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Analyzing the Prevalence and Factor Contributing to Examination Malpractice in Nigerian University (Case Study Federal University Lokoja)

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Abstract- ***This study investigates the prevalence and underlying factors of examination malpractice at Nigerian University using a mixed-methods approach. It explores the extent of malpractice across faculties and academic levels, socio-economic drivers, and the academic and institutional consequences. Results reveal that examination malpractice remains a significant challenge, with a notable proportion of students reporting direct involvement or observation. Although, financial pressures and family expectations were not consistently cited as major contributors, the competitive job market emerged as a key factor motivating unethical practices. The study also highlights the detrimental effects of malpractice on students' academic performance, professional readiness, and the university's reputation. To address these issues, a multifaceted approach is recommended, including stricter enforcement of regulations, targeted awareness campaigns, enhanced student support services, and periodic policy reviews to strengthen academic integrity and institutional credibility.***

Index Terms- ***Academic Integrity, Examination Malpractice, Higher Education; Policy Enforcement, Student Behavior***

I. INTRODUCTION

Examination malpractice has emerged as a pervasive issue within the Nigerian educational system, particularly in universities. This unethical practice encompasses various forms of cheating during examinations, including but not limited to, the use of unauthorized materials, impersonation, and collusion between students and exam officials. The prevalence of this phenomenon undermines the integrity of the educational process, casting doubts on the credibility of academic qualifications awarded by Nigerian institutions (Adedeji & Olatunji, 2021). According to the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), there has been a noticeable increase in cases of examination malpractice over the past decade, with Nigerian universities being significant contributors to these statistics (WAEC, 2020).

Several factors contribute to the high incidence of examination malpractice in Nigerian Universities. Among these, the intense pressure to succeed academically stands out. Students often face immense expectations from their families and society at large to excel in their studies, leading some to resort to unethical means to secure good grades (Nwaokugha & Onyeike, 2022). Additionally, the lack of adequate preparation and the fear of failure further push students towards engaging in malpractice. Institutional weaknesses, such as inadequate supervision during examinations and the complicity of some corrupt officials, exacerbate the problem, making it difficult to effectively curb this menace (Omonijo et al., 2021).

The implications of examination malpractice are far-reaching, affecting not only the individual students involved but also the broader educational system and society. When students graduate without genuinely acquiring the requisite knowledge and skills, they are ill-prepared for the workforce, which can lead to reduced productivity and inefficiencies in various sectors of the economy. Furthermore, the persistent issue of examination malpractice tarnishes the reputation of Nigerian universities on the global stage, potentially affecting international collaborations and the recognition of Nigerian qualifications abroad (Adeyemi & Oyetakin, 2020). Addressing this challenge requires a multifaceted approach, including stringent policy enforcement, technological interventions, and a cultural shift towards valuing academic integrity.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Examination malpractice in Nigeria is not a recent phenomenon. Its roots can be traced back to the early years of formalized education and standardized examinations in the country. Historical accounts suggest that incidents of cheating were reported as far back as the 1970s, coinciding with the expansion of secondary and tertiary education (Alutu, 2005). Initially, malpractice was relatively unsophisticated, often involving whispering answers in examination halls, writing notes on the palms of hands, or using "microchips" — small slips of paper containing prepared answers. By the 1980s and 1990s, examination malpractice became more organized and widespread. This period marked the rise of syndicated cheating networks, where external collaborators, including teachers, exam officials, and even community members, assisted students in circumventing examination rules (Ogunji, 2011). The commercialization of malpractice also became evident during this era, as some individuals or groups began to profit by selling leaked exam papers or offering "assistance" during exams.

The advent of technology in the 2000s significantly transformed the methods of malpractice. Mobile phones, programmable calculators, and later, internet-enabled devices provided new avenues for accessing or sharing information during examinations (Akaranga & Ongong, 2013). Cases of students storing notes on phones, exchanging answers via text messages, or browsing online during exams were increasingly documented. This technological shift added complexity to the malpractice problem, as traditional invigilation techniques proved inadequate to detect or deter sophisticated cheating methods.

In more recent years, the problem has escalated further with the proliferation of social media and encrypted messaging platforms. Online groups dedicated to sharing examination answers in real time have emerged, making malpractice a collective and coordinated effort rather than an individual act (Ezekiel, Nwokocha & Obasi, 2020). This digital dimension has forced universities and examination bodies such as WAEC and JAMB to adopt stricter monitoring systems, including biometric verification and surveillance technologies, yet malpractice remains resilient.

The persistence of examination malpractice throughout Nigeria's educational history reflects broader societal issues. A culture that prioritizes certificate acquisition over actual competence has inadvertently encouraged students to adopt dishonest strategies as a survival mechanism (Aluede, Oni & Imoize, 2006). Furthermore, the rapid expansion of education without corresponding investments in infrastructure, teaching resources, and student support systems has contributed to an environment where malpractice thrives.

Thus, the historical evolution of examination malpractice in Nigeria illustrates a pattern of adaptation. As authorities introduce new measures, students and their collaborators develop more innovative strategies to bypass them. This underscores the need for continuous, multidimensional interventions that address not only the methods of malpractice but also the underlying socio-economic and institutional conditions that sustain it.

Examination malpractice has reached alarming proportions in Nigeria's higher education system, making it one of the most persistent challenges to academic integrity. Reports from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC, 2020) consistently show rising numbers of malpractice cases over the past decade, with Nigerian universities accounting for a significant share. For instance, leaked reports indicate that entire exam centers have sometimes been flagged for collusion, suggesting that malpractice is not just an individual act but also a systemic issue.

Empirical studies also reinforce this trend. Adedeji and Olatunji (2021) reported that nearly 60% of students surveyed in Nigerian universities admitted to engaging in one form of malpractice, ranging from copying in exams to impersonation. Similarly, Nwaokugha and Onyeike (2022) found that malpractice is often normalized among undergraduates, with many students perceiving it as a "necessary evil" to survive in a competitive academic environment.

The widespread nature of malpractice raises serious concerns about the credibility of degrees awarded by Nigerian universities. Employers, both locally and internationally, have expressed growing skepticism about the competence of graduates, citing

malpractice as one of the underlying reasons for skill gaps in the labor force (Adeyemi & Oyetakin, 2020).

Individual-level motivations play a critical role in driving examination malpractice. One of the most frequently cited reasons is fear of failure, which is exacerbated by high academic expectations from families and society. Many students believe their self-worth and future success depend on securing good grades, pushing them toward dishonest practices when they feel unprepared (Nwaokugha & Onyeike, 2022).

Another key factor is inadequate preparation. Students who procrastinate or lack access to adequate study resources often see cheating as a quick fix to bridge their knowledge gaps (Nduka & Igwe, 2017). Psychological stress also contributes significantly: exam-related anxiety can impair students' confidence in their ability to succeed honestly, making malpractice seem like a rational coping strategy (Olasehinde-Williams, 2020).

Furthermore, peer influence amplifies the problem. When students observe their peers cheating successfully without facing consequences, they are more likely to emulate such behaviors, reinforcing a cycle of dishonesty (Adebayo, 2020). Thus, individual motivations are intertwined with the broader academic culture, making malpractice difficult to curb through punitive measures alone.

Institutional weaknesses are arguably the most enabling conditions for examination malpractice. Poorly monitored examination environments provide opportunities for students to cheat with little fear of detection. For example, cases of overcrowded examination halls with insufficient invigilators are common in Nigerian universities, making it difficult to enforce discipline (Omonijo et al., 2021).

Weak enforcement of rules further exacerbates the problem. Although most universities have formal policies against malpractice, inconsistent application of penalties undermines their effectiveness. When students perceive that offenders are rarely punished—or that penalties can be negotiated away—they are emboldened to cheat (Okafor & Okolie, 2020).

Corruption among staff also plays a role. Bamgboye (2019) documented cases where lecturers or exam officials accepted bribes in exchange for turning a blind eye or altering grades. On the other hand, universities with robust monitoring systems, such as electronic surveillance or computer-based testing, tend to report lower rates of malpractice, suggesting that institutional vigilance is a powerful deterrent (Olatunji, 2021).

Examination malpractice is also linked to broader socio-economic pressures. Many students come from low-income households where families make significant financial sacrifices to fund their education. The fear of disappointing parents or losing sponsorship motivates some to cheat as a way of guaranteeing success (Audu, Bako & Idris, 2018).

Financial hardship also limits access to essential learning materials such as textbooks, private lessons, or digital resources. In such cases, malpractice becomes a means of "levelling the playing field" against peers who have better support (Adamu, 2020). Additionally, the competitive job market places enormous pressure on students to achieve top grades, often regardless of their actual competence. Employers in Nigeria typically emphasize certificates over skills, further incentivizing malpractice as a strategy for survival (Ibrahim & Shuaibu, 2019).

Thus, socio-economic realities intersect with academic pressures to foster a climate where malpractice is seen not merely as opportunism, but as a rational response to systemic inequities.

The rapid advancement of technology has significantly transformed examination malpractice, introducing new and sophisticated methods. Mobile phones are perhaps the most widely used tools, enabling students to store information, exchange answers via SMS or WhatsApp, or access internet resources during examinations (Chukwudi, 2021).
Smart devices such as programmable calculators, Bluetooth-enabled earpieces, and smartwatches have further complicated the monitoring of exams. These tools allow students to conceal large volumes of information in ways that are difficult for invigilators to detect (Ezekiel, Nwokocha & Obasi, 2020).

The rise of social media and encrypted messaging platforms has added another dimension, enabling

real-time sharing of exam questions and answers. In some cases, organized groups coordinate malpractice across entire classes or faculties, turning it into a collective rather than individual enterprise (Iroha, 2021).

While technology enhances learning opportunities, its misuse in examinations underscores the need for institutions to adopt counter-technologies, such as signal jammers, computer-based testing, and plagiarism detection software, as part of broader anti-malpractice strategies (Obafemi & Adediran, 2021).

The consequences of examination malpractice are far-reaching, affecting not only the individual student but also the education system, society, and the economy at large. Academically, malpractice undermines the credibility of examinations as a tool for assessing learning. When grades no longer reflect actual competence, the value of qualifications diminishes, leading to a decline in educational standards (Adedeji & Olatunji, 2021). Socially, the widespread acceptance of malpractice fosters a culture of dishonesty, where unethical shortcuts are normalized. Students who succeed through malpractice may carry the same unethical attitudes into professional and civic life, perpetuating corruption in society (Aluede, Oni & Imoize, 2006). Economically, examination malpractice produces graduates who are poorly equipped for the workforce. This mismatch between certification and competence contributes to high unemployment, underemployment, and reduced productivity (Bulus, 2019). Furthermore, Nigerian degrees risk losing international recognition, as persistent malpractice erodes the credibility of the country's entire education system (Adeyemi & Oyetakin, 2020).

In sum, the long-term consequences of malpractice extend far beyond the exam hall, threatening national development and Nigeria's competitiveness in the global knowledge economy.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design with a quantitative orientation to investigate the prevalence, drivers, and consequences of examination malpractice among undergraduates at Federal University Lokoja (FUL). A descriptive survey is appropriate when the objective is to systematically describe a phenomenon, estimate its prevalence, and examine associations among variables using standardized instruments across a defined population (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Structured questionnaires enabled consistent measurement across respondents and supported descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) and inferential tests aligned to your analyses (independent-samples t-tests across academic levels). The quantitative approach enhances objectivity, replicability, and generalizability within the institution (Fowler, 2014; Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Study Area (Federal University Lokoja)

The study was conducted at Federal University Lokoja (FUL), Kogi State, Nigeria. Consistent with your Chapter Four data, respondents were drawn from five faculties—Science, Arts, Social Science, Management Science, and Education—capturing varied academic subcultures and assessment regimes within one institution. Selecting a single-institution case with multiple faculties allowed us to control for national-level variations while still capturing intra-institutional heterogeneity in assessment practices and student experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The FUL context is suitable because it reflects the pressures typical of Nigerian public universities (large cohorts, resource constraints, competitive labor market expectations), which are salient to malpractice dynamics.

Population of the Study

The target population comprised all undergraduate students enrolled across the five faculties at FUL during the study period. The study population from which the sample was drawn covered undergraduates at 100, 200, 300, and 400 levels. Defining the population this way is consistent with survey research guidance explicitly delimiting the elements, setting, and time frame ensures sampling frames and estimates are interpretable (Kothari, 2004; Fowler, 2014).

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling strategy was used to enhance representation and reduce sampling error (Lohr, 2019). Two stratification axes were applied in line with your analysis:

- Faculty strata: Science, Arts, Social Science, Management Science, Education.

- Academic level strata: 100, 200, 300, 400 level.

Within each stratum, students were selected via simple random sampling, ensuring all members had equal probability of selection (Cochran, 1977). The realized sample was n = 100.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a self-developed structured questionnaire and all attitudinal items used a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree (Likert, 1932). Item construction followed scale development guidance: clear stems, single constructs per item, balanced wording, and domain coverage to support content validity (DeVellis, 2017; Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2014).

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

Content validity was ensured through expert review in research methods/educational measurement, checking for construct coverage, clarity, and alignment with the study objectives (Haynes, Richard & Kubany, 1995; DeVellis, 2017). Cognitive pretesting was used to refine wording and response options (Dillman et al., 2014). Internal consistency reliability for multi-item sections (Prevalence; Socio-economic factors; Impacts) was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with $\alpha \geq .70$ interpreted as acceptable for group-level inferences (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). (Alpha coefficients for each section are reported in the Appendix alongside the final instrument.)

Method of Data Collection

Following departmental permission and ethical clearance procedures, questionnaires were administered in person across lecture venues in the five faculties. Students were briefed on the study aim, voluntary participation, and anonymity/confidentiality. To minimize nonresponse and social desirability bias, administration avoided examination sessions, ensured no lecturer presence, and allowed private completion (Dillman et al., 2014; Fowler, 2014). All completed questionnaires were screened; 100 valid responses were retained for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in sequential phases using IBM SPSS. The dataset was first cleaned and coded, with verification of value ranges, checks for missing data, and cross-field consistency. Descriptive statistics were then computed: demographic variables were summarized with frequencies and percentages, while Likert-type items and composite scales were summarized with means and standard deviations (Field, 2018). An a priori decision rule guided interpretation, whereby item or scale means ≥ 3.00 indicated Accepted (agreement/endorsement) and means < 3.00 indicated Rejected/Neutral (Boone & Boone, 2012). Hypotheses were tested with independent-samples t-tests comparing (i) 100-level versus 400-level students on prevalence items (H01) and (ii) 200 level- versus 400-level students on socio-economic factors (H02). Standard assumptions were evaluated—group independence, approximate normality at the item/scale level, and the robustness of t-tests for Likert-type composites given adequate sample sizes; Levene's test informed equal-variance decisions, and statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Field, 2018; Norman, 2010). Results were presented in tables reporting item means, standard deviations, and grand means for each construct (prevalence, socio-economic factors, and impacts).

Ethical Considerations

The study complied with standard research ethics principles: respect for persons (informed consent, voluntary participation), beneficence (minimal risk, debriefing), and justice (fair selection of participants) (The Belmont Report, 1979; BPS, 2018). No personally identifying data were collected; responses were anonymous and stored securely with access restricted to the research team. Participants were informed that they could decline or withdraw at any time without penalty. Institutional permissions were obtained prior to data collection, and the instrument avoided sensitive or incriminating questioning.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings from the data collected on the prevalence and factors contributing to examination malpractice at Federal University Lokoja. This chapter begins with an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, providing context for the subsequent analysis. It then quantifies the prevalence of examination malpractice, detailing the frequency and types reported. The chapter further examines the

contributing factors, categorized into institutional, student-related, and socio-economic factors, offering insights into how these elements influence malpractice occurrences.

Table 4.1 presents the distribution of respondents by faculty, indicating a balanced representation across the different faculties within Federal University Lokoja. The faculty of Science has the highest number of respondents, with 28 individuals, representing 28% of the total sample. This is followed by the faculties of Management Science and Art, each with 19 and 18 respondents respectively, both contributing to 18% of the total sample. The faculty of Social Science has 17 respondents, making up 17% of the sample, while the faculty of Education also has 18 respondents, accounting for 18% of the total.

Table 4.1: Distribution of the respondents by faculty

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Science	28	28
Art	18	18
Social Science	17	17
Management Science	19	19
Education	18	18
Total	100	100

Table 4.2 shows the distribution of respondents by their level of study at Federal University Lokoja. The 400 level has the highest respondents with 42% of the total sample, followed by the 200 level with 29%. The 100 level and 300 level have fewer respondents, accounting for 18% and 11% respectively. This distribution suggests that insights into examination malpractice primarily come from more senior students, who have more experience with the university's examination processes.

Table 4.2: Distribution of the respondents by level

Level	Frequency	Percentage
100	18	18
200	29	29
300	11	11
400	42	42
Total	100	100

The data in table 4.3 reveals that examination malpractice is widely acknowledged among students at Federal University Lokoja. The highest agreement is with the statement that malpractice is a common issue (Mean = 4.01), followed closely by students' personal experiences witnessing or engaging in malpractice (Mean = 3.85). The use of unauthorized materials is also recognized as prevalent (Mean = 3.37), indicating a clear awareness of dishonest practices during exams. However, the relatively lower mean (2.63) for the frequency of reported cases suggests that while malpractice is perceived as widespread, it may not be consistently reported or publicly addressed. The grand mean of 3.47 confirms a general consensus among respondents that examination malpractice is a significant issue on campus.

Table 4.3: Summary of apparent prevalence of examination malpractice

Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
Examination malpractice is a common issue among students	4.01	1.02	Accepted
I have personally witnessed or experienced examination malpractice	3.85	1.21	Accepted
Use of unauthorized materials is prevalent	3.37	1.45	Accepted
There are frequent reports of students engaging in malpractice	2.63	1.29	Rejected
Grand Mean	3.47	–	–

The bar chart in figure 4.1 visually highlights students' perceptions of the consequences of examination malpractice. The highest rated impact is the diminished credibility of academic qualifications, followed closely by concerns that malpractice leaves students unprepared for their careers. Many also agree that it undermines academic performance and integrity. However, the least agreed upon impact is that malpractice negatively affects the university's reputation, suggesting that students may internalize the consequences more personally than institutionally.

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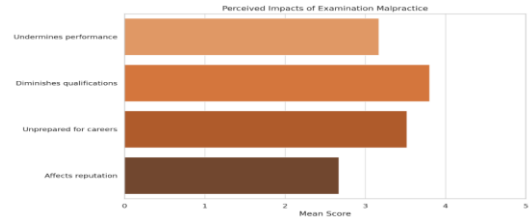

Figure 4.1: Apparent Impacts of Examination Malpractice

The data in Table 4.4 indicates that, overall, students do not strongly perceive socio-economic conditions as primary drivers of examination malpractice at Federal University Lokoja. Most factors, such as financial pressures, family expectations, economic instability, and low-income background, received mean scores below the threshold of 3.0, leading to their rejection as significant influences. However, the competitive job market stands out with a mean score of 3.24, the only factor accepted as a contributor. This suggests that while personal or household financial conditions may not directly drive malpractice, external societal pressures related to future employment prospects do influence student behavior.

Table 4.4: Summary of Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Malpractice

Factor	Mean	SD	Decision
Financial pressures	2.87	1.23	Rejected
Family expectations	2.57	1.33	Rejected
Competitive job market	3.24	1.15	Accepted
Low-income background	2.62	1.18	Rejected
Economic instability	2.54	1.15	Rejected
Grand Mean	2.77	–	–

The bar chart in figure 4.2 illustrates students' perception of various socio-economic factors in relation to examination malpractice. Among the five items, job market pressure stands out with the highest mean score, indicating that students feel the competitive demand for good grades to secure future employment contributes to malpractice. In contrast, factors like economic instability, low-income background, family expectations, and financial pressures all scored below the neutral midpoint (3.0), suggesting they are not widely seen as strong motivators for malpractice behavior.

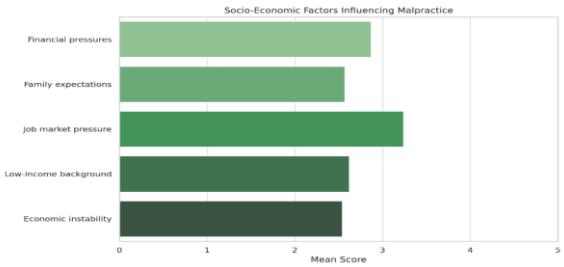

Figure 4.2: Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Malpractice

The results in Table 4.5 show that students recognize serious personal and academic consequences of examination malpractice. The highest-rated impact is that it diminishes the credibility of academic qualifications (Mean = 3.80), suggesting that students are concerned about how malpractice undermines the value of their degrees. This is closely followed by agreement that malpractice leaves students unprepared for professional careers (Mean = 3.52) and undermines academic performance and integrity (Mean = 3.17). Interestingly, the lowest rating (Mean = 2.67) was for the statement that malpractice damages the university's reputation, which was rejected. This implies that while students internalize the personal risks, they may not fully associate malpractice with broader institutional harm. The grand mean of 3.29 confirms an overall agreement that malpractice has significant long-term consequences, especially at the individual level.

Table 4.5: Impact of Examination Malpractice

Factor	Mean	SD	Decision
Undermines academic performance/integrity	3.17	1.36	Accepted
Diminishes credibility of qualifications	3.80	1.28	Accepted
Leads to unprepared graduates	3.52	1.32	Accepted
Damages university's reputation	2.67	1.25	Rejected
Grand Mean	3.29	–	–

The chart provides a clear visual summary of students' perceptions regarding the prevalence of examination malpractice at Federal University Lokoja. The highest agreement is on the statement

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that malpractice is common (Mean ≈ 4.0), followed closely by students who have witnessed it firsthand. Although, many acknowledge the use of unauthorized materials during exams, there is a noticeable drop in agreement when it comes to frequent reports of malpractice, suggesting a gap between what students observe and what is formally reported.

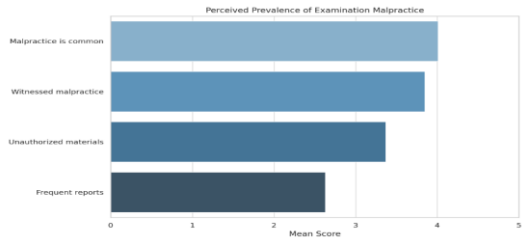

Figure 4.3: Apparent Prevalence of Examination Malpractice

A comparative t-test was conducted to examine differences in the prevalence of examination malpractice between 100-level and 400-level students. Four key indicators were assessed: perceptions that malpractice is common, witnessing malpractice, use of unauthorized materials, and frequency of reported cases. Although 400-level students reported slightly higher mean scores than 100-level students across most items, none of the differences were statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). These results indicate that both entry-level and final-year students share similar experiences and perceptions regarding examination malpractice. The findings suggest that malpractice is a persistent issue throughout students' academic progression, rather than one concentrated at a particular level of study. The lack of significant differences between 100-level and 400-level students highlights the need for consistent, institution-wide interventions to address examination malpractice. Preventive measures, such as stricter enforcement of examination policies, targeted awareness campaigns, and the integration of ethics education early in students' academic careers, may help reduce malpractice uniformly across all levels. These results suggest that the prevalence and perception of examination malpractice remain consistent across entry and final-year students, implying that the issue persists throughout students' academic progression without substantial variation by academic level.

Table 4.6: Comparative T-Test Results: 100 vs 400 Level (Prevalence)

Statement	Level	Mean	t-stat	p-value	Decision
Malpractice is common	100 400	3.67 3.75	-0.208	0.736	No sig. diff.
Witnessed malpractice	100 400	4.00 4.50	-1.058	0.468	No sig. diff.
Use of unauthorized materials	100 400	3.06 3.00	0.095	1.253	No sig. diff.
Frequent reports	100 400	2.33 2.92	-1.184	0.426	No sig. diff.

In table 4.7; a comparative t-test was conducted to examine differences between 200-level and 400-level students regarding socio-economic factors contributing to examination malpractice. The factors assessed included financial pressures, family expectations, job market pressure, low-income background, and economic instability. The results show that mean scores for 400-level students were generally slightly higher than those for 200-level students across most factors. However, except for job market pressure, none of the differences were statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Job market pressure emerged as the only factor showing a significant difference, indicating that 400-level students experience greater influence from the competitive job market compared to 200-level students. These findings suggest that while socio-economic factors like financial pressures and family expectations are consistent across academic levels, the transition toward graduation intensifies job market-related stress. This highlights the need for targeted interventions such as career guidance, mentorship, and stress-management programs to support final-year students as they prepare for employment, reducing the likelihood of unethical behaviors linked to job market anxieties.

Table 4.7: Comparative T-Test Results: 200 vs 400 Level (Socio-Economic Factors)

Statement	Level	Mean	t-stat	p-value	Decision
Financial pressures	200 400	2.72 2.93	-0.694	0.38	No sig. diff.
Family expectations	200 400	2.45 2.66	-0.651	0.434	No sig. diff.
Job market pressure	200 400	2.90 3.61	-2.607	0.167	Significant diff.
Low-income background	200 400	2.86 2.56	1.036	0.881	No sig. diff.
Economic instability	200 400	2.66 2.37	1.099	0.815	No sig. diff.

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V. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

This study set out to examine the prevalence, contributing factors, and impacts of examination malpractice among students at Federal University Lokoja. Using a descriptive survey design and a structured questionnaire, data was collected from a sample of 100 students drawn from various faculties and academic levels. The research aimed to uncover both the students lived experiences with malpractice and their perceptions of the causes and consequences of this growing concern in the Nigerian university system. Outcomes from the study reveal that examination malpractice is widely perceived as a serious and recurring issue within the university. Most students agreed that malpractice is common, and a large number indicated that they had either witnessed or experienced it directly. The use of unauthorized materials during examinations was acknowledged as prevalent, although fewer students believed that malpractice is frequently reported or formally addressed by the institution. The data showed a more nuanced result, when assessing the influence of socio-economic factors. Out of the five socio-economic variables examined, only the pressure created by the competitive job market was accepted as a significant driver of malpractice. Other factors such as financial hardship, family expectations, low-income backgrounds, and economic instability were generally rejected as key motivators by the respondents. With regard to the consequences of malpractice, students strongly agreed that it negatively affects academic performance, diminishes the credibility of academic qualifications, and leaves students ill-prepared for their professional futures. Interestingly, the impact on the university's reputation was not widely accepted as significant, indicating that students may internalize the consequences more on a personal than institutional level.

Finally, the comparative analysis between different academic levels revealed no significant differences in how 100-level and 400-level students perceived the prevalence of malpractice. Likewise, there was no significant variation in how 200-level and 400-level students viewed the influence of socio-economic factors, except for job market pressure, which was rated significantly higher among final-year students. This suggests that students across all academic levels have a consistent awareness of malpractice, but the urgency to succeed in a competitive labor market grows stronger with academic progression.

In light of the findings from this study, the following recommendations are proposed to help curb examination malpractice and promote academic integrity at Federal University Lokoja and other similar institutions:

1. Strengthen Examination Monitoring and Enforcement Mechanisms: The University should invest in stricter invigilation procedures and surveillance tools during examinations. This includes training invigilators to detect and prevent malpractice, using seating arrangements that discourage cheating, and implementing digital monitoring systems where feasible.
2. Institutionalize Academic Integrity Policies: Clear, well-communicated policies on examination misconduct should be established and consistently enforced. Every student should be aware of what constitutes malpractice, the penalties attached, and the long-term consequences. This should be included in orientation programs and reinforced at key academic stages.
3. Provide Academic Support Services: Many students resort to malpractice due to inadequate preparation. Establishing or expanding academic support systems such as tutoring, revision sessions, study groups, and counseling services can help students build the confidence and competence to succeed honestly.
4. Address Job Market Pressures through Career Readiness Programs: Since students identified job market competition as a major influence, universities should provide employability training, internship placements, and skill development workshops. Preparing students for life after graduation can help shift the focus from grades to competence.
5. Create Awareness Campaigns on the Consequences of Malpractice: Sensitization programs, through seminars, posters, social media, and drama presentations should be used to highlight the dangers of examination malpractice. Emphasizing long-term consequences like unemployability and reputational damage can help shift student mindsets.
6. Promote Ethical Culture Across Campus: Faculty and staff must model integrity in their own conduct. When lecturers, administrators, and invigilators demonstrate fairness and accountability, it fosters a campus-wide culture of honesty.

Institutions must also hold staff accountable where complicity is suspected.

7. Involve Students in Policy Design: Engaging students in conversations around academic integrity and decision-making fosters ownership and compliance. Student unions and faculty representatives should be part of disciplinary committees or integrity boards where possible.

By implementing these recommendations, Federal University Lokoja can take proactive steps toward creating an environment that discourages malpractice and fosters excellence based on merit, transparency, and ethical values.

VI. CONCLUSION

Examination malpractice remains a persistent challenge in Nigerian universities, undermining both the quality of education and the credibility of academic qualifications. This study focused on Federal University Lokoja and explored the prevalence, contributing factors, and impacts of this unethical practice using a quantitative approach. The findings confirmed that malpractice is widely recognized among students, with many acknowledging its commonality and personal experience with it. Although, several socio-economic factors were assessed, only the pressure from the competitive job market emerged as a significant motivator. Other factors such as financial strain, family expectations, and economic instability were largely rejected by respondents. Importantly, the consequences of malpractice were seen as far-reaching, particularly in weakening academic performance and producing graduates who may be ill-equipped for the workforce. The study also revealed that perceptions of malpractice are relatively consistent across academic levels, suggesting that the problem is systemic rather than confined to particular cohorts. This emphasizes the need for a university-wide approach to policy and intervention. In conclusion, tackling examination malpractice requires a holistic, sustained, and collaborative effort from all stakeholders, including students, faculty, university management, and policymakers. By promoting academic integrity, offering support structures, and addressing root causes such as employability pressure, institutions can begin to reverse the trend and uphold the core values of education.

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