https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jgcs ISSN: 1596-1141

JOURNAL OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING STUDIES

ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT AS A PREDICTOR OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN AWKA EDUCATION ZONE

[1]Edith Toochukwu Egidi, [2]Helen E. Uzoekwe

[1,2]Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Email: [1]talk2tocksmonex@gmail.com, [2]he.uzoekwe@unizik.edu.ng

Phone: [1]08038715325, [2]08032936196

ABSTRACT

This study investigated academic adjustment as a predictor of secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State, Nigeria. One research question guided the study, while one null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The predictive correlation research design was adopted. The population comprised 4,674 Senior Secondary one (SS I) students in the 64 public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone. A sample of 656 SS I students was drawn through a multi-stage sampling procedure, and 602 copies of the instruments were retrieved and analysed (91.77% retrieval). Data were collected using the Students' Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (SAAQ) and the Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Questionnaire (SAEMQ). The instruments were face-validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education, and their reliability, established using Cronbach's alpha, yielded coefficients of 0.75 and 0.79 respectively. Data were collected through on-the-spot administration with the help of resident school counsellors. Simple linear regression was used to answer the research question and to test the null hypothesis. The finding revealed that academic adjustment is a high negative (β = -.624) and significant predictor of students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Awka Education Zone. Based on the finding, it was recommended, among others, that counsellors should provide both group and individual counselling services to boost students' academic adjustment, as this will help students to develop a strong negative attitude towards examination malpractice and desist from indulging in the act. Students should also be sensitised to seek assistance from their school guidance counsellors whenever they feel unable to cope with academic demands.

Keywords: Academic adjustment; Attitude towards examination malpractice; Secondary school students; Predictive correlation; Awka Education Zone

Introduction

Examination malpractice has remained a persistent challenge in Nigeria's educational system, undermining the credibility of certificates and eroding the moral fabric of students. Despite regulatory efforts by examination bodies such as WAEC, NECO and JAMB, as well as school authorities, cases of cheating, impersonation and collusion continue to be reported (Sola, 2025). Manafa, Ohamobi and Osegbue (2020) noted that examination malpractice is rife in public secondary schools in Anambra State, possibly because many students view it as a shortcut to academic success. Bervell, Mireku, Quaidoo, Nyieku, Somuah and Frimpong (2025) observed that students' attitudes towards examination malpractice are shaped by a complex mix of personal, social and systemic factors. Students' attitude is therefore not formed in isolation but is influenced by their experiences in the school, including how well they cope with academic demands.

Attitude towards examination malpractice embodies one's views, thoughts or feelings towards the perpetration of examination malpractice (Nwokolo & Oguzie, 2021). It may be positive or negative. Students with a negative attitude perceive examination malpractice as a criminal offence and are unlikely to indulge in it, whereas those with a positive attitude see it as a worthwhile venture that will put them ahead of their peers. Anierobi, Madike, Unachukwu and Ebenebe (2016) maintained that students' attitude may greatly determine their tendency to indulge in the act. Udebuana and Onwugbufor (2021) observed that some students in Anambra State have indulged in one form of malpractice or another, with some justifying it with poor teaching and learning environments. This persists despite re-orientation efforts by teachers, school administrators and guidance counsellors. Attitude towards examination malpractice may therefore be a function of students' academic adjustment.

Academic adjustment reflects how well students cope with school demands and academic stress. Olowodunoye and Titus (2016) averred that it captures students' interest in school work, their engagement with learning and their achievement outcomes, all of which are shaped by personal abilities, skills and the interpersonal environment. Zhang and Ling (2025) described it as encompassing learning appropriate study techniques, managing time effectively, handling a large volume of reading and taking examinations. Chanda, Edwin, Mwila and Mwila (2024) observed that academically adjusted students sustain interest in learning and are motivated to participate in classroom and co-curricular activities. Stella (2020) added that the successful performance of such students is explained not only by hard work but also by how well they have adjusted academically to their environment. Such students are likely to hold a negative attitude towards examination malpractice because they can stand on their feet academically.

Adjustment, however, is not a smooth process for every student. Olowodunoye and Titus (2016) noted that students who experience persistent difficulties in adapting to academic demands are more likely to record low achievement and irregular attendance, and may show a positive attitude towards examination malpractice in order to succeed. Jdaitawi et al. (2020) reported that high academic adjustment reduces anxiety and frustration, allowing students to focus on learning rather than on obstacles, and that such challenges induce some students towards examination malpractice in order to gain good grades. Raza, Qazi and Qamar (2020) and Willems, van Daal,

van Petegem, Coertjens and Donche (2021) found that academic adjustment mediates the effects of several learning strategies and motivational variables on achievement, while Vansteenkiste, Sierens, Soenens, Luyckx and Lens (2020) found it positively related to intrinsic motivation for learning. Ling and Tini (2022) also reported a significant correlation between academic adjustment and psychological distress.

Other studies have linked students' attitude towards examination malpractice to test anxiety, fear of failure and self-efficacy. Eremie and Ikpa (2020) and Ofodile, Odiato, Adenugba and Edun (2019) reported that students who see themselves as incapable of success-oriented academic tasks may become anxious in examinations and view malpractice as an escape route. Obi and Oguzie (2019) similarly noted that students who fear failure and lack confidence indulge in malpractice to defuse their fears. In contrast, Oguzie and Nwokolo (2021) found no significant relationship between academic achievement motivation and attitude towards examination malpractice among students in Imo State. Much as these studies have examined related variables, none of them predicted students' attitude towards examination malpractice using academic adjustment, and there is limited empirical evidence on the subject in Awka Education Zone. This gap gave impetus to the present study.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times, students' involvement in examination malpractice has assumed a serious dimension that threatens the credibility, standard and integrity of the educational system in Nigeria generally and Anambra State in particular. Reports from examination bodies indicate rampant cases of examination malpractice nationwide (Sola, 2025). Measures have been put in place to curb the problem, including the 1999 Examination Malpractice Act (as amended), which stipulates stringent punishments for offenders, and the introduction of multiple paper options in the UTME by JAMB.

However, these efforts appear to have met with limited success. The researchers' personal observation and interactions during Parent-Teacher Association meetings showed that some candidates appear at examination centres armed with dangerous weapons such as cutlasses, knives and even guns. In a religious society such as Nigeria, students are expected to condemn examination malpractice, yet many in the State view it in a positive light, perhaps owing to their level of academic adjustment. The problem of this study is that, despite the efforts in place, the menace is getting more sophisticated year after year, possibly because the predictive influence of academic adjustment on students' attitude towards examination malpractice has not been addressed. This study therefore sought to determine the extent to which academic adjustment predicts secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Awka Education Zone.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine academic adjustment as a predictor of secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Awka Education Zone. Specifically, the study determined the predictive power of academic adjustment on students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Awka Education Zone.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

What is the predictive power of academic adjustment on secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice?

Hypothesis

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

Academic adjustment does not significantly predict students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

Method and Procedure

The study adopted the predictive correlation research design, which highlights existing relationships between variables and predictive outcomes based on those relationships (Nworgu, 2015). The design was chosen because the study sought to predict students' attitude towards examination malpractice using academic adjustment. The study was carried out in Awka Education Zone of Anambra State, in the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria. The zone comprises five Local Government Areas (Awka North, Awka South, Anaocha, Dunukofia and Njikoka) and has 64 government-owned secondary schools, 49 of which are public co-educational schools.

The population comprised 4,674 SS I students in the 64 public secondary schools in the zone (Post-Primary School Service Commission, 2026). SS I students were used because they could provide baseline data on attitudes before examination pressures escalate, and because their attitude towards examination malpractice may be more malleable at this stage. A sample of 656 SS I students was selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure. First, all five Local Government Areas were purposively included. Second, the 49 co-educational schools were stratified out of the 64 public schools to capture both male and female students. Third, simple random sampling was used to select 15 of the 49 co-educational schools. Finally, proportionate stratified sampling was used to select 50% of the students in each sampled school, giving 656 students, which represents approximately 14% of the population. This is in line with Sharma (2021), who suggested that a sample of 10 percent or above is adequate when the population is large.

Two instruments were used for data collection: the Students' Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (SAAQ) and the Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Questionnaire (SAEMQ). The SAAQ was adapted from the academic sub-scale of the International Students' Adjustment Scale by Sahuri and Wilson (2024). In the adaptation, 'lecturers' was changed to 'teachers', and 'administrative staff' and 'university' were changed to 'non-teaching staff' and 'school' respectively, while the original dimensions of communication, instructional relationship and performance were collapsed into one scale. It has 14 items on a five-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The SAEMQ was adapted from the Attitude of Students towards Examination Misconduct

Assessment Scale by Udebuana and Onwugbufor (2021), with 'misconduct' changed to 'malpractice'. It has 20 items on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

The instruments were face-validated by three experts: two from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and one from the Measurement and Evaluation unit of the Department of Educational Foundations. Their comments were used to modify the instruments, including collapsing the sub-scales of the SAAQ. To establish reliability, the instruments were administered to 30 SS I students in Onitsha Education Zone, outside the study area, and Cronbach's alpha yielded coefficients of 0.75 for the SAAQ and 0.79 for the SAEMQ. These values were adjudged adequate, since they exceed the 0.70 threshold recommended by Shrestha (2021).

Data were collected with the help of fifteen research assistants, who were the resident guidance counsellors in the sampled schools. After permission was granted by the school heads, the instruments were administered over five school days and retrieved on the spot. Out of 656 copies administered, 602 were retrieved, representing 91.77% retrieval. Data were analysed using simple linear regression with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. The null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance and was rejected where the p-value was less than 0.05. The standardized regression coefficient (β) was interpreted as follows: no prediction = 0.00; very low = ±0.01 to 0.20; low = ±0.21 to 0.40; moderate = ±0.41 to 0.60; high = ±0.61 to 0.80; and very high = ±0.81 and above.

Result and Discussion

The data collected from the field were analysed and summarised in tables, after which the finding was discussed.

Research Question

What is the predictive power of academic adjustment on secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice?

Table 1: Unstandardized and Standardized Coefficients Predicting Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice Contributed by the Variance in Academic Adjustment Scores (n = 602)

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized β
Constant	40.016	6.152	
Academic Adjustment Scores	-.626	.118	-.624

Table 1 shows that the standardized regression coefficient (β) for academic adjustment is -.624. This means that academic adjustment is a high negative predictor of secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice. In addition, the unstandardized coefficient (B) of -.626 shows that a unit rise in academic adjustment decreases students' attitude towards examination malpractice score by .626.

Null Hypothesis

Academic adjustment does not significantly predict students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

Table 2: Test of Significance of the Unique Contribution of Academic Adjustment to Students' Attitude towards Examination Malpractice (n = 602)

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized β	t	p-value	Decision
Constant	40.016	6.152		6.505	.000	Significant
Academic Adjustment Scores	-.626	.118	-.624	0.027	.000	Significant

Table 2 indicates that academic adjustment, with a β value of -.624, significantly predicted students' attitude towards examination malpractice (p = .000). Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Academic adjustment is therefore a significant predictor of students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

The finding revealed that academic adjustment is a high negative significant predictor of students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Awka Education Zone. This suggests that as students' level of academic adjustment increases, their attitude towards examination malpractice moves in the negative direction; the better students adjust to their academic demands, the less they see examination malpractice as something worth doing. Better-adjusted students are thus more likely to disapprove of examination malpractice, whereas less adjusted students are more likely to embrace it. This finding agrees with Jdaitawi et al. (2020), who reported that academic adjustment shapes students' inclination towards examination malpractice, and with Olowodunoye and Titus (2016), who linked persistent adjustment difficulties to a positive attitude towards examination malpractice. It is also supported by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which explains that individuals who are well adjusted to their environments tend to feel more capable of achieving success on their own, without any need for dishonest means.

A possible reason for this finding is that academically well-adjusted students experience reduced anxiety, focus on their studies rather than on obstacles, manage their time effectively and engage better with academic tasks. These qualities may lead them to believe that they can obtain good grades without any form of malpractice. In contrast, students who persistently struggle to adjust to their academic environment may experience higher anxiety and frustration and have less capacity to handle difficult academic tasks, and may therefore see examination malpractice as an easier route to academic success (Eremie & Ikpa, 2020; Ofodile et al., 2019).

Summary of the Findings

From the analysis, the following findings were made:

- Academic adjustment is a high negative predictor (β = -.624) of students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Awka Education Zone.
- Academic adjustment is a significant predictor of students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Awka Education Zone.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that academic adjustment is a high negative and significant predictor of secondary school students' attitude towards examination malpractice in Awka Education Zone. Students who are better adjusted to academic demands are less likely to hold a favourable attitude towards examination malpractice.

Implications of the Study

The finding that academic adjustment is a high negative significant predictor of students' attitude towards examination malpractice implies that the higher the level of students' academic adjustment, the lesser their predisposition to examination malpractice. It also implies that for educators, counsellors and researchers to effectively instill a negative attitude towards examination malpractice among secondary school students, they should first help to boost the students' level of academic adjustment.

It equally implies that any action targeted at solving the problem of examination malpractice in secondary schools should consider students' academic adjustment an important factor.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Counsellors should provide both group and individual counselling services to boost students' academic adjustment. This will help the students to develop a strong negative attitude towards examination malpractice and desist from indulging in the act.
- Students should be sensitised on the need to seek professional assistance from their school guidance counsellors whenever they feel unable to pass examinations on their own.
- The Ministry of Education should adopt multi-faceted approaches that address both individual and family factors, with a view to handling issues that border on students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

REFERENCES

Anierobi, E. I., Madike, N. E., Unachukwu, G. C. & Ebenebe, R. C. (2016). Peer group influence and gender as correlates of adolescents' attitude towards examination malpractice: Implication for wholesome adolescent development. *Journal of the Educational Psychologist, 10*(1), 103-113.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bervell, B., Mireku, D. O., Quaidoo, M., Nyieku, I. E., Somuah, B. A. & Frimpong, S. B. (2025). Modelling the antecedents of students' attitudes toward examination malpractice and intentions in distance education.

Chanda, C. T., Edwin, V. P., Mwila, M. & Mwila, M. G. (2024). The effect of co-curricular activities on learners' academic performance: A case of selected secondary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia. *International Journal of Research, 11*(8), 243-265.

Eremie, M. & Ikpa, I. (2020). Cognitive test anxiety and examination malpractices among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 12*(1), 48–59.

Jdaitawi, M., Rasheed, A., Gohari, M., Raddy, Y., Aydin, M., Abas, A., Hasan, A. & Khatiry, A. (2020). The determinants of leisure attitudes: Mediating effect of self-efficacy among students from science, engineering, and medicine colleges. *Journal of Turkish Science Education, 17*(2), 242-252.

Ling, Y. L. & Tini, J. (2022). A correlational study examining the relationship between psychological distress and academic adjustment in a technical college. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences, 10*(1), 66-79.

Manafa, I., Ohamobi, I. N. & Osegbue, G. C. (2020). Principal's management strategies for effective control of examination malpractices in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Educational Research and Development, 13*(2), 14-26.

Nwokolo, C. N. & Oguzie, A. E. (2021). Relationship between secondary school students' self-esteem and their attitude towards examination malpractice in Imo State. *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies, 4*(1), 33-44.

Nworgu, B. G. (2015). *Educational research: Basic issues and methodology*. Nsukka: University Trust Publishers.

Obi, J. S. C. & Oguzie, A. E. (2019). Effects of systematic desensitization technique on generalized anxiety among adolescents in Enugu East Local Government, Enugu State, Nigeria. *iJournals: International Journal of Social Relevance and Concern, 7*(5), 1-9.

Ofodile, M. O., Odiato, O. O., Adenugba, A. A. & Edun, T. (2019). Self-efficacy, test anxiety and examination malpractice in Ogun State. *The Journal of Positive Psychology and Counselling, 3*(1), 134-145.

Oguzie, A. E. & Nwokolo, C. N. (2021). Relationship between secondary school students' academic achievement motivation and their attitude towards examination malpractice in Imo State. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies, 4*(1), 73-84.

Olowodunoye, S. A. & Titus, O. (2016). Academic adjustment among Nigerian undergraduates: The role of parenting style and gender. *African Journal for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, 19*(2), 88–99.

Raza, S. A., Qazi, W. & Qamar, S. (2020). The influence of psychological, motivational, and behavioral factors on university students' achievements: The mediating effect of academic adjustment. *Journal of Research in Higher Education, 23*(2), 1-45.

Sahuri, N. S. S. & Wilson, R. (2024). The international students' adjustment scale: Integrating the academic, social and psychological adjustment experiences. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 9*(5), 2808. http://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v9i5.2808.

Sharma, N. K. (2021). *Easy way to determine the sample size*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357367244

Shrestha, N. (2021). Factor analysis as a tool for survey analysis. *American Journal of Applied Mathematics and Statistics, 9*(1), 4-11.

Sola, R. (2025). *2025 UTME: Anambra, Imo CBT centres top JAMB malpractice list*. https://guardian.ng/education/2025-utme-anambra-imo-cbt-centres-top-jamb-malpractice-list/

Stella, B. E. (2020). Parental harmony and students' tendencies to social behaviour in university environment in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science*, 186-192.

Udebuana, M. C. & Onwugbufor, E. E. (2021). Self-efficacy and self-esteem as predictors of students' attitude towards examination misconducts in Anambra State secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Research and Development, 4*(2), 1-14.

Vansteenkiste, M., Sierens, E., Soenens, B., Luyckx, K. & Lens, W. (2020). Motivational profiles from a self-determination perspective: The quality of motivation matters for science engagement and academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 112*(4), 880-900.

Willems, J., van Daal, T., van Petegem, P., Coertjens, L. & Donche, V. (2021). Predicting freshmen's academic adjustment and subsequent achievement: Differences between academic and professional higher education contexts. *Frontline Learning Research Special Issue, 9*(2), 28-49.

Zhang, K. & Ling, Y. (2025). The role of psychological distress in shaping academic adjustment: Implications for undergraduate support systems. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 9*(1), 1707-1714.