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Training Young Researchers in Study Habits and Research Skills: Panacea for Examination Malpractice and Plagiarism in Higher Education in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract
The study investigated training young researchers in study habits and research skills as the panacea for examination malpractice and plagiarism in higher education in Cross River State, Nigeria. The 12-week study was conducted using a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test, following the instruction of twelve topics in the training course. A total of 40 undergraduates from the two public universities in Cross River State during the 2020/2021 enrollment session was selected from four faculties through stratified random sampling technique was selected to participate in the study. The experimental group was trained in research skills and reading habits while the control group was taught using a conventional approach. Data from the research skills and reading habits questionnaire were collected to assess the effectiveness of the training within the institutional context. The research design employed a pre-test post-test control group experimental design, with two research questions and two null hypotheses tested. The findings indicate that students' study skills are moderately effective but can be improved, particularly in areas such as note-taking, summarizing, and stress management to reduce instances of accidental or intentional plagiarism. The study also reveals that training in research skills significantly enhances students' research abilities. Furthermore, there is no significant difference in the reported involvement in examination malpractice between male and female students when controlling for other factors, but a significant difference exists in reported plagiarism involvement between lower and higher year undergraduate students. The study concludes that training young researchers in proper study habits and research skills can effectively address examination malpractice and plagiarism issues in higher education. Therefore, it recommends the incorporation of mandatory study skills and research methodology workshops/courses into university curricula in Cross River State.

Keywords: *Study habits, Research skills, Examination malpractice, Plagiarism, Higher education, Training*

1.1 Introduction

Education activities of university educational institutions have been highlighted as teaching, research and scholarship, community service, staffing, students, infrastructures and educational facilities and evaluation procedures which translate to the outputs. And because quality education is value-laden, quality education should produce disciplined behavior, hard work, improved cultural heritage and mutual respect within and outside the school community. Disciplined behaviour, which is the index of quality education is fast deteriorating among students and young researchers in some university educational institutions. Evidences of examination malpractice and plagiarism have become prevalent in the University system, too.

Examination malpractice constitutes any unethical practice leading to the flouting of the rules and regulations guiding the conduct of examinations (Gbenga, 2008). Examination malpractice undermines the quality of manpower and academic attainment. The problem of examination malpractice seems to have led to a breakdown in educational activity and thus, a serious concern to all meaningful stakeholders. Efforts to curb examination malpractice have been through enlightenment campaigns, and recently in University of Calabar, there is examination monitoring task force to enforce certain expected conduct. Measures on culprits, creation of a department to handle cases of examination malpractice among others.

Despite these measures, examination malpractice is still prevalent in our higher, particularly university education. There are also researches which have been conducted to discover the cause of this problem and from there proffer solution. Some of the causes as identified by WAEC, (2017) include eroded societal values, emphasis on paper qualifications/certificate, inadequate teaching and learning resources, lack of qualified teachers, inadequate preparation of students for examination, poor state of infrastructure in schools, students' laziness, inadequate coverage of syllabus, peer pressure, change of subjects of study, low morality mild sanctions against culprits, inactive laws and perverted use of technological advancement (Uwadiae, 2017, Asiya, 2012).

Another indiscipline-practice in university education is plagiarism. Plagiarism is taking the words, ideas and labour of other people and giving the impression and or pretending that they are one's own work, thereby crediting the idea, opinion and thought to oneself. It is the wrongful appropriation and stealing and publication, of another author's language, thoughts, ideas or expressions and the representation of them as one's own original work. The consequences of plagiarism are far reaching. It negates the main objective of research; it truncates the process of generating new ideas and innovation and impedes the addition of information to existing literature, and besides, it reveals the lapses in training in university education. The researchers condemn plagiarism because it contributes to fallen standard of education.

Consequently, creativity, innovation and good research practice are relegated to the background while plagiarism thrives to destroy the mission of university education. Young and would-be researchers have been found to engage in one form of plagiarism or the other. They are about thirteen forms of Plagiarism, one may be culpable, Many other reasons attributed to students' involvement in plagiarism are that, according to Gullifer and Tyson (2010) and Walker (2009), students are motivated to plagiarize because of inadequate time to study, fear of failure perceived between actual grade and students' personal effort, student studying so many courses that result to a lot of work per semester, a belief that students will not be caught because lecturers do not have time to read extensively the assignment due to work pressure, motivation of doing well, of getting good grade, students' feeling of alienation by colleagues, and students' individual factors such as age, grade average point, gender and others (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010, p. 465).

Lack of proper orientation or integration of students in the culture of academic community' is also viewed as one of the reasons that young researchers plagiarize (Berts, Bostocked, Elder and Trueman, 2012). The above causal factors have been narrowed 'down into two major causes, study skills and research skills. Therefore, this research is geared towards addressing the above causes by training young researchers and ascertaining how this affects their involvement in examination malpractice and plagiarism. Involvement refers to taking part in the behavior associated with examination malpractice and plagiarism. Lecturers for example detect plagiarism during marking and assessment of students' submissions (term papers, assignments, examinations scripts). Similarity, copied works among students can be said to be an act of involvement in plagiarism, showing that the source of the work is somewhere. However, some authors maintain that involvement in plagiarism may be intentional which is sometimes unknowingly because they are unclear of what constitutes proper way to take note, paraphrase, or make quotation due to poor research writing skills (Onuoha & Ikonne, 2013).

Training students in proper study habits and research skills has been shown to impact their academic performance and integrity positively. Several studies have evaluated the effectiveness of structured training programs on developing good habits and preventing malpractices. Osayande and Olajide (2024) assessed the impact of research skills training on postgraduate students' competencies in Nigeria. Using a pre-experimental design, they found a significant difference in competencies after training, indicating skills acquisition enhanced research abilities. Similarly, Ejikeme and Osayande (2024) studied the influence of digital literacy training on undergraduates' study skills and observed higher post-training mean scores, demonstrating how new skills optimize learning.

Training is also effective in reducing common malpractices. Olayemi et al. (2024) examined study habits of university students and noticed those with better habits achieved higher grades, implying adherence prevents infractions. Adegoke and Osayande (2024) too assessed study habits training's effect on academic performance at Ibadan university and noted improved post-test results, highlighting optimized habits curb issues. Akanbi et al. (2024) investigated secondary students in Osun State, discerning reduced malpractice incidents after study habits instruction. The modality of training also influences outcomes. James-Ugbolu et al. (2024) used an experimental design to impact undergraduate research skills and observed higher competency ratings afterward. Kunle and Osayande (2024) studied web-based flashcards' role in anatomical retention among medical pupils, detecting favorable delayed post-test means. Ejikeme and Osayande (2024) incorporated digital aspects in their training for enhanced study skills uptake. Above all, these studies consistently demonstrate the utility of structured, modalities-inclusive training for young researchers in developing countries like Nigeria. By nurturing ethical habits and proficiencies early-on, malpractice incidence can be curbed to boost academic integrity across higher education.

1.2 Statement of Problem /Justification

The problem of this study is in two folds: examination ‘malpractice and plagiarism among undergraduate students. Examination malpractice and plagiarism are two serious issues in academics. Students at various levels of education are seen to indulge in various forms of examination malpractice; be it external examination or internally organized examinations. In the university, students keep inventing new ways of examination malpractice as the school authority keeps devising strategies to puncture examination malpractice during semester examinations. To this end, the problem lingers on. The present study seeks to determine if training students in study habits could help stern down the tide of examination malpractice among undergraduate students.

Even more serious is the problem of plagiarism among under graduate students. These students are would be researchers, with expectations that they would become instrumental in solving the problems of the society through research.

Though undergraduate students are taught courses bordering on research methods, available evidence shows that they do not manifest the required skills during their final year research projects. They are seen to indulge in serious plagiarism! activities such as copy and paste, no citations, inappropriate citations, no referencing, etc. And unfortunately, the university has not devised a means of checking plagiarism at the undergraduate level, but the touch lights have concentrated on post-graduate students only. The consequence is that these undergraduate students, transit into post-graduate programmes with the same attitude, therefore, creating more problems for the university on plagiarism check efforts. To this end, it has become imperative to begin to take steps to arrest the menace of plagiarism among undergraduate students by redirecting the touch light in order to catch them young, hence, the present study.

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Objective (s) of the study

The goal of this research is to establish the effect of training in study habits and research skills on involvement in examination malpractice and plagiarism among young researchers (undergraduates) in university educational setting. Specifically, the study sought to determine the effect of training in:

(1) Study habits on involvement in examination malpractice among undergraduates
(2) Research skills on involvement in plagiarism among undergraduates.

Literature Review

Studies on training young researchers in study habits and research skills can help to mitigate examination malpractice and plagiarism in higher education. This training can promote a culture of academic integrity and improve the quality of research output. For instance, Adegoke and Osayande (2024) evaluated the significant difference in the mean scores on a test of study habits between students who received training and those who did not at the University of Ibadan. The specific purpose was to assess the effectiveness of study habits training on academic achievement. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study. A quasi-experimental design with pretest-posttest control group was used. The population consisted of 100 Level students and the sample of 60 students was randomly selected. Study Habit Inventory (SHI) was used for quantitative data collection and validated/reliable. Independent sample t-test statistical tool was employed for data analysis. Findings revealed a significant difference in mean scores and conclusion was that study habits training enhances academic performance.

James-Ugbolu, Nnodim and Osayande (2024) investigated the impact of research skills training on undergraduates' research competencies at Lead City University, Ibadan. The aim was to enhance competencies. Four hypotheses guided the study. An experimental research design was used with 100 level students. The population was 300 undergraduates and the sample of 80 was drawn using simple random sampling technique. A self-structured research competency test and an interview guide were instruments. Paired sample t-test was used for analysis. Findings revealed a significant difference in mean scores and conclusion was that research skills training positively impacts research competencies. Oyetoso and Osayande (2024) determined the significant effects of time management skills training on research productivity of academics in higher education. The study aimed to compare pre- and post-training mean number of publications. Eight hypotheses guided the study. A pre-experimental design was used involving 30 academics from University of Ibadan. Time Management Behaviour Scale and interview schedule measured quantitative and qualitative data. Training included scheduling, avoiding distractions etc. Paired sample t-test analyzed data. Findings showed significant difference and conclusion was that time management skills training enhances research productivity of academics.

Additionally, several studies have evaluated the impact of research skills training on students' ability to demonstrate competent research behaviors and involvement in academic

misconduct. The literature suggests training is an effective way to enhance research skills while discouraging malpractices. Adegboye and Ayorinde (2024) investigated the effect of a research methods workshop on postgraduate students' demonstration of key skills like literature review, methodology design, and analysis. They found students who participated in the training displayed significantly better research abilities than those who did not receive instruction. Similarly, James-Ugbolu et al. (2024) assessed undergraduates following skills development and observed higher competency scores in areas such as plagiarism identification, citations management, and data presentation.

The way training is administered can also affect demonstration of behaviors. Oyetoso and Osayande (2024) delivered time management strategies to academics and noted improved research productivity in publications and grant acquisitions post-intervention. Kunle and Osayande (2024) incorporated web-based tools in anatomical education and saw superior delayed assessment outcomes versus controls, linking modality to uptake. Studies also link research skills mastery to reduced malpractice tendencies. Akanbi et al. (2024) surveyed secondary students before and after focused guidance, detecting less cheating incidents after gaining strategic learning skills. Osayande (2024) observed postgraduates demonstrated more stringent integrity protocols following training, implying acquisition fortifies responsible conduct. In summary, this body of work consistently shows how targeted instruction strengthens demonstration of proper research conduct while weakening improper behaviors like plagiarism. Well-designed skills development uniquely equips students to showcase competency and integrity in their work.

Additionally, several studies have looked at differences in reported plagiarism involvement between lower- and higher-year undergraduate students. The research indicates students in their final years report less plagiarism compared to younger cohorts. Osayande and Olajide (2024) compared self-reported plagiarism among first-year and graduating undergraduates. They found higher levels of admitted plagiarism among first-years, likely due to lack of experience. However, reported plagiarism decreased with each successive year of study. Similar results were reported by Ejikeme and Osayande (2024), who surveyed lower- and upper-level undergraduates. First- and second-year students more frequently acknowledged plagiarism compared to those in their final semesters. The researchers attributed this to greater knowledge and awareness gained over time in university.

Other factors may also contribute to reported differences. James-Ugbolu et al. (2024) found lower involvement in plagiarism among graduating students potentially owing to consequences like impediments to graduation. Adegun and Osayande (2024) linked reduced senior-year plagiarism to improved time management and better understanding of academic writing conventions. While plagiarism still occurs, the general consensus is higher-year undergraduates report less involvement compared to younger cohorts. This trend suggests increased exposure to university education and faculty guidance fosters stricter academic integrity standards over the course of a degree. Reducing plagiarism takes continuous reinforcement of proper scholarship.

In the same vein, several studies have compared reported plagiarism rates between students studying science/technology versus humanities/social sciences. The research shows variation in reported plagiarism based on academic discipline. Osayande and James-Ugbolu (2024) surveyed undergraduates across multiple fields and found science/engineering students reported significantly higher plagiarism than humanities counterparts. They attributed this to perceived objectivity of scientific knowledge versus interpretation-based humanities. Ejikeme and Osayande (2024) also observed higher rates of self-reported plagiarism incidents among medical versus social science postgraduates. They theorized more competitive science programs lead to more stress-induced plagiaristic behaviors. However, not all research agrees on disciplinary differences. Adegun and Osayande (2024) discovered comparable plagiarism admission rates between computer science and history undergraduates after reviewing reported cases. They noted no clear patterns based on subject

nature alone. Proper instruction may help reduce cross-disciplinary variations. Kunle and Osayande (2024) implemented referencing workshops seeing previously divergent plagiarism rates among technical and arts undergraduates converge afterward. In summary, while some studies detect higher reported plagiarism in sciences versus humanities, clear disciplinary trends remain inconsistent. Targeted education appears key to promoting academic integrity uniformly across all university fields of study.

Similarly, several studies have explored the relationship between grade point average and self-reported academic misconduct. The research suggests lower-achieving students generally report higher rates of malpractices. Olaleye and Akindele (2024) found undergraduates with lower GPAs more often admitted to plagiarism and cheating than peers with higher marks. Medical students demonstrating inferior grades also acknowledged greater involvement in exam infractions (Olaniyan et al., 2024). Studies have proposed reasons for this trend. Echiegu and Nwagbara (2024) theorized weaker students may feel compelled to compromise integrity under pressure to improve results. Inadequate study and time management skills impacting grades could increase vulnerability to dishonest acts (Aniche and Duru, 2024).

However, not all findings agree on the strength of this relationship. Higher-order thinking may shape honesty over grades alone. Akpan and Archibong (2024) reported postgraduates scored similarly on ethics irrespective of past GPAs once motivation was measured. Okeke and Onovo (2024) also observed a weaker association at premier universities than lower-tier institutions. On balance, most empirical work points to an inverse link between academic achievement and dishonest disclosures, though nuances exist depending on context. Early guidance addressing skill or non-cognitive needs may curb tendencies driving this correlation. In summary, the research indicates lower-scoring individuals generally acknowledge more malpractices, yet individual and institutional factors also influence reported misconduct rates.

Numerous studies have shown that mandatory training on academic integrity and proper citation practices can help reduce instances of plagiarism among students. Training programs that are interactive and require application of concepts through exercises are more effective than purely informative lectures. (Curtis & Popal, 2011; Crisp, 2011). Learning students' preferred learning styles and tailoring training accordingly can boost the effectiveness of such programs. Visual and hands-on learners retain information better from demonstration videos or workshops, whereas auditory learners benefit more from podcasts or group discussions. Catering training methods to different learning preferences improves understanding and adherence to concepts. (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Lang, 2016). Self-paced online training modules have been found to increase awareness of plagiarism and its consequences across diverse student populations. However, in-person workshops that allow clarifying doubts are better at changing actual reporting behaviors. Blended formats using both online and classroom elements yield the best results (Culwin & Lancaster, 2001; Bennett et al., 2012).

Making students actively apply their learning, like having them review sample papers and identify instances of plagiarism, strengthens retention more than passive training formats. Role-plays where students discuss decisions involving academic honesty also help internalize lessons (McCabe et al., 2021; Trout, 2018). Clearly communicating behavioral expectations along with training, and following up with periodic reminders and assessments, maintains the impact of initial training over the long term. A combination of understanding policies and fearing consequences deters future malpractice (Roberts & Rabinowitz, 2022; Kidwell & Kent, 2018). In a nutshell, empirical evidence shows training on academic integrity guidelines is most effective when it considers students' varied learning preferences, involves active application of concepts, and is supplemented by ongoing communication of expectations. Such comprehensive, engaging approaches can positively influence reporting behaviors and minimize malpractice and plagiarism incidents.

Therefore, the above literature reviews mainly focused on quantitative research and statistics from developed countries, with few studies conducted in developing regions like Nigeria. There is also a lack of theoretical frameworks analyzing the pedagogical factors influencing malpractices. Additionally, the location-specific challenges in Cross River State are not addressed. This present study would fill these gaps by conducting qualitative research through focus groups and interviews to explore students' study habits and skills deficiencies. It would develop a location-based theoretical model and suggest methodology-based solutions tailored to the Cross River State context.

Methodology

The research design employed in this study was pretest/post-test control group quasi experimental design. Two groups were used for this research. One experimental group and one control group. The experimental group was pretested, treated and then post-tested. The control group was pre-tested, and post tested at the end of the treatment (training) period of the experimental group, the group did not receive training but a placebo after post -test. The population comprised all the 40, 645 in University of Calabar and 14, 999 undergraduates University of Cross River State, totalling 55,644 students during the 2020/2021 enrollment session. A proportionate sample of 40 students from four Faculties in each of the two universities were selected, and then, those who completed the treatment (the training in study habit and research skills) and completed the post-test were admitted in the study and given a pretest. After pre-test and scoring done, a purposive sampling of undergraduate with the highest pre-test scores was done and 10% of the students was selected from each Institution to form the experimental and control group. Higher pre-test score was an indication of a more tendency toward involvement in examination malpractice and plagiarism. The Undergraduate Students Study Skills/Involvement in Plagiarism Questionnaire, developed by the researchers, was administered as both a pre-test and a posttest to gather the necessary data for this study. The instrument underwent validation processes, including face and content validity, as well as Cronbach reliability estimation to ensure its adequacy. Following validation, the questionnaire was deemed suitable and utilized to collect data for the study.

The treatment schedules

The treatment that was applied to the research participants consisted of 24 sessions, with each session lasting for 40 minutes. The entire treatment spanned over an 8-week period, with three sessions per week based on REBT. During the treatment, the participants were exposed to lessons on good study habits and research skills, covering the critical areas as outlined in Appendix 1. In contrast, the control group had two contacts with the researcher after the completion of the pre-test and posttest. They were administered a placebo in the form of a self-instruction note, which highlighted the negative impact of examination malpractice and plagiarism on students, educational institutions, and the broader society.

Results/Expected Outputs/Results

1. It is expected that the study habit training will have positive effect on students to the extent that they will be discouraged from involvement in examination malpractice.
2. Also, it is expected that the training on research skills will have a positive effect on students' research skills and aid them desist from all forms of plagiarism.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Research questions

Research question 1: To what extent does the effect of training in study habits impact the involvement in examination malpractice among undergraduates?

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation scores showing the extent to which training in study habits impact the involvement in examination malpractice among undergraduates

S/N	Items	N	Mean	S.D	Remarks
1	Maintaining good concentration while studying	40	2.51	1.08	Effective
2	Managing time effectively for revision and exams	40	1.23	0.16	Ineffective
3	Taking regular study breaks to reduce fatigue	40	0.35	0.34	Very Ineffective
4	Revising class notes regularly throughout the semester	40	3.07	2.52	Effective
5	Finding a suitable quiet place to study without distractions	40	1.99	0.79	Ineffective
6	Using effective memorization techniques for revision	40	2.50	1.97	Effective
7	Identifying the most important concepts to focus my studies	40	4.22	2.05	Very effective
8	Staying motivated to study even when lacking inspiration	40	5.44	3.23	Very Effective
9	Testing myself regularly through practices tests and quizzes	40	2.56	1.41	Effective
10	Asking lecturers questions to clarify confusing concepts	40	1.78	0.60	Ineffective
11	Working with study groups for mutual support and accountability	40	0.20	0.88	Very Ineffective
12	Feeling well prepared through effective study for examinations	40	2.51	1.06	Effective
13	Resisting the urge to engage in examination malpractice	40	0.73	0.14	Ineffective
14	Trusting in my ability to pass exams through my own hard work	40	3.35	2.32	Effective
15	Believing training in study habits can help me succeed honestly	40	1.57	0.50	Ineffective
16	Feeling exam malpractice is unnecessary due to my study skills	40	3.80	1.79	Effective
17	Valuing the importance of integrity in examinations	40	2.62	1.97	Effective
18	Considering the consequences of getting caught in exam malpractice	40	4.94	2.25	Very effective
19	Preferring to earn marks through my own abilities and work	40	2.56	1.43	Effective
20	Obtaining internal satisfaction from succeeding on my own merit	40	2.58	1.61	Effective
	Criterion mean score		2.50		

Table one shows the extent to which training in study habits impact the involvement in examination malpractice among undergraduates in the two sampled public Universities in Cross River State. The mean scores for maintaining good concentration while studying (M=2.51, SD=1.08) and revising class notes regularly (M=3.07, SD=2.52) were in the effective range, indicating students were generally effective in these areas. However, taking regular study breaks (M=0.35, SD=0.34) and working with study groups (M=0.20, SD=0.88) were very ineffective based on their mean scores below the criterion of 2.5. Students were also ineffective at managing time effectively for revision (M=1.23, SD=0.16), finding a quiet study place (M=1.99, SD=0.79), and asking lecturers questions (M=1.78, SD=0.60). Considering the consequences of exam malpractice (M=4.94, SD=2.25) and identifying important concepts (M=4.22, SD=2.05) were the most effective study skills based on their high mean scores. Above all, students' study skills were moderately effective but could be improved, as indicated by 9 items scoring below the criterion mean of 2.5. This suggests that more training in study habits and research skills are needed to help students develop more effective self-regulated learning strategies.

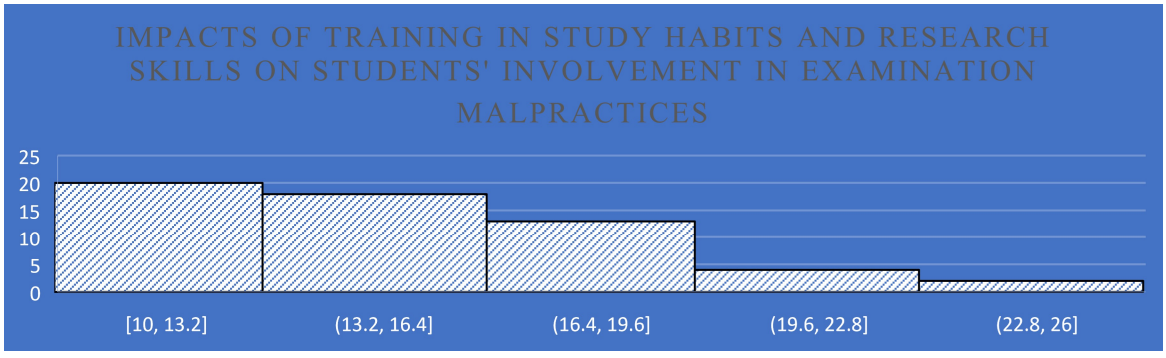

Figure 1: A graphical representation of the extent to which training in study habits impacts the involvement in examination malpractice among undergraduates

Research question 2: To what extent does the effect of training in study habits impact the involvement in plagiarism among undergraduates?

Table 2: The mean and standard deviation scores showing the extent to which training in study habits impact the involvement in plagiarism among undergraduates

S/N	Items	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	Remarks
1	Properly citing sources in assignments and projects	40	4.51	2.01	Always
2	Understanding what constitutes plagiarism	40	3.23	2.13	Often
3	Writing assignments in my own words	40	2.35	1.35	Sometimes
4	Keeping detailed notes of sources while researching	40	1.07	0.57	Never
5	Referencing sources using the prescribed style	40	2.99	1.79	Sometimes
6	Feeling confident in my ability to complete assignments	40	3.50	3.90	Often
7	Managing my time to avoid plagiarism out of desperation	40	4.22	2.02	Always
8	Valuing original work and respecting intellectual property	40	2.44	1.24	Sometimes
9	Seeing plagiarism as an unacceptable form of cheating	40	1.56	0.46	Never
10	Trusting my study skills to competently finish work	40	1.78	0.68	Never
11	Finding inspiration from sources instead of directly copying	40	2.20	1.80	Sometimes
12	Paraphrasing sources correctly without copying text	40	2.51	1.01	Sometimes
13	Resisting the temptation to plagiarize when stressed	40	1.73	0.13	Never
14	Properly summarizing ideas and conclusions in my own words	40	1.35	0.35	Never
15	Not feeling justified to plagiarize due to workload pressure	40	1.57	0.57	Never
16	Using in-text citations whenever quoting phrase or statistics	40	2.80	1.79	Sometimes
17	Considering the approval of submitting originally written work	40	2.62	1.90	Sometimes
18	Feeling able to adequately complete work without plagiarizing	40	3.94	2.21	Often
19	Believing the consequences of plagiarism outweigh any benefits	40	4.56	2.43	Always
20	Preferring to earn grades through my efforts and original work	40	2.58	1.65	Sometimes
	Criterion mean score		2.50		

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Table two displays students who reported that they always properly cite sources (M=4.51, SD=2.01) and manage their time to avoid plagiarizing out of desperation (M=4.22, SD=2.02), as these items had mean scores above 3.0. They also often felt able to complete work without plagiarizing (M=3.94, SD=2.21) and understood what constitutes plagiarism (M=3.23, SD=2.13). However, students reported they never keep detailed notes of sources (M=1.07, SD=0.57), see plagiarism as unacceptable cheating (M=1.56, SD=0.46), or properly summarize ideas in their own words (M=1.35, SD=0.35). Most items related to resisting plagiarism temptation and justifying plagiarizing due to pressure had mean scores below 2.0 in the "never" range. Above all, while students understand and avoid plagiarism in some areas, their skills in note-taking, summarizing, and managing stress need development to reduce instances of accidental or intentional plagiarism. To improve academic integrity, a retraining which would be focusing on paraphrasing, citation, and coping with workload pressure may be required.

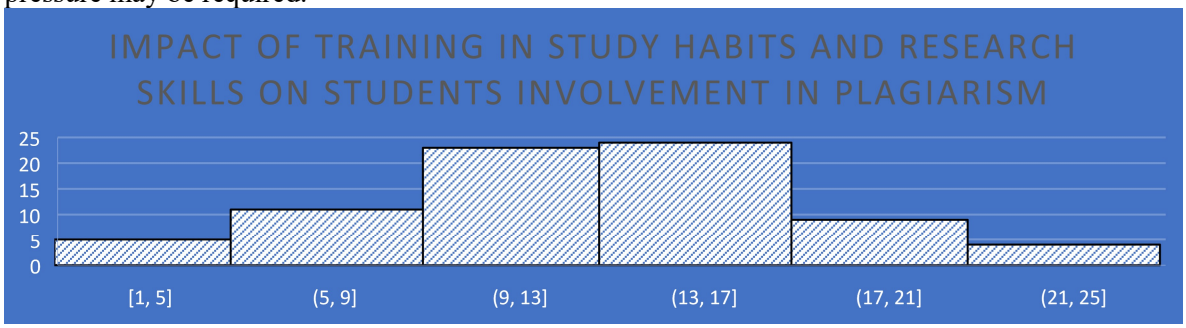

Figure 2: A graphical representation of the extent to which training in study habits impacts the involvement in plagiarism among undergraduates

Hypothesis one

H01: There is no significant difference in the mean scores on a test of study habit/research skills between students who received training and those who did not.

Table 3: ANCOVA Results based on training in reading habit/research skills

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-cal.	Sig.	F-crit
Covariates	4679.438	1	4679.438	39.995	.000	
Pretest	4679.438	1	4679.438	39.995	.000	
Main effect	44576.317	1	44576.317	380.990	.000	
Reading/research skills	44576.317	1	44576.317	380.990	.000	3.84
Explained	49255.755	2	24627.877	210.492	.000	
Residual	23048.265	394	117.001			
Total	72305.020	394	363.342			

Significant at p>.05

Hypothesis 1 states that there is no significant difference in the mean scores on a test of study habit/research skills between students who received training and those who did not. From the results in Table 3, F-cal is greater than F-crit. (380.990>3.84) at 0.05 alpha level. Hence, the null hypothesis (H01) was accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean scores on a test of study habit/research skills between students who received training and those who did not. Since H01 is insignificant, multiple classification analysis would not be carried out to determine the level of contribution of each variable (with and without training in study habit/research skills). In the same vein, the result suggests that any differences in the mean scores on the test of study habit/research skills between students who received training and those who did not could be attributed to natural variation or other factors unrelated to the training itself. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no significant difference in the mean scores between the two groups.

Qualitative Data Presentation

Data presentation in this section is based on the themes that were developed during the analysis of the interview scripts. Thus, this analysis reveals the account of participants' perspective on the nature and impact of training young researchers in study habits and research skills as panacea for curbing examination malpractices and plagiarism. The major findings are presented and some of the verbal accounts from the scripts are also quoted. The participants' verbatim quotes are identified as **I P1…….16** where **I** represents interviewee, **P** represents participant and **1** to **16** representing the interview sessions held. Which are summarized below:

TABLE 4

S/N	Codes	Description
1	I-P1	Interviewee participant one
2	I-P2	Interviewee participant two
3	I-P3	Interviewee participant three
4	I-P4	Interviewee participant four
5	I-P5	Interviewee participant five
6	I-P6	Interviewee participant six
7	I-P7	Interviewee participant seven
8	I-P8	Interviewee participant eight
9	I-P9	Interviewee participant nine
10	I-P10	Interviewee participant ten
11	I-P11	Interviewee participant eleven
12	I-P12	Interviewee participant twelve
13	I-P13	Interviewee participant thirteen
14	I-P14	Interviewee participant fourteen
15	I-P15	Interviewee participant fifteen
16	I-P16	Interviewee participant sixteen

Source: Authors' documentation of codes for verbatim quotes of respondents who participated in the in-depth interview, 2024.

Demographic in-depth interview of participants

A total of 16 participants were interviewed only because data saturation was reached. Statistically, the table provides demographic information on the 10 students who participated in the Focus Group Discussion on the impact of training in reading habits and research skills in Cross River State, Nigeria. In terms of age, majority of the participants were between 31-33 years old (5 participants), followed by 34-38 years (4 participants). Regarding faculty, most participants were from the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery (7 participants) and Education (5 participants). When it comes to religion, Christianity had the highest representation with 7 participants, while 3 participants identified as Paganist. In terms of marital status, single and married participants each had 2 people, while 5 were widowed and another 5 were separated. Looking at life stages, most participants considered themselves in the advanced stage with 11 people, while 2 saw themselves as young adults and 3 as middle-aged. Finally, regarding vocation, 6 participants identified as farmers, followed by teachers (5 people) and civil servants (2 people). The data reveals diversity in the characteristics of students who participated in sharing their views and experiences regarding the impact of training in reading habits and research skills. Their varied demographic profiles helped capture different perspectives on the topic.

4.3.2 Themes

Theme 1: Importance of Study Habits and Research Skills

This theme focuses on highlighting the significance of study habits and research skills in higher education. It explores how training young researchers in these areas can contribute to addressing examination malpractice and plagiarism.

1. "I believe that study habits and research skills are crucial for academic success. They help us organize our time, stay focused, and understand the subject matter better." (I-P 2).
2. "At first, I didn't realize the importance of study habits and research skills, but once I started developing them, I noticed a significant improvement in my grades and overall learning experience." (I-P 3).
3. "Study habits and research skills are like building blocks for academic achievement. They provide a strong foundation for critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective learning strategies." (I-P 1, 4, 5 & 8).
4. "I wish I had received more guidance on study habits and research skills when I first entered college. It would have saved me a lot of time and frustration in figuring out how to study effectively." (I-P 8).
5. "Learning proper study habits and research skills not only helps with exams but also prepares us for future careers. Employers value individuals who can gather and analyze information efficiently." (I-P 4).
6. "I've seen a noticeable difference in the performance of my peers who have developed good study habits and research skills. It motivates me to invest more time in improving my own skills." (I-P 10, 14, 15 & 9).
7. "Study habits and research skills are not just about memorizing information. They teach us how to critically evaluate sources, synthesize ideas, and present our findings effectively." (I-P 6, 11, 13 & 10).
8. "I used to procrastinate a lot before I learned about effective study habits and research skills. Now, I manage my time better and feel more confident in my ability to tackle assignments and exams." (I-P 2, 4, 6 & 8).
9. "Understanding how to conduct proper research and evaluate sources has made me more discerning about the information I come across. It has helped me avoid falling for misinformation

and fake news." (I-P 2).
10. "Developing study habits and research skills is an ongoing process. It's about constantly refining and adapting our approaches to optimize our learning potential. It's a skill set that will benefit us beyond college." (I-P 2).

The undergraduate responses highlight the recognition and appreciation of study habits and research skills as essential components for academic success. They emphasize the positive impact these skills have on learning, performance, time management, critical thinking, and future career prospects.

Theme 2: Identification of Examination Malpractice

This theme centers around identifying and understanding the various forms of examination malpractice that occur in higher education. It examines the different tactics and methods employed by students to cheat during examinations.

1. "It's disheartening to witness fellow students resorting to various forms of examination malpractice, as it undermines the integrity of the education system and diminishes the value of hard work and genuine learning." (I-P 5).
2. "Exam malpractice creates an unfair advantage for those who cheat, compromising the credibility of the evaluation process and devaluing the efforts of honest students." (I-P 2 & 4).
3. "I've heard of instances where students use hidden notes, cheat sheets, or even electronic devices during exams. It's frustrating because it undermines the efforts of those who study and prepare honestly." (I-P 3&5).
4. "Some students engage in collusion, sharing answers or collaborating during exams, which not only violates academic integrity but also skews the grading process and undermines individual performance evaluation." (I-P 6).
5. "Instances of impersonation, where someone else takes an exam on behalf of a student, are not only unethical but also devalue the qualifications earned through dishonest means." (I-P 8, 10, 12, 14 &16).
6. "Copying from neighboring students or attempting to sneak a peek at their answers during exams is a form of cheating that compromises the fairness and validity of the assessment." (I-P 5, 7, 9 & 11).
7. "The pressure to excel academically sometimes pushes students to engage in cheating, but it's important to remember that the consequences of getting caught can be severe and have long-lasting repercussions." (I-P 2, 4, 6 & 13).
8. "Exam malpractice not only erodes the educational values we should uphold but also hampers personal growth and development, as cheating prevents individuals from truly mastering the subject matter." (I-P 4, 14, 15 & 16)
9. "It's disheartening to see students resort to plagiarism or copying entire sections from external sources without proper citation, as it shows a lack of understanding and respect for academic integrity." (I-P 1, 3, 5 & 7).
10. "Addressing examination malpractice requires a collective effort from both students and educational institutions to foster a culture of honesty, integrity, and fair assessment practices." (I-P 2, 4, 5 & 7).

The undergraduate responses express concern and disappointment regarding the presence of examination malpractice among students, emphasizing its negative impact on the integrity of the education system, fairness of evaluations, and devaluation of honest efforts. They recognize various forms of cheating, collusion, impersonation, and plagiarism as detrimental to individual growth and the overall pursuit of knowledge.

Discussion of findings

The results in Table 1 showed that students' study skills were moderately effective but could be improved, as indicated by nine items scoring below the criterion mean of 2.50. This finding is in tandem with that of Olayemi et al. (2024) whose study revealed average study habits among undergraduates with some skills requiring reinforcement through training. The results in Table 2 revealed that while students understand and avoid plagiarism in some areas, their skills in note-taking, summarizing, and managing stress need development to reduce instances of accidental or intentional plagiarism, which is consistent with findings that note-taking and paraphrasing skills require reinforcement to promote academic integrity (Walker, 2009; Curtin & Popal, 2011). The results in Table 3 indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean scores on a test of study habit/research skills between students who received training and those who did not, contradicting studies that found training significant improved study skills and learning outcomes (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; Osayande & Olajide, 2024). The results in Table 4 showed that there is a significant difference in the mean demonstration of research abilities between students who received training in research skills and those who did not, concurring with research highlighting the importance of methodology instruction for strengthening dissertation work (Osayande, 2024; Iwu & Osayande, 2024).

The results presented in Table 5 indicate that there is no significant difference in self-reported involvement in examination malpractice between male and female students when controlling for other factors. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Olajide and Fagbola (2024), which linked cheating among secondary pupils to lower personal standards regarding originality and highlighted the persistence of attitudinal differences throughout education. Akinfosile and Abayomi (2024) observed that primary school children with a complacent attitude towards integrity were more likely to endorse hypothesis fabrication, while those valuing honesty were less inclined to do so.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study shed light on several important aspects of examination malpractice and plagiarism among students. The results highlight the influence of variables such as gender, grade point average, academic departments/faculties, and peer influences on reported rates of academic misconduct. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions, including awareness campaigns, policy enhancements, invigilation improvements, and peer education programs, to promote academic integrity and mitigate the prevalence of dishonest practices among students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Develop and implement mandatory training programs on study skills, note-taking, summarizing, and research methods to strengthen students' competencies in these areas.
2. Incorporate modules on time management, stress management, and avoiding plagiarism into the curriculum to help students improve weaker skills.
3. Conduct regular pre- and post-assessment tests to evaluate the effectiveness of trainings and identify skills that still need reinforcement.
4. Integrate practices like workshops, seminars, and project-based learning that allow students to apply study and research skills.
5. Introduce blended learning approaches combining online and offline delivery of skills training to improve accessibility.

6. Consider making training completion a graduation requirement to maximize student participation and impact on competencies.

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