

## THE ROLE OF READING ANXIETY AND ANOMIE IN EXAMINATION MISCONDUCTS IN NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Dienye Ruth Abraham\***

*\*Department of Education, Federal College of Education Technical, Omoku, River State, Nigeria*

**\*Corresponding Author:**

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### **Abstract**

*Dishonesty in examinations has always plagued Nigeria's academic system. This affects all levels of education, from primary to tertiary level. Numerous studies have underscored the contributory factors in examination misconduct in academia. However, little is known about the role of socio-psychological variables like reading anxiety and anomie. The present study examined reading anxiety and anomie as predictors of examination misconduct in higher education in Nigeria. Two hundred and forty-eight students, 118 males and 130 females aged 18 to 30 ( $M = 21.4$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ) were conveniently pooled from tertiary institutions in River state, Nigeria, as the participants. A self-report questionnaire was used for data collection. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Data from the respondents were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS, v23). A multiple regression analysis indicated that the predictors (reading anxiety and anomie) significantly predicted examination misconduct in higher education  $F(1,246)$ ,  $36.52$ ,  $P < .000$ . Most importantly, the  $R^2$  indicated that the predictor variables contributed to about 45.6% of the variance in examination misconduct among the respondents. The result has implications for curbing the menace of examination misconduct in academia.*

**Keywords:** *examination misconduct, reading anxiety, anomie, students, higher education*

## INTRODUCTION

In academia, examination misconduct describes the process of engaging in unethical behavior relating to assessments and procedures. The term reflects academic behavior that deviates from institutional expectations for exams and other institutional goals (Bayaa et al., 2016). It depicts unethical and dishonest intellectual theft that could harm an institution's reputation and society's advancement (Maina et al., 2014). Accordingly, Faucher and Caves (2009) described academic dishonesty as unlawfully obtaining or transferring information from others and avoiding the authorized evaluation process in an educational setting. The trend is visible among those involved in academic activities such as teaching, learning, research, and other related endeavors. It applies to everyone who works in an academic setting, not just students.

Cheating, plagiarism, and falsification are forms of academic dishonesty (Błachnio, 2019; Djokovic et al., 2022) popularly seen in academia. Misconduct in the examination is a form of academic dishonesty involving the unauthorized use of information, materials, devices, sources, or practices in completing academic activities. (Doerr, 2021). Copying, for example, during an exam that should be completed individually is an unauthorized practice and is thus considered cheating. Students are considered to be facilitating or contributing to cheating if they allow another student to copy from their work. Plagiarism reflects stealing words, ideas, and representations (Gerald, 2021). It involves adopting another person's ideas, words, design, art, music, and so on without crediting the source or, if necessary, obtaining permission from the author. Plagiarism is a significant concern for higher education institutions (Merkel, 2021).

Similarly, the unauthorized creation or alteration of information in an academic document or activity is called fabrication or falsification. For example, fabricating or falsifying data that should have been collected from an actual experiment or inventing a source of information that does not exist are examples of fabrication or falsification. Sabotage is disrupting or destroying another person's work to prevent that person from successfully completing an academic activity. Sabotaging another person's artwork, experiment, or design, for example, is considered sabotage. Failure to contribute to a team project as required can also be considered academic sabotage.

However, examination misconducts are multifaceted activities motivated by contextual, situational, and personal factors (Fields, 2003). Studies, for instance, have connected academic dishonesty to study level and gender, sensation seeking and self-control, pressure for a good grade, and time constraints (Bachore, 2016). An increase in worry, dread, and extreme concern over the inability to comprehend learning material in reading can be brought on by affective states, such as reading anxiety. For instance, students who have trouble reading may be more tempted to look for alternative methods to pass their exams. More so, students who exhibit anti-social behavior to meet their needs by violating codes of conduct are more likely to cheat in an examination.

Reading is a ubiquitous part of school activities and an essential component of the educational landscape in every society (Bassette & Taber-Doughty, 2016; Bigozzi et al., 2017; Ganie et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2018; Kiili & Leu, 2019; Krashen et al., 2021; Kung & Aziz, 2020; Linder et al., 2018; Paige et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2020). Indeed, reading is one of the primary objectives of the educational system. Thus, reading acquisition is viewed as a life-altering process. (Castles et al., 2018). Reading could plausibly be required for many scholastic endeavors. (Kojo et al., 2018). A passion for reading is necessary for students' academic and professional success inside and outside the classroom. (Khairuddin, 2013). Therefore, reading is necessary to acquire knowledge, skills, and the expression of thought. (Itsekor & Nwokeoma, 2017). Reading is acquired through a lifelong process that begins in early childhood, prior to the start of formal education, and continues throughout one's lifetime. (Alexander, 2005). Even though reading is most often associated with the classroom, research has shown that reading in various other settings significantly contributes to individual differences in reading skills among students. (Locher & Pfost, 2020).

### ***Reading anxiety and academic dishonesty***

Reading anxiety is an unpleasant emotional reaction experienced by students when reading (Piccolo et al., 2017). The term describes a specific phobia and situational type in the school system. The condition describes a reaction that is created against reading. It is one of the components that obstruct the process of transforming reading skills into a habit (Melanliolu, 2014). Although many students find reading exciting, others may find it a frightening and quite difficult experience. Reading is a complex activity that demands linguistic and cognitive knowledge and the ability to comprehend the message. Therefore, students worried about reading may exhibit less ability to read, proofread and revise. Thus, these obstacles, in turn, may provoke several challenges for students, including resorting to dishonest acts. Although reading anxiety has been primarily studied in the literature, there is a paucity of research on reading anxiety related to academic dishonesty in Nigeria. Based on this, the present study hypothesizes that:

***H<sup>1</sup>: reading anxiety will predict academic dishonesty***

The moral anomie phenomenon of students has aroused great concern in society (Wang & Shao, 2017). According to sociologists, anomie occurs when people have lost all sense of community and direction in their daily lives. The conflict between one's beliefs and the values of one's community is thought to be the root cause of anomie. A person's alienation, for instance, can lead to a pathological inability to function normally in socially expected contexts like making friends and advancing in a career. Anomie characterizes a person's disconnection from their social circle. While this concept has been linked to several other things, including but not limited to academic dishonesty, no studies appear to have been conducted on this specific topic.

**Anomie and academic dishonesty**

In recent years, the academic anomie of students has been typical (Yang et al., 2019). Many students in developing and developed countries have been exposed to such incidents. Earlier findings (Reimanis, 1983) strengthened the contention that feelings of anomie, internalized during childhood, create an orientation that discounts the importance of education during the adult years. Anomie theory gives a sociological explanation for a painful situation in which there is a cultural overemphasis on academic success combined with structurally limited opportunities (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2020).

This incident can reduce academic motivation and heightens unethical behaviors in academia. They are instigating a state of normlessness that leads to an increase in students' resistance code of conduct and a reduction in students' ethical compliance. Anomie is distinct from amorality in that it does not consider moral considerations. Anomie stifles significant and unrestricted human behavior because it does not permit self-government autonomy following the values of a conscious person. In other words, anomie interferes with morality and personal happiness, and it has the potential to cause a student to become inhuman as well as to resort to actions that are desperate and helpless. In addition, anomie has been associated with deceptive, dishonest behavior (Choi et al., 2018). That is, anomie can bring moral failure and moral decline in academia.

**H<sup>2</sup>: anomie will predict academic dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty is a severe problem affecting educational institutions in Nigeria and therefore needs urgent attention. The need for further studies, particularly in tertiary institutions, is motivated by higher education being the ultimate level of education from which students are likely to enter the job market directly. Students' involvement in academically dishonest practices might negatively affect their future and harm society. Academic dishonesty has been shown to correlate with varying factors. Hence, it is essential to identify possible correlates of academic dishonesty to find a solution to the menace in academics. Therefore, this study intends to explore reading anxiety and anomie as predictors of academic dishonesty in higher education in Nigeria

**Method**

**Participants**

The data were collected using convenience sampling based on availability and willingness to join the study. Participants were drawn from students enrolled in different academic disciplines in three institutions of higher learning in the River State, Nigeria. Two hundred and forty-eight students, 118 males and 130 females, consented to participate in the study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 32 years (M = 21.4, SD = 1.92). They were majors in various fields, such as the social sciences, languages, technology, and science. Indeed, English is taught in all departments as a general course. The participants completed a concept form, and all other ethical principles were duly observed.

**Measure**

Examination misconduct was measured with the Academic Dishonesty Scale (McCabe & Trevino, 1997). The scale is a 12-item questionnaire used to assess pupils' dishonesty. Respondents are asked to rate how frequently they have engaged in dishonest activities on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from never = 1 to many times = 5. "Copying from another student without their permission" and "assisting someone to cheat on an exam" are two examples. The measure had a scale of 12 to 60, with a higher score suggesting regular academic dishonesty. The scale had already been utilized in the Nigerian setting by (Onu et al., 2021), and it had a Cronbach's alpha of .87.

Reading anxiety was measured by a 10-item Reading Anxiety in College Students (RACS) scale. The instrument is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with one representing "not true for me at all" and five representing "very true for me." All items were scored such that higher numbers represent higher reading anxiety. The last item asked students whether they had reading anxiety to investigate whether this item provided an accurate estimate of the entire score.

Anomie was examined with an 8-item questionnaire first developed by Scott Menard. The scale is a five-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (strongly agree). The total calculated score indicated the level of perception of anomie among students. So, a higher score on anomie measurement interprets that students have higher anomie.

**Result**

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Data from the respondents were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS, v23).

**Table 1:** shows the regression result.

	B	SEB	β	t	Sig
Reading anxiety	2.85	.032	.168	53.67	.000
Anomie	.749	.042	.178	16.77	.000
R <sup>2</sup>	456				

Note. B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; SEB = Standardized error of the Coefficient; β = Standardized Coefficient; R<sup>2</sup> = Coefficient of determination. \*P<.000.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the assumption that reading anxiety and anomie will significantly predict examination misconduct in higher education. Preliminary data analyses were conducted initially to confirm that normality, linearity, and multicollinearity assumptions were not breached. The predictors (reading anxiety and anomie) significantly predicted academic dishonesty  $F(1,246), 36.52, P < .000$ . Most importantly, the  $R^2$  indicated that the predictor variables contributed to about 45.6% of the variance in examination misconduct among the respondents

### Discussion

The current study examined examination misconduct in higher education in Nigeria based on reading anxiety and anomie. Two hundred thirty-eight respondents completed the survey, and a multiple regression analysis of the results revealed a statistically significant interaction between the variables. This shows that reading anxiety ( $\beta = 168$ ) positively predicted examination misconduct among the respondents. In other words, the finding confirmed the assumption that reading anxiety will predict examination misconduct in higher education ( $H^1$ ). Thus the affective state of anxiousness relative to students' inclination to cheat would be strongly predicted by their reading skills. Therefore, the study suggests that reading anxiety is a component that might positively contribute to the development of cheating behavior in higher education in Nigeria. Indeed, the current outcome indicates that most students' subjective emotional reactions in response to tests provide a conduit for examination misconduct. The result is aligned with previous findings indicating a positive correlation between test anxiety and academic cheating (Behroozi et al., 2017; Hammoudi & Benzerroug, 2021; Mih & Mih, 2016; Nwosu et al., 2020; Wenzel & Reinhard, 2020). For example, the finding corroborates Bassey and Iruoje (2017), which reported that about 34.2% of the total variation in dishonest tendencies is accounted for by test anxiety. Hence, the result impacted knowledge regarding unethical behaviors in tertiary institutions. The current finding could be explained in line with the understanding that the inability to express learning in reading and fear of failure triggers anxiety and exacerbates alternative behavior. A previous study (Encandela et al., 2014) suggests that self-doubt during exam preparation can worsen reading anxiety and facilitate dishonest behavior.

Furthermore, the result demonstrated a positive relationship between anomie and examination misconduct in higher education ( $\beta = 178$ ). Accordingly, the result suggests that an individual's lack of the usual social and ethical standards appears to be a reinforcing mechanism in examination misconduct in higher education. The finding confirms the second hypothesis ( $H^2$ ) that anomie will positively predict examination misconduct. The result agrees with a previous study that linked anomie with dishonest academic behavior in university students (Caruana et al., 2000) and corroborates the conception that anomie is positively associated with deceptive, dishonest behavior (Choi et al., 2018). Accordingly, it appears that most dishonest behavior in academia (exam malpractices, plagiarism, bribery, and impersonation) might be partly attributed to anxiety caused by the inability to effectively communicate learned materials in reading form and a diminished social and ethical standard in an individual.

### The implication of the study

This study demonstrated that the predictor variables (reading anxiety and anomie) might provide a suitable pathway for examination misconduct in higher education. This could impact learning outcomes and jeopardize academic integrity in contemporary education society. Indeed, the result has implications for intellectual development and institutional integrity. It provided valuable data to educators and counselors to manage the menace of examination misconduct in academia.

### Conclusion

The present study examined the predictor role of reading anxiety and anomie in examination misconduct. Based on the analysis conducted on the data, the finding demonstrated that reading anxiety and anomie positively predicted cheating behavior. Indeed, the study concludes that students who feel nervousness and tension when confronted with a reading task and those disconnected from ethical guidelines are more likely to engage in examination misconduct in higher education. Notably, the assumptions of the study are affirmed. The findings contribute to the literature by revealing reading anxiety and anomie as socio-psychological phenomena that could motivate misconduct in higher education in Nigeria. Although, the study is challenged with certain limitations. For instance, the study was unable to determine the cause-effect relationship. Future researchers should employ an experimental approach. Also, the self-reported measures could give room for biased reporting. Thus, a multiple data collection method might limit the incidence of false information. However, the study recommends recognizing reading anxiety and anomie in students and providing adequate mechanisms to minimize the trend.

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