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Impact of Examination Misconduct on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how examination malpractice influences the academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria. To guide the research, four questions and corresponding hypotheses were developed. The study utilized a descriptive survey design. The target population consisted of 5,874 students from public secondary schools within Port Harcourt City. A sample of 400 students was selected using the Taro Yamane formula for determining sample size. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled “Examination Misconduct and Academic Performance Scale (EMAPS),” which was designed by the researcher. The instrument contained 20 items rated on a modified four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), with scores of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.74. To answer the research questions, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used, while the hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square (X^2) goodness-of-fit test at a 0.05 significance level. A benchmark mean of 2.50 was used for interpreting responses, with scores below 2.50 indicating negative or disagree responses. The results showed that examination misconduct significantly affects students’ class attendance, participation, study habits, and motivation. Based on these findings, one of the key recommendations was for schools to implement and enforce strict attendance policies, requiring students to meet a minimum attendance rate in order to qualify for examinations.

Keywords: Examination Misconduct, Academic Performance, Class Attendance, Class Participation, Study Habits and Motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Examinations are a fundamental component of educational systems across the world, serving as a universal measure of academic performance, learning progress, and competency evaluation. They play a critical role in certifying knowledge acquisition, determining academic progression, and ensuring that students meet the required standards for various professional and academic pursuits (OECD, 2019). However, the integrity of examinations is increasingly being threatened by examination misconduct, a global challenge that affects both developed and developing countries. In many parts of the world, including the United States, the United Kingdom, India, and China, incidents of cheating, impersonation, collusion, and use of unauthorized materials have been reported at various levels of education (McCabe, Butterfield, & Treviño, 2017). The widespread nature of this issue has prompted policymakers, educators,

and governments to implement stricter regulations, technological surveillance, and ethical education campaigns to curb malpractice in academic assessments.

Despite global efforts to uphold academic integrity, examination misconduct remains highly prevalent in Nigeria, particularly in secondary schools, where the pressure to succeed is immense (Adebayo, 2018). The problem has been fuelled by systemic issues such as poor study habits, lack of motivation, inadequate preparation, and a culture that often prioritizes success over merit. Reports from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO) indicate that cases of malpractice, including collusion, smuggling of unauthorized materials, and bribery, are on the rise, raising concerns about the credibility of academic qualifications in the country (Okorodudu, 2021).

Examinations are a cornerstone of educational systems worldwide, serving as tools for assessing students' academic performance, measuring learning outcomes, and ensuring the attainment of educational goals. However, the integrity of examinations is frequently compromised by acts of misconduct, a pervasive issue that undermines the validity and reliability of assessments. Examination misconduct refers to unethical or dishonest practices such as cheating, collusion, impersonation, and the use of unauthorized materials during examinations. This phenomenon is not only a global challenge but is also prevalent in Nigeria, particularly in secondary schools, where the pressure to achieve academic success is high (Adebayo, 2018). Examination misconduct is symptomatic of deeper issues in the educational system, such as inadequate preparation, lack of motivation, and poor study habits, which merit detailed exploration.

Academic performance, a key concept in this study, refers to the outcomes of students' learning processes, typically measured through grades, test scores, and teacher evaluations. Academic performance is crucial as it determines students' progress through educational levels and their readiness for future opportunities. Examination misconduct significantly influences academic performance, often creating a false representation of students' abilities. According to Ogundele and Ojo (2020), students who engage in malpractice may obtain higher grades, but their actual competencies remain undeveloped, leading to academic underperformance in subsequent endeavours. This fraudulent success has a ripple effect, affecting class participation, motivation, and other related behaviours.

Class attendance, another focal point of the study, is essential for effective learning. Regular attendance ensures that students are exposed to the full spectrum of instructional activities and enables them to engage actively in the learning process. However, examination misconduct may discourage consistent attendance. For instance, students who anticipate resorting to malpractice may see little value in attending classes regularly, thereby missing out on critical instruction and interactions (Eze, 2019). Furthermore, absenteeism correlates with poor performance and lower engagement, perpetuating a cycle of academic neglect and reliance on dishonest practices.

Similarly, class participation, which encompasses students' active involvement in classroom discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and other interactive activities, is integral to the learning process. Active participation fosters critical thinking, enhances understanding, and promotes knowledge retention. Examination misconduct undermines class participation, as students who resort to malpractice may lack the confidence to engage during lessons. Adeyanju (2021) highlights that students who habitually cheat often exhibit passive learning behaviours, relying on shortcuts rather than meaningful engagement with educational content.

Study habits are defined as the consistent practices and strategies students employ to prepare for examinations and complete academic tasks. Effective study habits include setting study schedules, reviewing materials, taking notes, and seeking clarification when needed. Poor study habits are both a cause and consequence of examination misconduct. Students with inadequate preparation often resort to cheating as a means of coping with academic demands. Conversely, students accustomed to malpractice may neglect developing proper study routines, further jeopardizing their academic success (Olawale, 2020).

Motivation, another critical variable, refers to the internal and external factors that drive students to achieve their academic goals. It can be intrinsic, stemming from personal interest and a desire for self-

improvement, or extrinsic, influenced by external rewards and pressures. Examination misconduct erodes intrinsic motivation, as students become focused on obtaining results by any means rather than valuing the learning process. According to Nwafor (2018), the normalization of malpractice in schools can create a culture where effort and diligence are undervalued, leading to a decline in students' drive to excel through legitimate means.

The relationship between examination misconduct and these academic behaviours is particularly concerning in Nigeria, where systemic issues such as inadequate infrastructure, overpopulated classrooms, and a lack of qualified teachers exacerbate the problem (Adamu & Bello, 2020). In Port Harcourt City, Nigeria, these challenges are compounded by societal pressures to succeed academically and a lenient attitude toward malpractice. Several studies conducted within Nigeria indicate that the prevalence of examination misconduct is higher in regions where educational resources are scarce, highlighting the need for localized interventions (Chukwuemeka, 2017; Olayemi, 2019).

Understanding how examination misconduct impacts class attendance, participation, study habits, and motivation is essential for addressing its root causes and consequences. This study, therefore, aims to explore these dynamics in secondary schools within Port Harcourt City, Nigeria, providing insights that could inform policies and practices aimed at promoting academic integrity. By focusing on this context, the research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on educational improvement in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for systemic reforms and targeted interventions to curb examination misconduct and enhance students' academic behaviours.

Statement of the Problem

Examination misconduct is a persistent challenge in the educational system, undermining the integrity of academic assessments and eroding the value of education. In Port Harcourt City, Nigeria, the prevalence of this unethical behaviour among secondary school students has raised concerns among educators, parents, and policy makers. Despite the implementation of various strategies to curb examination malpractice, its impact on students' academic behaviours remains a critical area of concern.

Evidence (Okolie, Nwosu, Eneje & Oluka, 2019; Amadi, 2022; Dadzie & Annan-Brew, 2023) suggests that examination misconduct may influence students' class attendance, participation, study habits, and overall motivation. When students rely on dishonest practices to succeed academically, they may neglect important aspects of the learning process, such as attending classes regularly or engaging actively during lessons. Similarly, their study habits may deteriorate, and their intrinsic motivation to learn could weaken, as success becomes linked to malpractice rather than effort and discipline. While numerous studies have focused on the causes of examination misconduct, there is limited research exploring its specific effects on students' academic behaviours in the context of Port Harcourt City, Nigeria. Understanding these effects is crucial, as they may have long-term implications for students' educational outcomes and personal development. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the impact of examination misconduct on class attendance, class participation, study habits, and motivation among secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. what is the impact of examination misconduct on class attendance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria?
2. what is the impact of examination misconduct on class participation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria?
3. what is the impact of examination misconduct on study habits of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria?
4. what is the impact of examination misconduct on motivation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. examination misconduct has no significant impact on class attendance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.
2. examination misconduct has no significant impact on class participation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.
3. examination misconduct has no significant impact on study habits of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.
4. examination misconduct has no significant impact on motivation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 5,874 public secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria. A sample of 400 students was selected using the Taro Yamane formula for determining appropriate sample size from a known population. Data were collected using a structured, researcher-developed instrument titled *Examination Misconduct and Academic Performance Scale (EMAPS)*. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items designed to assess students' perceptions of examination misconduct and its impact on academic performance. It utilized a modified four-point Likert scale with response options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), assigned values of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. To determine the internal consistency of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted, and the reliability coefficient was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.74, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability for the study. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation to address the research questions. Hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square (X^2) goodness-of-fit test at the 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used for decision-making; scores below 2.50 were interpreted as negative responses or disagreement.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Research Question 1: *What is the impact of examination misconduct on class attendance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria?*

Table 1: Analysis of Impact of Examination Misconduct on Class Attendance of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

S/N	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Examination malpractice reduces my motivation to attend classes regularly.	46	189	76	89	2.48	.96	Rejected
2	I often miss classes because I believe I can still pass through examination misconduct.	117	194	33	56	2.93	.97	Accepted
3	Students who engage in cheating are less committed to attending lessons.	60	243	62	35	2.82	.79	Accepted
4	Schools with a high rate of examination malpractice experience lower student attendance.	49	222	73	56	2.66	.87	Accepted
5	I feel no need to attend all my classes since I can rely on external help during exams.	51	184	95	70	2.54	.93	Accepted
Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation						\bar{X} = 2.68	SD = .902	Accepted

Table 1 indicates that the mean ratings of respondents' responses for items 1 to 5 are 2.48, 2.93, 2.82, 2.66, and 2.54 with corresponding standard deviations of .96, .97, .79, .87, and .93 respectively. Respondents rated all items except item 1 above the 2.50 cut-off point. The cluster mean of 2.68 with the

cluster standard deviation of .902 is above the cut-off point of 2.50 which indicates that examination misconduct has impact on class attendance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: *What is the impact of examination misconduct on class participation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria?*

Table 2: Analysis of Impact of Examination Misconduct on Class Participation of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

S/N	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
6	I rarely participate in class discussions because I know I can rely on cheating during exams.	275	90	35	0	3.60	.65	Accepted
7	Students involved in examination malpractice often avoid answering questions in class.	62	245	58	35	2.83	.79	Accepted
8	My engagement in class activities has reduced since I started depending on examination malpractice.	53	129	107	111	2.31	1.018	Rejected
9	I see no need to participate in classroom discussions when I can pass exams through malpractice.	51	279	56	14	2.92	.63	Accepted
10	Teachers in schools where cheating is common struggle to get students to participate in lessons.	56	203	71	70	2.61	.93	Accepted
Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation $\bar{X}= 2.85$ SD= .8038								Accepted

Table 2 indicates that the mean ratings of respondents' responses for items 6 to 10 are 3.60, 2.83, 2.31, 2.92, and 2.61 with corresponding standard deviations of .65, .79, 1.018, .63, and .93 respectively. Respondents rated all items except item 8 above the 2.50 cut-off point. The cluster mean of 2.85 with the cluster standard deviation of .80 is above the cut-off point of 2.50 which indicates that examination misconduct has impact on class participation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Research Question 3: *What is the impact of examination misconduct on study habits of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria?*

Table 3: Analysis of Impact of Examination Misconduct on Study Habits of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

S/N	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
11	I spend less time studying because I believe I can pass exams through malpractice.	117	188	12	83	2.85	1.064	Accepted
12	Examination malpractice has negatively affected my personal study routine.	92	223	12	73	2.84	.982	Accepted
13	Students who cheat in exams tend to have poor reading and revision habits.	123	184	29	64	2.92	1.008	Accepted
14	I find it unnecessary to prepare for exams when I have access to external assistance.	58	232	36	74	2.69	.937	Accepted
15	Engaging in examination malpractice has made me less committed to academic excellence.	135	162	15	88	2.86	1.113	Accepted
Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation $\bar{X}= 2.83$ SD= 1.02								Accepted

Table 3 indicates that the mean ratings of respondents' responses for items 11 to 15 are 2.85, 2.84, 2.92, 2.69, and 2.86 with corresponding standard deviations of 1.008, .910, 1.039, .918, and 1.115 respectively. Respondents rated all items above the 2.50 cut-off point. The cluster mean of 2.83 with the cluster standard deviation of 1.02 is above the cut-off point of 2.50 which indicates that examination misconduct has impact on study habits of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Research Question 4: *What is the impact of examination misconduct on motivation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria?*

Table 4: Analysis of Impact of Examination Misconduct on Motivation of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

S/N	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
16	Examination malpractice has reduced my motivation to work hard academically.	120	160	80	40	2.90	.95	Accepted
17	I feel less interested in studying since I know I can pass through cheating.	320	60	20	0	3.75	.54	Accepted
18	The availability of exam malpractice options discourages students from setting academic goals.	160	180	40	20	3.20	.81	Accepted
19	Students who engage in cheating have lower confidence in their academic abilities.	183	139	42	36	3.17	.95	Accepted
20	My drive to excel in school has weakened because of the ease of examination malpractice.	170	172	1	57	3.14	.99	Accepted
Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation $\bar{X}= 3.23$ SD= .85								Accepted

Table 4 indicates that the mean ratings of respondents' responses for items 16 to 20 are 2.90, 3.75, 3.20, 3.17, and 3.14 with corresponding standard deviations of .95, .53, .81, .95, and .99 respectively. Respondents rated all items above the 2.50 cut-off point. The cluster mean of 3.23 with the cluster standard deviation of .85 is above the cut-off point of 2.50 which indicates that examination misconduct has impact on motivation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Hypotheses Testing

In testing the hypotheses of this study, Chi-square (X^2) was used to test the responses of respondents at .05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1

Examination misconduct has no significant impact on class attendance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Table 5: Chi-square Test of Impact of Examination Misconduct on Class Attendance of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Response	O	E	df.	Level of sign.	X^2_{cal}	P-value	Decision
			3	.05	115.340	.000	Sig.
SA	46	100.0					
A	189	100.0					
D	76	100.0					
SD	89	100.0					
Total	400						

Table 5 revealed that $\chi^2 = 115.340$, $df = 3$ and $p = 0.00$. Since the p-value of 0.00 is less than the set alpha-value of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) at 3 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis which states that examination misconduct has no significant impact on class attendance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria is therefore, rejected. This implies that examination misconduct has significant impact on class attendance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2

Examination misconduct has no significant impact on class participation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Table 6: Chi-square Test of Impact of Examination Misconduct on Class Participation of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Response	O	E	df.	Level of sign.	X ² cal	P-value	Decision
			3	.05	32.200	.000	Sig.
SA	53	100.0					
A	129	100.0					A
D	107	100.0					
SD	111	100.0					
Total	400						

Table 6 revealed that $\chi^2 = 32.200$, $df = 3$ and $p = 0.00$. Since the p-value of 0.00 is less than the set alpha-value of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) at 3 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis which states that examination misconduct has no significant impact on class participation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria is therefore, rejected. This implies that examination misconduct has significant impact on class participation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3

Examination misconduct has no significant impact on study habits of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Table 7: Chi-square Test of Impact of Examination Misconduct on Study Habits of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Response	O	E	df.	Level of sign.	X ² cal	P-value	Decision
			3	.05	124.380	.000	Sig.
SA	135	100.0					
A	162	100.0					
D	15	100.0					
SD	88	100.0					
Total	400						

Table 7 revealed that $\chi^2 = 124.380$, $df = 3$ and $p = 0.00$. Since the p-value of 0.00 is less than the set alpha-value of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) at 3 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis which states that examination misconduct has no significant impact on study habits of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria is therefore, rejected. This implies that examination misconduct has significant impact on study habits of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 4

Examination misconduct has no significant impact on motivation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Table 8: Chi-square Test of Impact of Examination Misconduct on Motivation of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Response	O	E	df.	Level of sign.	X ² cal	P-value	Decision
			3	.05	80.000	.000	Sig.
SA	120	100.0					
A	160	100.0					
D	80	100.0					
SD	40	100.0					
Total	400						

Table 8 revealed that $\chi^2 = 80.000$, $df = 3$ and $p = 0.00$. Since the p -value of 0.00 is less than the set alpha-value of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) at 3 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis which states that examination misconduct has no significant impact on motivation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria is therefore, rejected. This implies that examination misconduct has significant impact on motivation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of the findings of this research was organized around the research questions and hypotheses. The four null hypotheses that were postulated and tested were all rejected.

The first finding of the study revealed that examination misconduct has significant impact on class attendance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria. Examination misconduct has a profound effect on students' class attendance, as it diminishes their motivation to attend lessons regularly. When students become reliant on dishonest practices to pass their exams, they see less value in attending classes, believing that their grades are guaranteed regardless of their participation in formal learning (Adeyemi, 2010). This attitude results in increased absenteeism, which negatively impacts their understanding of key concepts and reduces their engagement with teachers and peers (Uche & Ekezie, 2019). Additionally, studies have shown that students who frequently engage in examination malpractice tend to prioritize social activities over academic responsibilities, further contributing to irregular class attendance (Olatunji, 2017). The long-term consequences of this trend include poor academic performance, difficulty in grasping complex subjects, and ultimately, a lower chance of success in future academic and professional endeavors. Regular class attendance is essential for effective learning, as it allows students to receive direct instruction, ask questions, and participate in discussions. However, examination misconduct disrupts this process by creating an environment where students no longer see the necessity of actively engaging with their education.

The second finding of the study revealed that examination misconduct has significant impact on class participation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria. Many students who engage in cheating lose interest in learning because they no longer see the need to actively contribute to discussions, complete assignments, or prepare for tests (Okafor & Ugochukwu, 2016). Class participation is a critical aspect of academic development, as it fosters critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and confidence in expressing ideas. However, when students rely on unethical means to succeed, they tend to become passive learners, refraining from asking questions or engaging in academic debates (Ajibola, 2021). This lack of participation affects not only the individual students but also the overall classroom dynamic, making discussions less interactive and reducing the exchange of ideas among peers. Moreover, students who cheat often experience a decline in their self-esteem and intellectual curiosity, as they recognize their inability to succeed on their own merit (Ezenwa & Nwafor, 2018). In the long run, this hinders their ability to develop independent learning strategies, which are crucial for academic and professional success. Teachers also face difficulties in assessing students' true abilities, as those who cheat provide a false representation of their knowledge, leading to ineffective teaching strategies.

The third finding of the study revealed that examination misconduct has significant impact on study habits of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria. A student's study habits play a crucial role in determining their academic success. However, examination misconduct significantly weakens students' ability to develop effective study routines, as they become overly dependent on dishonest means to achieve good grades (Igbokwe & Chukwuma, 2015). When students know they can pass exams without studying, they are less likely to invest time in revision, practice, or seeking additional academic resources. This lack of preparation affects their cognitive development, leading to poor retention of knowledge and an inability to apply learned concepts in practical situations. Furthermore, the absence of strong study habits reduces students' problem-solving skills, making it difficult for them to tackle complex questions that require critical thinking. Effective study habits—such as time management, self-discipline, and consistency—are essential for long-term academic growth. However, examination malpractice disrupts this process by promoting laziness and a mindset that values shortcuts over genuine

effort. In higher education and professional settings, individuals with weak study habits often struggle to adapt to challenging workloads, as they lack the discipline and perseverance needed for success. The fourth finding of the study revealed that examination misconduct has significant impact on motivation of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria. Student motivation is one of the key drivers of academic success, and examination misconduct significantly diminishes this intrinsic desire to learn. When students engage in cheating, they gradually lose interest in the actual process of acquiring knowledge, focusing instead on obtaining good grades through dishonest means (Bamiro & Odu, 2022). Motivation in education is driven by both extrinsic and intrinsic factors. While extrinsic motivation—such as rewards or societal recognition—may encourage students to cheat, intrinsic motivation, which comes from a genuine love for learning, is often eroded in the process (Omotosho, 2018). As students become accustomed to unethical practices, they lose confidence in their abilities, believing that they cannot succeed without external assistance. This creates a cycle of dependency, where students repeatedly engage in examination malpractice rather than developing the resilience and determination needed to succeed through hard work (Dike & Akpan, 2021). Furthermore, when cheating becomes widespread in an academic environment, it leads to a culture of mediocrity, where effort and integrity are devalued. Over time, students who lack motivation to study struggle with academic and career growth, as they fail to develop the perseverance and work ethic required to excel in competitive fields. In contrast, motivated students are more likely to take initiative, seek out knowledge, and embrace challenges as opportunities for growth. Therefore, examination misconduct not only affects individual students but also weakens the overall quality of education by reducing the emphasis on hard work and genuine learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that examination misconduct has significant impact on academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria. Examination misconduct has far-reaching consequences on students' academic engagement and overall learning experience. Its negative impact on class attendance, participation, study habits, and motivation creates a cycle of academic dishonesty that ultimately weakens the educational system. When students rely on cheating rather than genuine effort, they miss out on essential learning opportunities, leading to poor academic performance and a lack of preparedness for future challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Schools should enforce strict attendance policies that require students to maintain a minimum attendance threshold before being eligible to take exams. Additionally, teachers should make lessons more engaging and interactive to encourage regular attendance.
2. Educators should adopt student-centred teaching approaches, such as group discussions, project-based learning, and interactive sessions, to encourage active participation. Reward systems, such as participation marks, can also motivate students to engage more in class activities.
3. Schools should introduce academic mentorship programs where teachers or senior students guide struggling learners in developing effective study routines. Workshops on time management, critical thinking, and self-discipline should also be integrated into the curriculum.
4. Schools and parents should emphasize the value of hard work and integrity in academic success. Recognition and rewards for students who excel through honest means, such as scholarships, awards, and public acknowledgments, can serve as incentives to discourage cheating and inspire a strong work ethic.

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