

## Study Habit Predicts Examination Behaviour: An Imperative For Enhancing Quality of College Guidance and Counselling

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**Abstract** Study habit was investigated as a predictor of students' examination behaviour. The sample consisted of 1290 first year students in tertiary institutions in Delta State. Multiple Regression was used to analyze data collected with a study habits and examination behaviour questionnaire. It was found that study habit was a significant predictor of examination behaviour and that gender did not significantly moderate the prediction of examination behaviour by study habits. Therefore, it was recommended that educational practitioners especially counselors should use measures of students' study habits as indicators of their disposition towards engaging in examination malpractices thereby administering proactive counselling on them before they sit for examinations. This could enhance the quality of college counselling in African schools because the level of examination malpractices may be drastically reduced.

**Key Words:** Study Habit, Examination Behavior, Guidance Counselling.

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### Introduction

Examination malpractices have been described as any act of dishonesty that occurs before, during and after an examination or assessment which is intended to obtain or offer an unfair advantage to a candidate or candidates in that examination or assessment (University of Exeter, 2002). It includes all forms of cheating by candidates in order to enhance their performance in an examination or any other form of assessment. Cizek (2001) also described it as any action that violates the rules for administering a test or examination. Thus described, it is easy to identify forms of examination malpractices in Nigerian educational system. The governments, examination bodies, school authorities and concerned individuals in the Nigerian society have consistently condemned the occurrence of examination malpractices in Nigeria. For example, as far back as 1984, the Federal Government of Nigeria promulgated the miscellaneous offences Decree 20 which made examination malpractice a triable offence by a tribunal and offenders could be jailed for 21 years without an option of fine upon conviction. The examination bodies such as the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) have also been adopting various punitive measures against candidates who engage in examination malpractices in their examinations. Some of these measures include, cancellation of results, blacklisting of schools and candidates, etc. However, these punitive measures seem to have had little impact in deterring candidates from engaging in examination malpractices (Ejemuta, 2001; Ogunlowo, 2003; Onyechere, 2003).

It is, therefore imperative for researchers in education to examine factors that could contribute to proactive actions against examination malpractices other than the present punitive measures. The present research has taken up this challenge. It investigated study habit as a predictor of students' examination behaviour with a view to establishing a foundation for proactive actions against examination malpractices in Nigeria. It focused on the relationship between study habit and examination behaviour.

Study habits have been linked with academic performance in several studies such as Read & Hagen (1996), Elliot, McGregor & Gable (1999), Meter (2001), Kagu (2003) and Ossai (2004). In these studies it was found that good study habits contribute to high academic performance while poor study habits lead to poor academic performance. More importantly, it has been suggested through research that examination malpractices is the major cause of poor study habits among Nigerian students in the same way as poor study habits also leads to involvement in examination malpractices (Daniel 1998; Omotosho, 1990; Obimba, 2002;

Ossai, 2004). In the same vein, it has been proven through research that high examination anxiety affects academic performance negatively (Spielberger & Vagg, 1987; Morakinyo, 1986; Birenbaum & Pinku, 1997; Kagu, 2003; Ossai, 2004, G.N Okorodudu & Ossai, 2004).

Given the above background, the present study seeks to establish study habit measures as predictors of examination behaviour thereby providing the basis for adopting proactive actions to checkmate incidents of examination malpractices in Nigeria education.

### Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model

There are three theoretical models for explanation of the relationship between study habits and examination behaviour. These are the Interference, Deficit and Interference-Deficit models. The interference model portrays a picture of a student who studies very hard for an examination thereby mastering the course material very well but because he is so anxious about the examination, he lacks self confidence hence he forgets all he has studied during examination (Hembree, 1990). The deficit model, on the other hand, posits that the highly examination-anxious student has insufficient (deficit) knowledge of the course material due to poor study habits thereby leading to poor performance during examinations (Birenbaum & Pinku, 1997). The deficit-interference model considers the two models as complementary rather than mutually exclusive (Benjamin, Mckeachie, Lin & Holinger, 1981). In the present research, study habit was conceptualized as important in the prediction of examination behaviour with gender as the moderator variable. The theoretical framework is presented in the stimulus – organism – Response (SOR) model in Figure 1 below

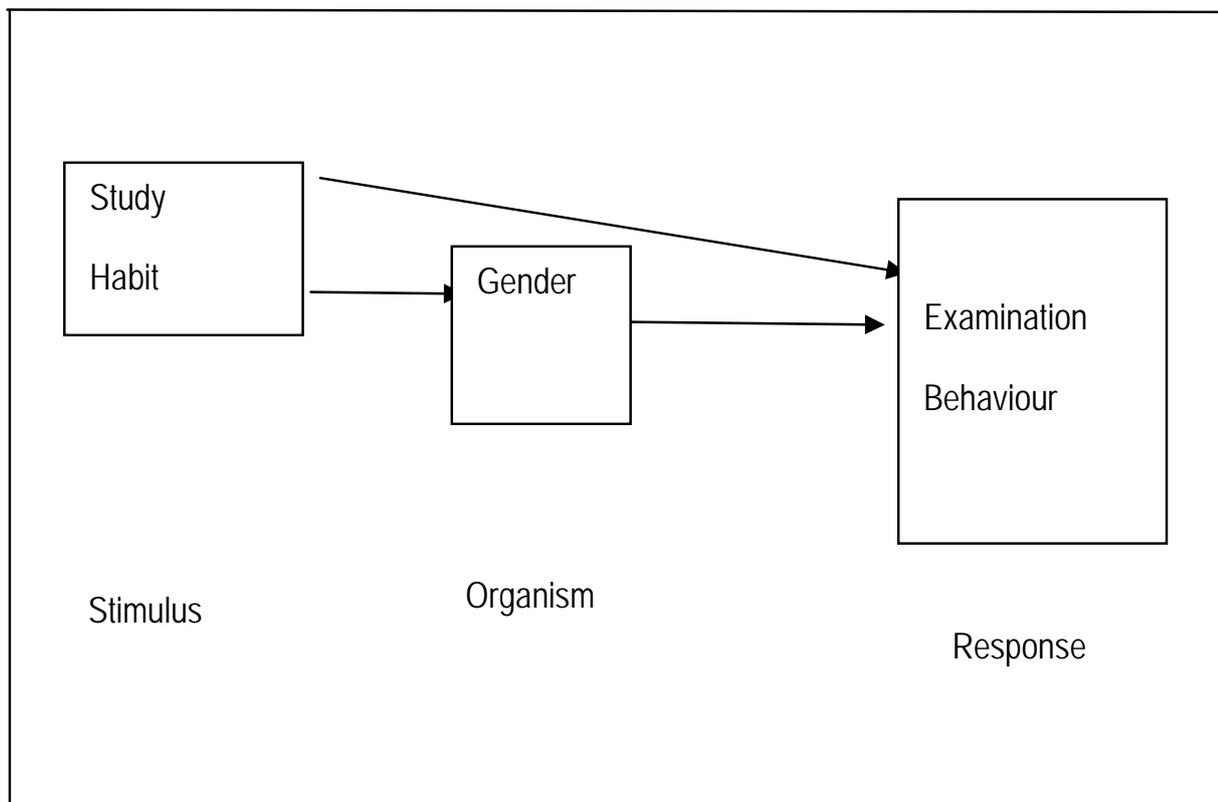


Fig. 1: Predictors of Examination Behaviour based on the S-O-R Model by Hull (1952) as cited in R.I Okorodu (1999).

## Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study is to establish that study habit is a significant predictor of examination behaviour including malpractices hence providing a basis for educationists especially counselors to adopt preventive actions prior to examinations. In other words, if students who are positively disposed towards examination malpractices could be identified from measures of study habits, they could be reoriented towards more appropriate examination behaviour prior to their sitting for the actual examinations thereby contributing to enhancing the quality of college counselling.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. Does study habit predict examination behaviour?
- ii. Does gender of students moderate the prediction of examination behaviour by study habits.

## Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of Significance:

- i. Study habits do not significantly predict examination behaviour.
- ii. Gender does not significantly moderate the prediction of examination behaviour by study habits.

## Research Method

The ex-post-facto Survey design was used in the study. The population of the study consisted of 12089 regular students in eight tertiary institutions in Delta State. Out of this population, the proportional stratified sampling procedure was used to obtain a sample size of 1,300. This procedure involved selecting the subjects in such a way that identified strata in the population such as institution, courses, and gender were represented proportionally in the sample. This involved multi-stage application of systematic sampling interval (K) to each subset of the population (institutions, courses, and gender). A thirty-five item questionnaire consisting of two sections, namely, study habits (20 item), and examination behaviour (15 items) was used to gather data for the study. The items in the study habits section of the questionnaire were adapted from standardized instruments, namely, the Cook Counselling Centre at Virginia University Study Skills Checklist (2000). The items in the examination behaviour section were generated by the researcher. However all items in the three sections of the questionnaire were revalidated using Nigerian subjects. Construct validity and internal reliability of the instrument was ascertained through Cronbach Alpha which yielded the following indices. Study habits = 0.69 and examination behaviour = 0.67. These Cronbach Alpha indices are indicative of high construct validity and internal reliability (Anastasi, 1976; Egbule, 2002; G.N. Okorodudu, 2004). Test-retest reliability of the instrument also produced acceptable correlation coefficients of 0.75 and 0.87 for the study habits and examination behaviour sections respectively. The administration of the instrument was done by the researcher and this led to a very high rate of return (1295) out of which 1290 questionnaires were completed correctly. The Multiple Regression Statistics was used in the data analysis since prediction was required.

## Results

The results of the study are presented in Table 1 below. Data in the Table were used to answer the two research questions and test the two hypotheses.

Table 1: Prediction of Examination Behaviour by Study Habits with Gender as Moderator

Variables	B	SEB	Beta	T	Decision
(Constant)	31.93	3.92		8.15*	Significant
Study Habit	- .35	.03	- .41	-11.67*	Significant
Gender	.48	.46	.02	11.04	Not Significant

\*Significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). Dependent variable is Examination Behavior

Data in Table 1 show that study habit is a significant predictor of examination behaviour with gender as moderator variable. The significant t values for study habits (-11.67) in Table 1 indicate that it is a significant predictor of examination behaviour. The significant Beta weights in Table 1 show that gender does not significantly moderate the prediction of examination behaviour by study habits and examination anxiety. Therefore, the answers to the research questions and results of the hypotheses testing are that:

Study habits significantly predict examination behaviour

Gender does not significantly moderate the prediction of examination behaviour by study habits.

### Discussion of Results and implications for College Guidance and Counselling

Study habits have been found to be significant predictor of students' examination behaviour in this study. This finding is in agreement with earlier studies which considered study habits and examination anxiety as predictors of academic performance. For example, Spielberger & Vagg (1987, 1995); Knight (1999); Palmer (1999); G.N Okorodudu and Ossai (2004) found that students who were highly anxious of examination typically had poor study habits as well as negative, non-productive attitude towards academic work which ultimately led to poor academic performance. By extension, the present study has shown that students who had high examination anxiety also tended to have poor study habits, as well as negative examination behaviour. Such students were inclined to engage in acts of examination malpractices. The findings of this research has further corroborated the deficit model theory of the relationship among study habits, examination anxiety and academic performance as propounded by Birenbaum & Pinku (1997). Proponents of the deficit model theory argued that low academic performance of highly test-anxious students, were traceable to insufficient knowledge of the course material due to poor study habits as well as the metacognitive awareness of this insufficient knowledge at the time of taking examinations. By extension, the present study has shown that this metacognitive awareness of insufficient knowledge of course material due to poor study habits may also engender positive attitude towards examination malpractices. Furthermore, the results of the present study which identified study habits and examination anxiety as significant predictors of examination behaviour tended to deemphasize the interference model explanation of the relationship among study habits examination anxiety and academic performance. The interference model refers to the test anxious students as one who knows the course material but fails to recall learned materials during examination due to interference of examination anxiety (Hembree, 1990). If this were to be the case, then good study habits would not be relied upon as predictor of students' examination behaviour since it may make no difference if you studied well or not for examination. The non-moderating role of gender in the present study is consistent with similar findings by Ogunsanya (2003); Ossai (2004); and G.N. Okonodudu & Ossai (2004). This seems to point to the fact that both male and female students have equal tendencies to engage in negative examination behaviour (Onyechere; 2004; Ogunlowo, 2004). The findings of this study that study habits significantly predicts examination behaviour implies that College Counselors could rely on measures of students study habits to administer proactive counseling services to students who are likely engage in examination malpractice. This will help to reduce cases of examination malpractices in schools.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Students who have good study habits are more likely to resist the urge to engage in examination malpractices as suggested by the inverse Beta and t values between study habits and examination behaviour. Conversely, students who have poor study habits are more likely to engage in examination malpractices. Students who have high examination anxiety levels are more likely to have positive attitude towards examination malpractices as suggested by the positive Beta and t values between examination anxiety and examination behaviour. Finally, male and female students have equal tendencies to engage in examination malpractices.

On the basis of the conclusion reached above, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Measures of students study habits could be relied upon by counselors, teachers and other educational practitioners as indicators of students' likely disposition towards engaging in examination malpractices.
- ii. Students who have poor study habits and high examination anxiety levels should be reoriented before they sit for examinations.
- iii. Equal attention should be given to male and female students in proactive strategies against examination malpractices since both sexes showed no significant difference in their examination behaviour.
- iv. Standardized study habits inventories should be made available for use in schools.

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