out by Robinson (1991), on how a person's Christian faith plays a role in locus of control and embarrassment levels. 29 undergraduate college students from a small Christian liberal arts college in the Midwestern United State (23 female and 16 male), ages from 18-28, with a mean of 19.86.participated. The researcher used Norwiki-strickland locus of control test and a version of Mondigliani's embarrassability scale (1966) acquired from Robbinson (1991). A descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data the study yielded. Results indicated a  $M=9.10$  locus of control score, with a  $SD$  of 5.18: and a  $M=63.34$  embarrassability score, with a  $SD$  of 15.7 scores on the locus of control survey ranged from 1-21 scores on the embarrassability survey ranged from 37-94. The data showed a correlational value between locus of control and embarrassability of  $r=2.15$ , with a  $P$  value of .26. Results also indicated that 52% of the participants had an internal locus of control and 10% had an external locus of control.

### 3. Statement of the problem

Where academic certificates are not valid measures of knowledge and performance, where people employed on the basis of certificates, fail to deliver, yet certificates represent the major means of authentication of

academic attainment, then the problem is obvious. Again, if a country becomes noted for examination misconduct, she could lose international credibility; documents emanating from the country will be treated with suspicion. Examination misconduct is also a prelude to other forms of corrupt practices. It also makes the goals of education a mirage. Now, many approaches have been adopted to curb examination misconduct: strict supervision, suspension or expulsion of perpetrators from school, payment of fines and even jail terms. All these have not succeeded hence the need to do further search on the possible predisposing factors in the understanding that this will help in the development of workable prophylactic approaches.

This study therefore aims at finding out if a significant relationship exists between embarrassability, and tendency to engage in examination misconduct.

Secondly, to find out if a significant relationship exists between psychoticism and tendency to engage in examination misconduct. The study explores these relationships in order to deduce the solution to reducing or eliminating examination misconduct.

#### 4. Hypotheses

- There would be a significant relationship between embarrassability and tendency to engage in examination misconduct
- There would be a significant relationship between psychoticism and tendency to engage in examination misconduct.

#### Method

##### Participants

By a simple randomization technique, a sample of 223 undergraduates (97 females and 126 males) of Nnamdi Azikiwe University was selected from three faculties: Education, Engineering, and Management Sciences. Their ages ranged from 17 years to 30 years. The mean and standard deviation of the ages were 22.79 years and 2.76 respectively.

#### 5. Method

A questionnaire was used for the data collection. It consisted of two (2) parts.

- Part 1: comprised questions eliciting some demographic variables such as name, sex, age, and faculty.
- Part 2: contained the measures of the variables of interest; embarrassability, psychoticism and tendency to engage in examination malpractice.

The Susceptibility to Embarrassment Scale is a 25 item instrument developed by Kelly and Jones (1997) which uses personality trait-based statements, rather than situations, to measure a person's vulnerability to embarrassment. Participants were required to respond on a 7 point likert type structure (1- completely disagree to 7- completely agree). Some of the items were scored in reverse direction to obtain consistency of

scoring (4,8 and 25). The score range for the susceptibility to embarrassment scale is 25 to 175. The mean score for college students is 92, with higher scores indicating higher degrees of embarrassability.

### 5.1. Psychoticism scale

The revised version of the psychoticism scale is a 32-item scale by (S.B.G. Eysenck, H.J. Eysenck and Paul Barret, 1985). Scores 4.62 and above (for males) and 2.97 (for females) reflect psychoticism with higher scores indicating higher levels of psychoticism. Participants were required to respond in a 'yes' or 'no' format.

### 5.2. Examination malpractice questionnaire

Examination malpractice scale is a 24 item questionnaire by (Azuka. N.G. Alutu and Oyaziwo Aluede, 2006) which measures the tendency to engage in examination misconduct. Participants were required to "agree" or "disagree" to the statements in the questionnaire.

### 5.3. Procedure

All the instruments were collapsed into a questionnaire, which the researchers distributed to final year students in the various departments of the faculties of Engineering, Education, Management Sciences, and Social Sciences. Participants were fully informed about the purpose and design of the reseach. A total of 940 copies of the questionnaires were distributed to students whose last digit of registration number were odd. After collation, a total of 223 copies were fit for use, and were used for statistical analyses.

### 5.4. Design and statistics

The study employed a Corelational Research design and the statistics employed to analyze the data was Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ). The data was analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0.

## **6. Results**

The results are stated in the order in which the hypotheses were presented.

### 6.1. Hypothesis I

There will be a significant relationship between embarrassability and tendency to engage in examination misconduct.

**Table I.** Correlation between embarrassability and tendency to engage in examination misconduct

N	Factor	Mean	SD	r.cal
223	Embarrassability	96.87	19.64	
	Examination Misconduct	35.68	4.55	-.186**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

From the table above, mean score of 96.87 and standard deviation of 19.64 on embarrassability, mean score of 35.68 and standard deviation of 4.55 on examination misconduct were observed. Embarrassability had a negative correlation to examination misconduct.  $F(1, 222) = -.186, p < .05$ . Therefore, hypothesis I was accepted.

## 6.2. Hypothesis II

There will be a significant relationship between psychoticism and tendency to engage in examination misconduct.

**Table II.** Correlation between psychoticism and tendency to engage in examination misconduct

N	Factor	Mean	SD	r.cal
223	Psychoticism	11.30	4.69	
	Examination Misconduct	35.68	4.55	-.420**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

From the table above, mean score of 11.30 and standard deviation of 4.69 on psychoticism, mean score of 35.68 and standard deviation of 4.55 on examination misconduct were observed. Psychoticism had a negative correlation to examination misconduct.  $F(1, 222) = -.420, p < .05$ . Therefore, hypothesis II was accepted.

## 6.3. Summary of findings

Research findings indicated that embarrassability, and psychoticism correlated significantly with the tendency to engage in examination misconduct. It strongly suggests that the more embarrassed one could be, the more he/she is likely not to engage in misconduct, while the less someone is 'psychoticistic' the more he/she is likely to engage in misconduct.

## 7. Discussion

The objective of this study was to find out if a significant relationship exists between embarrassability and examination misconduct, and psychoticism and examination misconduct. The results of this research reveal

significant negative correlation between embarrassability and the tendency to engage in examination misconduct. This means that as the level of embarrassability increases the tendency to engage in examination misconduct reduces. Thus the alternative hypothesis is accepted which says that there is a significant relationship between embarrassability and the tendency to engage in examination misconduct. This findings supports the social evaluation theoretical framework: "Fear of embarrassment helps bring behaviour in line with certain accepted social rules. Without its impact, there would be social anarchy" (Gibbons 1990, pg 138). Indeed, it is understandable that people feel some constraints in the presence of significant others and even sitting posture is influenced by the presence or otherwise of people we care about their evaluations. As a signal of the threat of social rejection, social evaluative embarrassment presumably plays a key role in socialization and self regulation.

Futhermore, Edelmann (1995) asserts that embarrassability is not related to private self-consciousness, but to public, and that people who are typically conscious of the reaction of others towards them suffer stronger embarrassment.

It supports Asendorph (1990) findings that people who are sensitive to the opinion of others are prone to embarrassment. These findings pointedly suggests that embarrassability is a function of one's motivation to avoid social disapproval.

Also the study revealed that there is a negative correlation between psychoticism and the tendency to engage in examination misconduct. Thus the second alternative hypothesis was accepted; implying that as psychoticism increases, tendency to engage in examination malpractice reduces. Thus the result of this research adds support to the literature review of Whitley (2002) that academic dishonesty was higher among students who feel the pressure to succeed. Psychoticism is characterized by disregard for common sense and the non acceptance of cultural norms. Now common sense requires that a student should feel the pressure to succeed in examination, but they may not be overly concerned with social norms like being expected to pass examinations. This might cause them to show less tendency to engage in examination misconduct. Also the fact that psychoticism has been linked to creativity could explain why students who score high on the psychoticism scale may display less tendency to engage in examination misconduct even though they may be prone to other criminal behaviours.

## 8. Conclusion

This study set out to study the relationship between embarrassability, psychoticism and tendency to engage in examination misconduct. A total of 223 participants were used as sample for this study. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used in testing the two hypotheses and their variables. The study concluded that embarrassability is significantly correlated with tendency to engage in examination misconduct. It also showed that psychoticism is significantly correlated with tendency to engage in examination misconduct. In other words, further research or studies could reveal relevant factors that cause examination misconduct.



### 8.1. Implications of the study

This research showed that a significant relationship exists between embarrassability, psychoticism and the tendency to engage in examination misconduct. Avoiding the social awkwardness of deviance, confrontation, moral reproach appears to be a central motive producing embarrassment. Embarrassability may lead people to avoid situations that promise to be embarrassing such as being caught for examination misconduct. Also even though psychoticism correlates with criminal behaviour, it may not be predictive to examination misconduct. Examination boards may consider keeping sensitive exam materials in the custody of people with high embarrassability, and away from high psychoticism scorers who could be induced to do business with them.

### 8.2. Limitations of the study

The use of only questionnaires to gather data is the main limitation for generalizing the findings.

### 8.3. Recommendations

Since embarrassability is based on concern about other's perceptions and evaluations of oneself, fear of social disapproval and social rejection, students who are caught should be shamefaced by publicizing their misconduct and punishment. Honesty should be encouraged in students; while behaviour modification should be employed for those who score high on the psychoticism scale because environmental factors like peer influence and cultism may stimulate them to eventually engage in examination misconduct.

Future research is required to strengthen the findings stated above or otherwise, and to establish relationships between other psychological states and examination misconduct.

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