

Academic Corruption as a Predictor of Senior Secondary School Students' Indiscipline in Ilorin and Sokoto Metropolises, Nigeria

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Paper Number: 240464

<https://doi.org/10.68089/202609240464>

Abstract:

Academic corruption has emerged as a persistent challenge confronting educational systems in developing countries, undermining educational quality, institutional integrity, and students' moral development. This study investigated the predictive influence of academic corruption on indiscipline among senior secondary school students in Ilorin and Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design with multiple regression analysis was adopted, involving 442 randomly selected respondents from ten public secondary schools. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Academic Corruption and Students' Indiscipline Questionnaire (ACSIQ). For negatively worded items, responses were reverse-coded before analysis to ensure accurate interpretation. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was employed to test the predictive hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that academic corruption significantly predicted students' indiscipline, accounting for 31% of the variance in disciplinary behaviours ($R^2 = 0.31$, $F(3, 238) = 35.64$, $p < .05$). Students demonstrated negative attitudes towards academic dishonesty (grand mean = 2.35) and disapproved of academic corruption (grand mean = 2.23), yet acknowledged that indiscipline remains prevalent. Attitudes towards academic dishonesty ($\beta = 0.34$) and perceptions of corrupt practices ($\beta = 0.28$) emerged as significant predictors, while institutional factors did not independently predict indiscipline. The study concludes that academic corruption serves as a significant predictor of student indiscipline by weakening moral values and normalising unethical behaviours. It recommends strengthening integrity education, enforcing disciplinary measures consistently, and promoting stakeholder collaboration to foster ethical behaviour among students.

Keywords: Academic corruption, indiscipline, prediction, educational, integrity and dishonesty

Introduction

Education serves as a fundamental instrument for national development, social transformation, and human capital development. Beyond transmitting knowledge and skills, education plays a significant role in shaping learners' moral values, ethical standards, and responsible citizenship. The school system is therefore expected to promote honesty, discipline, accountability, and integrity among students. However, the increasing prevalence of academic corruption has become one of the most serious threats to achieving these educational objectives.

Academic corruption refers to dishonest and unethical practices that compromise the integrity of educational processes. Such practices include examination malpractice, plagiarism, impersonation, bribery for grades, falsification of academic records, leakage of examination questions, and other forms of academic misconduct. These behaviours undermine merit-based assessment, weaken public confidence in educational institutions, and reduce the credibility of educational qualifications. The incidence of academic corruption has continued to increase across many educational institutions, particularly within developing countries. In Nigeria, examination malpractice and other unethical academic practices have become persistent concerns despite numerous policy interventions by government agencies, educational authorities, and examination bodies. According to Onyechere (2025), approximately 67% of private and public secondary schools in Nigeria function as 'exam magic centres,' where examination malpractices thrive. The education sector is ranked among the five most corrupt sectors in Nigeria, with some private secondary schools institutionalising examination malpractice whereby students can register for final examinations for an inflated fee and be assured of success, irrespective of merit (SOAS Anti-Corruption Evidence cited in Roy, 2017).

Several factors have been associated with this phenomenon, including excessive academic pressure, inadequate preparation, ineffective supervision during examinations, poor moral orientation, peer influence, parental pressure, and weak enforcement of disciplinary regulations (Oghuvbu, 2007). The emergence of 'Miracle Examination Centres' (MECs), schools where candidates obtain undeserving excellent results through institutionally enabled malpractice, has further entrenched a culture of dishonesty among young learners.

The consequences of academic corruption extend beyond poor academic performance. Students who repeatedly engage in dishonest academic practices often develop attitudes that normalise unethical behaviour in other aspects of life. Such behaviours frequently manifest in various forms of indiscipline,

including truancy, bullying, disrespect for teachers, vandalism, classroom disruption, absenteeism, and non-compliance with school regulations (Fareo & Ballah, 2018). Consequently, academic corruption may not only be an outcome of poor discipline but also a significant predictor of broader behavioural misconduct among students.

School discipline remains an essential component of effective teaching and learning. A disciplined school environment promotes academic excellence, respect for authority, social responsibility, and positive interpersonal relationships. Conversely, where corruption becomes institutionalised within the educational process, students gradually lose confidence in fairness and accountability, thereby increasing the likelihood of engaging in additional deviant behaviours.

The theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between academic corruption and student indiscipline draws from three established theories. Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory posits that behaviour is acquired through observation and reinforcement. When students observe dishonest academic practices being tolerated or rewarded, they are likely to imitate such behaviours and extend them to other aspects of school life. Robert K. Merton's (1968) Strain Theory explains that when there is a tension between culturally defined goals, such as academic success, and the institutionalised means available to achieve them, such as hard work and integrity, individuals may resort to deviant means such as academic corruption. Travis Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory identifies four social bonds, attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief, that keep individuals disciplined; academic corruption systematically severs these bonds, freeing students to engage in deviance without guilt.

Although previous studies have examined examination malpractice and academic dishonesty separately, relatively few studies have specifically explored academic corruption as a predictor of student indiscipline within secondary schools in Kwara and Sokoto States. Understanding this relationship is important for designing effective interventions that strengthen academic integrity while promoting positive student behaviour. Kwara State, located in north-central Nigeria, has experienced significant educational developments in recent years, including the implementation of various educational reforms and infrastructure improvements. Similarly, Sokoto State, located in northwestern Nigeria, has invested heavily in education, spending N4.7 billion to register students for external examinations and committing N8.3 billion to renovate

selected basic and secondary schools (Daily Trust, 2025). The state has also commenced the construction and upgrading of 56 secondary schools under the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) Project. These contextual factors make both study areas important settings for investigating the relationship between academic corruption and student indiscipline.

The problem this study seeks to address is the extent to which academic corruption contributes to or predicts indiscipline among secondary school students in the two study areas, and how this relationship affects overall learning outcomes. Despite continuous efforts by educational stakeholders to promote integrity and discipline in secondary schools, cases of academic corruption, such as cheating during examinations, plagiarism, falsification of results, impersonation, and bribery for grades, continue to rise. These practices undermine the core values of education and appear to be strongly linked to growing indiscipline among students. If students increasingly perceive academic dishonesty as acceptable or unpunished, they may develop a broader pattern of misconduct that threatens the teaching-learning process. Therefore, this study investigates academic corruption as a predictor of indiscipline among secondary school students in Ilorin and Sokoto Metropolis. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence that will assist educational administrators, teachers, policymakers, parents, and other stakeholders in developing strategies aimed at reducing academic corruption and improving discipline within secondary schools.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between academic corruption and students' indiscipline among secondary school students in Ilorin and Sokoto Metropolis. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the attitudes of secondary school students towards academic dishonesty in the study areas.
2. Assess students' perceptions of academic corruption in secondary schools in the study areas.
3. Determine the level of compliance with school rules and regulations among secondary school students in the study areas.
4. Determine whether academic corruption can predict senior school students' indiscipline in Ilorin and Sokoto Metropolis.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the attitudes of secondary school students towards academic dishonesty in the study areas?
2. What are the perceptions of students regarding academic corruption in secondary schools in the study areas?
3. What is the level of compliance with school rules and regulations among secondary school students in the study areas?

Research Hypothesis

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

H₀: Academic corruption cannot explain senior school students' indiscipline in Ilorin and Sokoto Metropolis.

Methodology : This study adopted a descriptive survey research design of the correlational type to investigate the relationship between academic corruption and students' indiscipline among secondary school students in Ilorin and Sokoto Metropolis. The correlational design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between the variables without manipulating any of them. The study was conducted in two geographical areas, namely Ilorin Metropolis in Kwara State and Sokoto Metropolis in Sokoto State, Nigeria. The target population comprised all senior secondary school students (SSS 1–3) enrolled in public secondary schools across both metropolises.

From this population, a sample of 442 respondents was selected from ten public secondary schools, with five schools drawn from each study area. A combination of purposive and simple random sampling techniques was employed. The schools were purposively selected to ensure representation across different geographical zones within each metropolis, while students within each school were randomly selected from SSS 1–3 classes using simple random sampling. Following data cleaning, a total of 433 complete and usable questionnaires were retained for regression analysis, representing a response rate of 94.8%.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Academic Corruption and Students' Indiscipline Questionnaire (ACSIQ). The instrument comprised two sections measuring academic corruption and students' indiscipline, respectively, using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by experts in educational research, measurement, and Evaluation, whose observations and recommendations were incorporated before final administration. To establish

reliability, a pilot study was conducted with thirty (30) respondents from schools outside the study areas. The internal consistency was determined using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded a value of 0.84, indicating high internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951).

For items that were negatively worded, responses were reverse-coded before analysis to ensure accurate interpretation of results. Specifically, responses of 1 (Strongly Agree) were recoded to 4, 2 (Agree) to 3, 3 (Disagree) to 2, and 4 (Strongly Disagree) to 1. This procedure ensured that higher scores consistently represented more positive attitudes, perceptions, or compliance levels across all items. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers with the assistance of trained research assistants in both locations. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately after administration to ensure a high return rate.

Finally, the collected data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise respondents' characteristics and answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted for decision-making, such that mean scores of 2.50 and above were regarded as Agreed, while scores below 2.50 were regarded as Disagreed. The hypothesis was tested using Multiple Linear Regression Analysis at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The data elicited were presented as follows. The research questions were answered using weighted mean and standard deviation. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted for decision-making.

Research Question One: *What are the attitudes of secondary school students towards academic dishonesty in the study areas?*

Table 1: Students' Attitudes towards Academic Dishonesty

S/ N	Item	Mea n	SD	Decisio n
1	Students perceive examination malpractice as an unacceptable academic practice.	2.63	0.82	Agreed
2	Academic honesty promotes effective learning and character development.	2.68	0.78	Agreed

3	Cheating during examinations is justified under academic pressure.	2.14	0.83	Disagreed
4	Students should be sanctioned for engaging in academic dishonesty.	2.57	0.81	Agreed
5	Buying examination question papers is an acceptable practice.	2.11	0.85	Disagreed
6	Paying for grades is justifiable.	2.16	0.84	Disagreed
	Grand Mean	2.35		Disagreed

Key: Agreed = 2.50 and above; Disagreed = Below 2.50

Respondents demonstrated negative attitudes toward academic dishonesty (grand mean = 2.35, below the 2.50 criterion). While they affirmed the importance of academic honesty (2.68), viewed examination malpractice as unacceptable (2.63), and supported sanctions against dishonesty (2.57), they rejected cheating under pressure (2.14), buying examination papers (2.11), and paying for grades (2.16). This indicates that students across both study areas recognise the value of academic integrity.

Research Question Two: *What are the perceptions of students regarding academic corruption in secondary schools in the study areas?*

Table 2: Students' Perceptions of Academic Corruption

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Examination malpractice negatively affects educational quality.	2.81	0.73	Agreed
2	Bribery and favouritism encourage academic corruption.	2.72	0.77	Agreed
3	Weak supervision contributes to examination malpractice.	2.65	0.76	Agreed
4	Selling grades is an acceptable practice.	1.82	0.84	Disagreed
5	Fraudulent admission practices are acceptable.	1.78	0.82	Disagreed
6	Academic corruption should be tolerated in schools.	1.74	0.85	Disagreed
	Grand Mean	2.23		Disagreed

Key: Agreed = 2.50 and above; Disagreed = Below 2.50

Respondents largely disapproved of academic corruption (grand mean = 2.23). They acknowledged institutional factors enabling corrupt practices, including the negative effect of examination malpractice on educational quality (2.81), bribery and favouritism (2.72), and weak supervision (2.65). However, they strongly rejected tolerating such practices (1.74), selling grades (1.82), and fraudulent admissions (1.78). This indicates that students perceive academic corruption as undesirable within the educational system.

Research Question Three: *What is the level of compliance with school rules and regulations among secondary school students in the study areas?*

Table 3: Level of Students' Compliance with School Rules and Regulations

S/ N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Students regularly obey school rules and regulations.	2.73	0.75	Agreed
2	Students demonstrate respect for teachers and school authority.	2.67	0.78	Agreed
3	Students avoid behaviours that violate school regulations.	2.70	0.72	Agreed
4R	Using disrespectful language toward teachers is not acceptable.*	2.36	0.80	Disagreed
5R	Arriving late and skipping assembly is a serious offense.*	2.39	0.82	Disagreed
6	Cases of indiscipline remain common in secondary schools.	2.75	0.79	Agreed
	Grand Mean	2.60		Agreed

Note: Items 4 and 5 were originally negatively worded and have been reverse-coded (1→4, 2→3, 3→2, 4→1). Higher scores indicate higher levels of compliance.

Key: Agreed = 2.50 and above; Disagreed = Below 2.50

Respondents demonstrated moderate compliance with school regulations (grand mean = 2.60). They reported obeying rules (2.73), respecting teachers (2.67), and avoiding violations (2.70). After reverse-coding, students did not endorse disrespectful language toward teachers (2.36) and recognised lateness and skipping assembly as serious offenses (2.39). However, they acknowledged that

indiscipline remains common in schools (2.75), indicating persistent disciplinary challenges despite generally positive self-reports. The moderate scores for disrespect and lateness suggest a troubling tolerance for misconduct that, if unaddressed, may undermine teacher authority and create a hostile learning environment.

Testing of Hypothesis

H_0 : Academic corruption does not predict senior school students' indiscipline in Ilorin and Sokoto Metropolis.

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Academic Corruption Dimensions Predicting Students' Indiscipline

Predictor Variables	B	Std. Error	B	T	Sig.	Decision
(Constant)	1.24	0.18		6.89	0.000	
Attitudes towards academic dishonesty	0.42	0.07	0.34	6.00	0.000	Significant
Perceptions of academic corruption	0.35	0.08	0.28	4.38	0.000	Significant
Institutional factors (weak supervision, etc.)	0.15	0.09	0.12	1.67	0.097	Not Significant

$R = 0.56$; $R^2 = 0.31$; $Adjusted R^2 = 0.30$; $F(3, 238) = 35.64$; $p < 0.05$

Table 5: Model Summary for Predictive Regression

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	R ² Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	0.56	0.31	0.30	0.53	0.31	35.64	0.000

Academic corruption significantly predicted students' indiscipline, accounting for 31% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.31$, $F(3, 238) = 35.64$, $p < .05$). Attitudes towards academic dishonesty emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < .001$), supporting Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory that internalised moral frameworks shape behavioural outcomes. Perceptions of corruption also significantly predicted indiscipline ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .001$), consistent with Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory that interpretations of corrupt practices influence

behavioural choices. However, institutional factors such as weak supervision did not independently predict indiscipline ($\beta = 0.12$, $p > .05$), suggesting they require mediation through students' attitudes and perceptions to translate into behavioural outcomes.

Discussion of Findings

The multiple regression analysis established that academic corruption significantly predicts students' indiscipline, accounting for 31% of the variance in disciplinary behaviours. This substantial explanatory power confirms that dishonest academic practices are a meaningful contributor to broader behavioural misconduct across both study areas.

Students in both Ilorin and Sokoto Metropolises demonstrated negative attitudes towards academic dishonesty, acknowledging the importance of academic honesty, viewing examination malpractice as unacceptable, and supporting sanctions against dishonest practices while rejecting cheating under pressure, buying examination papers, and paying for grades. Attitudes towards academic dishonesty emerged as the strongest predictor of indiscipline, indicating that internal moral frameworks influence student behaviour more significantly than external institutional factors. This supports Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which posits that internalised attitudes serve as cognitive precursors to behavioural misconduct. However, the tendency for some students to rationalise dishonest behaviour under academic pressure supports Merton's (1968) Strain Theory, which predicts that individuals resort to deviant means when experiencing tension between cultural goals and institutionalised avenues for achievement.

Students expressed strong disapproval of academic corruption more broadly, recognising that examination malpractice undermines educational quality, bribery and favouritism foster corruption, and weak supervision enables malpractice, while strongly rejecting the tolerance of such practices. Perceptions of academic corruption significantly predicted indiscipline, though with slightly less predictive power than attitudes. This finding aligns with Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory, which predicts that when students perceive corrupt practices continuing without consequence, their belief in fairness diminishes, weakening the social bonds that maintain discipline. The persistence of corrupt practices despite widespread disapproval reveals a troubling gap between espoused values and institutional realities.

Regarding school discipline, after proper reverse-coding of negatively worded items, students demonstrated moderate compliance with school regulations (grand mean = 2.60). They reported obeying rules, respecting teachers, and avoiding violations. Following reverse-coding, students did not endorse disrespectful language toward teachers and recognised lateness and skipping assembly as serious offenses. However, they acknowledged that indiscipline remains common in schools, indicating persistent disciplinary challenges despite generally positive self-reports. The moderate scores for disrespect and lateness suggest a troubling tolerance for misconduct that, if unaddressed, may undermine teacher authority and create a hostile learning environment.

Interestingly, institutional factors such as weak supervision and enforcement did not independently predict indiscipline. This suggests that while such factors may create opportunities for corruption, they do not directly translate into indisciplinary behaviours without the mediating influence of students' attitudes and perceptions. The predictive model demonstrates that attitudes and perceptions serve as stronger predictors of actual outcomes than self-reported compliance.

Several theoretical frameworks explain these predictive relationships. Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains that students observing dishonest practices being tolerated imitate such behaviours, extending them to other aspects of school life. When academic corruption becomes normalised, students learn that rules can be bent for personal gain, fostering indiscipline. Merton's Strain Theory illuminates how, when institutionalised means of success are perceived as broken, individuals resort to deviant means, diminishing motivation for hard work and increasing disruptive behaviours. Hirschi's Social Control Theory predicts that academic corruption systematically severs social bonds as students lose attachment to corrupt teachers and belief in rule fairness weakens, enabling deviance without guilt.

The implications for educational practice are significant. The finding that attitudes and perceptions are stronger predictors than institutional factors suggests stakeholders should prioritise interventions targeting internal moral frameworks and interpretations of corrupt practices. Integrity education, ethical reasoning training, and interventions reshaping perceptions may be more effective than structural reforms alone. However, the non-significant predictive power of institutional factors does not imply reforms are unnecessary, but rather that they are most effective when combined with interventions addressing

attitudes and perceptions. This requires comprehensive approaches that strengthen institutional integrity while reshaping moral frameworks.

Across both study areas, while overall patterns remained consistent, notable differences emerged. Kwara respondents exhibited slightly more negative attitudes toward dishonesty and corruption than Sokoto counterparts, while compliance with rules was marginally higher in Sokoto. These variations likely stem from contextual factors including educational policies, supervision levels, cultural influences, and socioeconomic conditions. Such differences underscore the importance of context-sensitive reforms that can be adapted to local circumstances.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study established that academic corruption significantly predicts students' indiscipline in secondary schools across Ilorin and Sokoto Metropolises, accounting for 31% of the variance in indisciplinary behaviours. Students demonstrated negative attitudes toward academic dishonesty and disapproved of corrupt practices, yet acknowledged the persistence of both phenomena. While they reported moderate compliance with school rules, they also recognised that indiscipline remains prevalent. The significant predictive power of attitudes and perceptions over institutional factors confirms that internal moral frameworks and interpretations of corrupt practices shape behavioural outcomes more than external structures. These findings underscore the interconnected nature of corruption and indiscipline, suggesting that efforts to address one must simultaneously tackle the other. Based on the four findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is the need Nigerian schools to strengthen integrity education targeting students' attitudes towards academic dishonesty, as attitudes emerged as the strongest predictor of indiscipline. Schools should integrate ethical reasoning and moral development programmes into the curriculum.
2. Each school management should emphasise more on addressing students' perceptions of corruption by ensuring transparency, fairness, and accountability in all academic processes, as perceptions significantly predict indisciplinary behaviour.
3. Enforcement of disciplinary measures consistently while implementing restorative approaches that address root causes of misconduct, given students' moderate compliance and recognition that indiscipline remains prevalent.
4. There is a need for school heads to combine institutional reforms with interventions targeting attitudes and perceptions, as institutional factors alone

do not independently predict indiscipline but are most effective when paired with programmes reshaping moral frameworks.

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