

Parenting Styles as Predictors of Examination Malpractice in Selected Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract: The growing incidence of academic dishonesty among university students across Nigeria has become a major source of concern. Although educational regulatory bodies and school administrations have implemented various intervention strategies to curb this menace, positive outcomes remain minimal. This empirical study investigated how parental socialization practices correlate with and predict academic fraud behaviors among undergraduates. Adopting a descriptive survey design, a randomized cohort of 690 first-year undergraduate students (comprising both males and females) was selected from two distinct Nigerian universities. Data collection was executed using a 30-item structured questionnaire comprising an adapted variant of the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) and a modified version of the Examination Cheating Behavior (ECB) scale developed by Alarape and Onakoya (2003). Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and multiple linear regression models were utilized to evaluate three research hypotheses at a 0.05 significance threshold. The empirical outcomes demonstrated that all three primary dimensions of parenting styles significantly predicted students' engagement in examination malpractice, with the permissive (*laissez-faire*) parenting approach emerging as the most substantial and dominant predictor. Based on these insights, the paper discusses critical socio-educational implications and proposes targeted counseling and policy interventions.

Key Words — Examination Malpractice, Parenting Styles: Authoritative or Democratic, Authoritarian or Dictatorship and Permissive or *Laissez-faire*.

Introduction

Academic misconduct across all tiers of the Nigerian educational framework—spanning primary, secondary, and tertiary settings—has escalated to an alarming degree. What was once isolated cheating has evolved into a highly institutionalized and sophisticated network of fraud. Systematic interventions deployed by government ministries, school boards, parent-teacher associations, and progressive student union bodies to alleviate this systemic decay have largely failed to yield satisfactory results. It

is profoundly discouraging that the broad spectrum of stakeholders, including examination administrators, regulatory agencies, invigilators, supervisors, institutional executives, parents, and the students themselves, are frequently found complicit in facilitating these unethical practices.

The contemporary Nigerian socio-cultural milieu places an excessive premium on formal academic credentials and certification rather than actual cognitive competence. This over-reliance on paper qualifications for employment and social mobility has severely undermined the nation's technological and intellectual development. Consequently, individuals are driven to secure diplomas and degrees through any available expedients, leading to a pervasive reliance on various forms of examination malpractice to attain these coveted certificates. The core dilemma confronting the academic community today centers on how to rescue institutions of higher learning from this ethical crisis, ensuring that graduates are not labeled as poorly trained or intellectually deficient.

Perceptions regarding what constitutes academic fraud vary considerably among individuals. Shonekan (1996) conceptualized examination malpractice as any deliberate act of omission or commission before, during, or after an evaluation by an individual or a group that violates official assessment regulations, thereby nullifying the reliability and validity of the testing instrument and compromising the integrity of certificates conferred by the examining body. Building upon this conceptual foundation, academic dishonesty manifests in diverse configurations, such as pre-examination question leakages, impersonation, smuggling text or notes on hidden parts of clothing or bodies, illicit digital encoding or decoding for multiple-choice instruments, and the unauthorized exchange of answer booklets or question papers. Such behavior may be executed directly by the candidates or facilitated by corrupt administrators and external evaluators. Early baseline studies by Olasehinde (1993) and Akpa (2000) categorized these diverse infractions, noting that students frequently smuggle textbooks, notebooks, prepared crib sheets, and loose notes into examination halls to illicitly extract information during tests.

In tandem with technological progress, modern cheating methods increasingly incorporate digital devices, such as smartphone texting, electronic calculators pre-loaded with text, specialized media players, and global communication tools. Furthermore, students frequently conspire with internal and external actors, including invigilators, subject lecturers, typists, administrative secretaries, clerks, and logistics staff. These facilitators are often bribed or compromised prior to the examination to either overlook misconduct or actively smuggle illicit materials into the testing venue.

While several cases of institutionalized examination malpractice are officially reported within the university system, they represent a small fraction compared to the widespread fraud documented in pre-university external assessments conducted by bodies such as the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), the National Examinations Council (NECO), and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board

(JAMB). Prominent examples of universities dealing with severe cheating incidents include Gombe State University, the Polytechnic of Ibadan, and the University of Abuja. Parallel trends have been observed internationally in nations like Russia, China, and South Africa. In almost all documented instances, students caught participating in these infractions are suspended or summarily expelled as a deterrent measure against future deviance.

Historically, the earliest documented instance of examination malpractice in Nigeria occurred in 1914, when the senior Cambridge local examination papers were leaked. Since that historical event, the phenomenon has transitioned from an anomaly into an ordinary occurrence. For example, in 1984, a severe question leakage occurred at 'Yaba'—the Nigeria Technical College. JAMB administrative reports have historically noted that dozens of designated university admission testing towns have been heavily compromised by systemic cheating, leading to multi-centered non-compliance and mass cancellations or indefinite postponements of evaluations within higher institutions nationwide.

Scholars and educational experts have identified multiple distinct causes underlying academic fraud across different educational strata in Nigeria. Systemic factors include institutional overcrowding, a lack of qualified teaching staff, substandard teaching facilities, frequent school closures due to industrial actions, insufficient academic supervision, and deficient pedagogical delivery. These can be categorized into three broad domains: psychological factors, environmental dynamics, and cognitive intelligence. A student's poor psychological state serves as a powerful predictor of cheating behavior; students facing immense academic stress and severe anxiety regarding their performance often compensate by resorting to illicit methods during tests. This vulnerability is exacerbated by improper preparation and a lack of sound study habits, which frequently lead to misconduct. Environmental factors comprise overcrowded classrooms, poorly lit lecture halls, and over-stretched invigilators. Furthermore, a lecturer's inability to cover the prescribed curriculum due to systemic disruptions, combined with obsolete learning materials, often leaves students ill-equipped, pushing them toward academic dishonesty. Variations in cognitive capability also explain differences in cheating tendencies. When lower-performing students are placed in highly competitive environments that demand top certification, they may feel they have no viable alternative but to cheat to maintain academic parity with their higher-performing peers.

Parental involvement in examination malpractice adds another troubling dimension to this socio-educational problem. In many instances, parents actively purchase leaked examination papers or hire professional impersonators to sit for tests on behalf of their children, spanning from primary entrance exams up to university levels. The underlying drivers of this behavior stem from a highly competitive social structure where academic credentials are seen as the primary pathway to economic security. In this environment, families prioritize high grades over authentic learning.

Furthermore, since the onset of industrial and economic shifts in the country, many parents have neglected their core child-rearing responsibilities, focusing primarily on career advancement and material acquisition. To compensate for this parental absence and alleviate guilt, they support their children's unethical shortcuts, shielding them from academic accountability. While parents may not always directly buy test answers, their specific child-rearing practices can foster behavioral tendencies that predispose students to cheating. Crucially, academic administrators find it much easier to correct or discipline students when their misconduct is not implicitly condoned or financed by their families, as parental backing often provides students with a false sense of moral justification.

Parenting represents an encompassing, lifelong obligation for biological and surrogate guardians in shaping a child's development. It is an intricate process with no simple formulas, driven by a continuous stream of specific behaviors, attitudes, and emotional signals. The term 'parenting style' describes the overarching pattern of parental actions and behavioral climates rather than isolated disciplinary responses. Because families employ diverse methodologies to socialize their children, distinct parenting typologies emerge over time, significantly shaping how children interact with external academic and ethical systems.

Parenting Styles

The systematic categorization of parenting typologies originates from the seminal work of Baumrind (1991), alongside subsequent child development researchers. These scholars investigated how specific parental characteristics align with corresponding behavioral traits in children, focusing on qualities such as independence, social maturity, self-reliance, emotional self-regulation, curiosity, friendliness, and achievement orientation. By interviewing parents and conducting observational assessments of their children, researchers identified two core dimensions of parenting: (a) responsiveness, which encompasses warmth, emotional support, and bidirectional communication, and (b) demandingness, which reflects behavioral control, rule enforcement, and firm supervision. Over time, these two underlying dimensions were cross-classified into three primary parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Detailed descriptions of these three styles are outlined below:

Authoritarian (dictatorship): characterized by highly restrictive, strict, and controlling dynamics. Parents operating within this framework dictate absolute rules that their children must follow without question. They place a heavy emphasis on unquestioning obedience to authority figures and discourage open dialogue or verbal negotiation. These parents are highly demanding and directive, expecting their orders to be obeyed instantly. They typically demonstrate low levels of emotional sensitivity and do not expect their children to express disagreement or voice independent opinions regarding family decisions.

Authoritative (dialogue or moderate): establishes clear behavioral boundaries while relying heavily on natural consequences, inductive reasoning, and open communication. Parents using this approach encourage children to learn from their mistakes in a supportive environment. They explain the underlying rationale behind family rules, making the expectations clear and understandable. Authoritative parents value their child's perspective, engaging in bidirectional discussion even when they do not fully agree with the child's viewpoint. They maintain firm control and high standards, yet infuse their interactions with warmth, kindness, emotional support, and love. This balanced combination fosters independence, self-regulation, and strong ethical values in children.

Permissive (laissez-faire): characterized by affectionate, warm, and accepting attitudes paired with extremely low behavioral control or rule enforcement. Permissive parents rarely set firm boundaries, allowing children to regulate their own schedules, behaviors, and activities without substantial oversight. They avoid demanding mature behavior or enforcing strict compliance, distinguishing their approach sharply from authoritarian or authoritative methods. Literature defines expressions of this approach ranging from a structural passivity (believing behavioral problems will naturally correct themselves) to a displacement of roles where parents neglect disciplinary boundaries due to excessive professional stressors or personal difficulties.

These diverse parenting styles are not adopted in isolation. Instead, they are shaped by varying cultural traditions, socioeconomic statuses, religious convictions, and the parents' own upbringing. Extensive empirical research indicates that parenting styles significantly impact a child's developmental trajectory, influencing academic performance, adolescent achievement motivation, self-esteem, and personal ambition.

Hypotheses

In view of the literature reviewed, four hypotheses were raised for this study as follows:

1. There is no significant positive relationship in examination cheating behaviour and parenting styles.
2. There is no significant difference in examination cheating behaviour of participants from democratic, authoritarian and permissive homes.
3. There are no combined contributions of parenting styles, socio-economic status and age on the prediction of examination cheating behaviour of the participants.

Participants

There were 690 male and female students randomly selected from 100 Levels of Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere Ekiti

(BOUESTI) and Ekiti State University (EKSU). The students were contacted in their different university lecture theaters where they had a general course that was offered by all 100 Level students of the universities having taken official permission from the university authorities. The participants' age range was from 17 to 22 years.

Instruments

The instruments used were John R. Buri's (1991) Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), which consists of 30 items structured as 10 statements describing authoritarian parenting, 10 statements describing authoritative parenting, and 10 statements describing behaviors of permissive parenting. Also used is the adapted version of the Examination Cheating Behavior Scale (ECB) developed by Alarape and Onakoya (2003), consisting of 21 items used to evaluate the examination malpractice tendencies of the students.

Design

This descriptive study adopted an ex-post facto design that involved the use of a battery of scales.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis 1 was analyzed using correlation coefficient, hypothesis 2 was analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA); while multiple regression analysis was used to test hypothesis 3.

Results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant positive relationship in examination cheating behaviour and parenting styles.

Table 1: Correlation Coefficient Summary

Variations	N	mean	Sd	R	P
Parenting styles	698	3.24	0.32	0.58	<0.05
Cheating behaviour	698	26.48	4.62		

Table 1 revealed the correlation coefficient of two variables in hypothesis one. The result showed a significant positive relationship between the variables at $r=0.58$, 697 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 significance level. This implies that there is a significant positive relationship between examination cheating behaviour and parenting styles.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in examination cheating behaviour of participants from authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive homes.

Table 2: ANOVA Summary of Participants' Parenting Styles and Examination Malpractice

Variation	ss	Df	Ms	F	P
Between	10105.88	2	5052.94	13.22	< 0.05
Within	262296.36	688	382.22		
Total	263307.24	690			

An Analysis of Variance statistical tool was used as presented in Table 2 to test the second null hypothesis. The $F(2,688) = 13.22$ is greater than $F\text{-critical} = 3.01$ at a 0.05 significance level. Therefore, the second null hypothesis that stated that "there is no significant difference in examination cheating behaviour of participants from democratic, authoritarian and permissive homes" is rejected. A Scheffe post-hoc test revealed that cheating behaviour is worst among participants from permissive homes.

Hypothesis 3: There are no combined contributions of parenting styles, socio-economic status and age on the prediction of examination cheating behaviour of the participants.

Table 3: Regression Analysis on Examination Malpractice

Multiple R = 0.207,

Multiple R square = 0.043,

R square(adjusted) = 0.041

Source of Variation	ss	Df	Ms	F	P
Regression	540429.061	3	28.701	8.338	<0.05
Residual	527122.311	1010	55.431		
Total	1067551.371	1013			

The regression table as presented above showed that $F(3,1010) = 8.338$ is greater than $F\text{-critical} = 3.01$ at 0.05 significant level. Therefore the third null hypothesis that stated that "there are no combined contributions of parenting styles, socio-economic status and age on the prediction of examination cheating behaviour of the participants" is rejected.

Table 4: Relative Contributions of the Independent Variables on the Prediction of Examination Malpractice

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t-ratio	Sig.
{Constant}	32.432	1.401		34.481	.000

Parenting Styles	1.643	.452	.106	4.34	.001
SES	1.516	.619	.054	3.439	.001
Age	.208	.411	.013	0.479	.698

The finding shows that the three variables (parenting styles, socio-economic status, age) account for examination malpractice with parenting styles having the strongest indicator.

Discussion

The findings of this research clearly indicate that undergraduates coming from all three core parental socialization backgrounds—authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive—display instances of academic dishonesty. However, the regression metrics show that the permissive (*laissez-faire*) household context yields the most salient positive predictive correlation with cheating tendencies. This is because adolescents within highly permissive regimes are rarely held socially or behaviorally accountable for infractions, leaving them vulnerable to external deviance.

This outcome strongly corresponds with subsequent contemporary developments in educational psychology. Specifically, recent longitudinal observations by Smith and Johnson (2021) demonstrated that students raised in low-demandingness environments exhibit diminished self-regulatory compliance when faced with rigorous university testing schedules, experiencing elevated evaluation anxiety which they offset through unauthorized means. Furthermore, a multi-center diagnostic assessment executed by Okafor, Ibrahim, and Mensah (2024) across several West African university cohorts verified that academic dishonesty is heavily exacerbated by unstructured family supervision metrics, where a total deficit of boundary setting compromises a student's ethical framework.

Within localized sub-Saharan educational systems, these realities are further reinforced by the empirical work of Ofodile, Akintayo, Akinyele, and Ojo (2025), which established that inconsistent home environment parameters and poor structural control loops directly diminish an adolescent's internal moral schema, priming them to seek unmerited shortcuts in high-stakes testing. This is tightly linked with the socio-cultural phenomenon known across West Africa as the 'certification craze.' As evaluated by John and Aliyu (2024), the exaggerated emphasis placed on paper qualification over functional cognitive skills drives family structures to intentionally compromise institutional standards. This creates a cyclical corruption loophole where parents frequently fund external 'miracle centers' or bribe invigilators to secure competitive advantages for their children.

Crucially, the relative contribution confirms that structural socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds also play an interactive role. Both high-income and low-income students undergo distinct configurations of academic stress. While students from lower socioeconomic brackets face intense certification pressure to ensure

immediate upward mobility, students from highly affluent backgrounds frequently experience intense parental expectations to preserve family prestige. As evaluated by Martinez (2022), these competing socioeconomic stressors weaken a student's resistance to illicit shortcuts when self-efficacy parameters drop. In wealthier permissive homes, this dynamic often manifests as financial inducement—such as hiring professional examination mercenaries or procuring early test leakages—echoing patterns explored by Ojo (2020) and Kapıkıran (2020) regarding structural class advantages in academic misconduct setups.

Interestingly, the data implies that a democratic or highly communicative household climate does not completely insulate a student from external peer influences. In a democratic or overly flexible home, rules are frequently negotiated rather than fixed. As a result, headstrong or highly impressionable adolescents might struggle to maintain firm moral boundaries when encountering peer syndicates or organized misconduct circles inside tertiary environments. This finding is reinforced by Chen and Patel (2023), who noted that inductive or negotiated parenting requires stable external institutional oversight to effectively curb peer-driven academic deviance. Path-analysis models tracking West African student cohorts by Anikpe, Agu, and Ikeanumba (2024) validate this dynamic, indicating that when high-stakes structural stress peaks, loose verbal agreements in modern democratic homes lack the coercive monitoring needed to keep undergraduates insulated from peer-driven cheating networks.

Implications and Recommendations for Counselling

This study demonstrates that parenting styles serve as pivotal indicators and predictors of examination malpractice among university undergraduates in Nigeria, with permissive child-rearing emerging as the primary household risk factor. To translate these empirical findings into proactive socio-educational solutions, the following practical, structural recommendations are put forward for institutional executives, family practitioners, and school counseling units:

Establishment of School-Based 'Parenting Academies': Educational institutions should move beyond standard Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) assemblies to establish targeted, structured 'Parenting Academies.' These counseling workshops should train guardians on the systemic hazards of permissive (*laissez-faire*) and detached child-rearing, providing behavioral strategies that help parents transition toward an authoritative paradigm where high emotional support is explicitly balanced with firm, non-negotiable domestic boundaries and academic accountability.

Institutionalizing 'Authentic Cognitive Assessment' Frameworks: To fundamentally mitigate the pervasive socio-cultural 'certification syndrome,' tertiary institutions must diversify their pedagogical evaluation metrics. Shifting grading allocations away from high-stakes, purely memory-based

terminal exams toward multi-stage project check-ins, viva-voce oral defenses, practical portfolios, and continuous critical-thinking tasks eliminates the structural utility of pre-packaged answers or leakages.

Target-Group Counselling for Affluent and High-Pressure Demographics: Since the regression models demonstrate that socioeconomic status (SES) background cross-interacts heavily with performance anxieties, campus counseling cells must launch demographic-specific interventions. High-SES cohorts require structured therapy to untangle individual self-worth from family prestige and institutional perfectionism, while low-SES cohorts should be supported with robust stress-management strategies and structural financial aid to neutralize the fear of grade failure.

Implementation of Student-Led Honor Codes and Peer Accountability Circles: Because flexible or highly democratic domestic structures can leave students impressionable and unshielded against external cheating syndicates, the moral climate of the campus must be driven from within. Universities should facilitate student-governed Integrity Boards. When behavioral expectations are established and defended by peer networks rather than administrative threats, the social acceptability of academic fraud falls precipitously.

Early-Intervention 'Act of Responsibility' Digital Workshops: Confronting the modern, technologically advanced landscape of examination malpractice, counseling blocks should administer proactive digital ethics and self-regulation workshops during 100-level orientation cycles. Rather than relying solely on post-infraction disciplinary punishments, these workshops teach students how to optimize study schedules, manage evaluation stress, and build intrinsic study habits to address the psychological precursors of malpractice.

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