Self-attribution as correlate of cheating behaviour among students in public secondary schools in Oyo state, Nigeria

OLAGUNJU, BOLANLE IDAYAT

Lecture II, Educational Psychology and Counseling/Specialized and Professional Education/Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo/Nigeria

Email - olagunjubi@eauedoyo.edu.ng/ayaalatede2002@gmail.com

Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between self-attribution and cheating behavior among students in public secondary schools in Oyo State, Nigeria. The research adopts a correlational descriptive survey design, targeting a sample of 250 senior secondary students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, comprising items on self-attribution and various forms of cheating behavior. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship (r = .838, p < .01) between external, unstable self-attribution and the likelihood of engaging in cheating behavior. The findings indicate that students who attribute their academic successes and failures to external factors or perceive factors as inconsistent are more prone to rationalize and engage in dishonest academic practices. The study also highlights that a substantial proportion of respondents believe that external and unstable attribution styles significantly contribute to cheating behavior. Based on these findings, the study recommended promotion of internal and stable attribution styles through educational programs that emphasize personal responsibility and ethical decision-making. Additionally, the study advocates for the integration of ethical education into the curriculum, the enhancement of teacher-student relationships, and the implementation of fair and transparent assessment practices to reduce the prevalence of cheating. These interventions are crucial in fostering a culture of academic integrity and reducing the tendency towards dishonest behavior in educational settings.

Key words: Self-attribution, cheating behavior, academic dishonesty, public secondary school students.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Cheating behavior in secondary schools have become critical concerns in the education sector, researches indicate that these behaviours undermine educational integrity, disrupt learning environments, and erode trust between students and educators (Munakarmi 2024)[1]. Many students cheat just to receive a passing grade and impress their parents and teacher. Academic cheating is caused by many reasons; parental pressure, teacher pressure and poor time management. Teachers' pressure will generate the need for students to cheat academically. Academic cheating is a growing concern among students worldwide (Sarita, 2015)[2]. Some of other reasons why students engage in cheating behavior according to Ahmadi (2022)[3] were: Not preparing for the exam, lack of time to study, carelessness and lack of punishment from instructors. He stressed further that the most common methods of cheating by students were found to be copying from other test studies and talking to neighbors during the examination besides using certain gestures to get answers from others. Cheating can as well manifest in various forms, including plagiarism, copying during exams, and falsifying academic records. The prevalence of such behaviours highlights the need to understand the underlying psychological and environmental factors contributing to cheating behavior.

Self-attribution is one of the key psychological constructs linked to cheating behavior, it refers to how individuals perceive the causes of their successes and failures. Students who attribute their academic outcomes to internal factors, such as effort and ability, are less likely to engage in cheating compared to those who attribute their outcomes to external factors, such as luck or task difficulty (McIntire, Calvert, & Ashcraft, 2024)[4]. Self-attribution plays a significant role in shaping student behaviour. Attribution Theory, developed by Fritz Heider and later expanded by Bernard Weiner, posits that individuals interpret and explain their successes and failures through internal and external attributions (Hart,

2022)[5]. Self-attribution refers to the process by which individuals assign causes to their own actions and outcomes. These attributions can be internal (e.g., personal effort or ability) or external (e.g., luck or external pressure), and they significantly influence how students perceive and justify their behaviour.

Self-attribution can affect students' likelihood of engaging in cheating. Students who attribute their failures to external factors such as difficult exams or unfair grading may be more inclined to cheat as a coping mechanism. Conversely, students who attribute their successes or failures to their own abilities or effort may be less likely to engage in cheating behavior, as they might feel a stronger sense of personal responsibility and integrity (Stone, 2023) [6].

Recent studies have shown that students with external self-attributions are more prone to cheating behavior compared to those with internal attributions (Maffly-Kipp, Rivera, Schlegel & Vess, 2022)[7]. For example, if students believe that their failure is due to an unfair test or lack of support from teachers, they might resort to cheating to compensate for their perceived disadvantages. On the other hand, students who view their academic outcomes as a result of their own effort or skill are likely to exhibit higher levels of academic integrity.

The relevance of self-attribution in understanding cheating behaviour is particularly significant in the Nigerian educational context, where educational pressures and system challenges are prevalent. Understanding how self-attribution affects cheating can provide insights into developing targeted interventions to promote academic honesty. By addressing the psychological factors influencing cheating, educators and policymakers can implement strategies to mitigate cheating behavior and foster a culture of integrity.

In conclusion, the study of self-attribution as it relates to cheating behavior offers valuable insights into the psychological mechanisms behind academic dishonesty. By exploring how students' attributions influence their likelihood to cheat, educators and researchers can better understand and address the root causes of cheating behavior. This understanding is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote academic integrity and improve educational outcomes.

Statement of the Problem :

Cheating behaviour has become increasingly prevalent in public secondary schools, posing a significant challenge to the educational system. In Oyo State, the issue is particularly concerning, with reports indicating a rise in instances of cheating in an examination by students (Adebayo and Osamoka, 2024)[8]. This behaviour not only compromises the integrity of assessments but also undermines the educational development of students, who miss out on genuine learning opportunities. Despite various efforts by school authorities to curb this trend, including stricter supervision during examinations and the introduction of honor codes, cheating remains a persistent problem. The effectiveness of these measures has been limited, largely because they do not address the underlying psychological factors that drive students to engage in dishonest behaviours.

One of such psychological factor is self-attribution, which refers to how students explain their academic successes and failures. Understanding self-attribution is critical because it influences students' motivation and decision-making processes, including their propensity to cheat (Rieger, Wang, Huang & Hsu, 2022)[9]. Students who attribute their academic failures to external factors, such as unfair teaching practices or difficult exam questions, may feel justified in cheating as a means of leveling the playing field. Conversely, those who attribute their outcomes to internal factors like effort and ability are less likely to engage in such behaviour. However, the role of self-attribution in cheating behaviour among students in Oyo State has not been extensively studied, creating a gap in the understanding of this phenomenon. Therefore, there is a need to explore how self-attribution correlates with cheating behaviour in this context to develop more effective strategies for promoting academic integrity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Cheating Behaviour

Cheating behaviour in educational settings is typically defined as any act of dishonesty undertaken by a student to gain an unfair advantage in an academic setting. This behaviour can take various forms, including but not limited to, copying answers during exams, using unauthorized materials or devices, plagiarism, and falsifying data or assignments (Hammoudi and Benzerroug, 2021)[10]. In recent years, the advent of technology has also led to new forms of cheating,

such as using smartphones to access information during tests or buying completed assignments online. The core of cheating behaviour lies in the intentional deception to misrepresent one's own academic abilities or knowledge, thus undermining the integrity of the educational process.

There are several types of cheating behaviour commonly observed in educational contexts. Direct cheating involves overtly dishonest actions such as copying from another student's paper during an exam or using cheat sheets (Fendler, Yates & Godbey 2023)[11]. Indirect forms include plagiarism, where students present someone else's work or ideas as their own, and falsification, which involves altering data or results to meet desired outcomes. Other forms of academic dishonesty include collusion, where students collaborate dishonestly on individual assignments, and unauthorized collaboration, which involves working together on assignments that are meant to be completed individually.

Several factors contribute to cheating behaviour among secondary school students. One significant factor is academic pressure, where students feel compelled to achieve high grades to meet parental expectations, secure scholarships, or gain admission to prestigious institutions (Springer, Morgan, Griesemer & Reider, 2023)[12]. This pressure can lead students to view cheating as a viable means to achieve their academic goals when they feel overwhelmed or inadequately prepared. perceived inequities in the educational environment, such as unfair grading practices or inconsistent enforcement of academic policies, can foster a sense of injustice that may drive students to engage in dishonest behaviours as a form of self-defense or retaliation.

Psychological factors also play a crucial role in cheating behaviour. For instance, students with lower self-efficacy may resort to cheating due to a lack of confidence in their ability to succeed through honest efforts. Conversely, students with a high level of anxiety about their performance may cheat to alleviate stress and improve their grades (Novick, Lee, Wei, Mundorff, Santangelo & Sonbuchner, 2022)[13]. The role of peer influence cannot be understated; students who observe their peers engaging in cheating without facing consequences may perceive such behaviour as acceptable or even necessary, thereby reinforcing a culture of dishonesty.

Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective strategies to combat cheating in secondary schools. Educators must address both the psychological and situational elements contributing to academic dishonesty, creating a supportive environment that promotes integrity and provides students with the resources and skills they need to succeed honestly.

Self-Attribution and Its Role in Behaviour

Self-attribution refers to the process by which individuals explain the causes of their own successes and failures. This concept is central to understanding how people interpret and react to different outcomes in their lives. Self-attribution can be categorized into two main types: internal versus external attribution and stable versus unstable attribution. Internal attribution occurs when individuals attribute outcomes to factors within themselves, such as their abilities, effort, or personal characteristics. For example, a student who believes they performed well on a test because of their intelligence is making an internal attribution. Conversely, external attribution involves attributing outcomes to external factors beyond one's control, such as luck, task difficulty, or the actions of others (Hamilton & Lordan, 2023)[14]. For instance, a student who blames a poor test score on the difficulty of the exam or unfair grading is making an external attribution.

In addition to internal and external attributions, outcomes can also be viewed as stable or unstable. Stable attributions refer to causes that are perceived as consistent over time, such as innate ability or personality traits. Unstable attributions, on the other hand, are related to causes that can vary, such as effort or mood. A student who attributes their success to hard work is making an unstable attribution because effort can change from one situation to another. In contrast, attributing success to intelligence is considered a stable attribution, as intelligence is generally perceived as a fixed trait. The combination of these dimensions—internal vs. external and stable vs. unstable—creates a framework through which individuals interpret their experiences and, subsequently, make decisions about future actions (Xu, 2023)[15].

The way individuals attribute their successes and failures plays a significant role in shaping their behaviour, particularly in ethical and moral decision-making. When students consistently make internal and stable attributions for their successes, they are more likely to develop a sense of competence and self-efficacy, which can lead to positive, ethical behaviours. For example, a student who believes that their good grades result from their effort and intelligence is more likely to engage in behaviours that reinforce this belief, such as studying hard and avoiding cheating (Hammoudi and

Benzerroug, 2021)[16].On the other hand, students who make external and unstable attributions for their failures may feel less control over their outcomes and more inclined to engage in unethical behaviours, such as cheating, to achieve their desired results.

The relationship between self-attribution and ethical decision-making is particularly evident in academic settings, where students are frequently confronted with challenges that test their integrity. Students who attribute failures to external factors, like unfair teaching methods or overly difficult exams, may rationalize cheating as a necessary means to succeed. This external attribution reduces their sense of responsibility for their actions, making them more susceptible to dishonest behaviours (Abraham, Prayoga, Murti, Azizah, Krishti, Fajrianti & Manurung, 2022)[17]. Conversely, students who attribute failures to internal factors, such as not studying enough, are more likely to take responsibility for their actions and refrain from cheating, as they believe they can improve their performance through increased effort.

Understanding the role of self-attribution in ethical decision-making has important implications for educators and policymakers. By fostering an environment where students are encouraged to make internal and unstable attributions for their academic outcomes, educators can help promote a sense of personal responsibility and integrity. This approach can reduce the likelihood of academic dishonesty and encourage students to adopt ethical behaviours that will benefit them in the long run. Additionally, addressing the factors that contribute to external attributions, such as perceived unfairness in assessment practices, can help mitigate the temptation to engage in unethical behaviour and reinforce the value of honesty and hard work.

Theoretical Framework

Attribution Theory by Fritz Heider

Attribution Theory, propounded by Fritz Heider in 1958, is a foundational framework in psychology that explores how individuals interpret and assign causes to events and behaviours. Heider posited that people tend to make attributions in an effort to understand and control their environment. According to this theory, individuals can attribute causes to either internal factors, such as personal traits and abilities, or external factors, such as situational pressures and environmental influences (Hamzah and Othman, 2023)[18]. The theory assumes that individuals are motivated to seek a logical explanation for events, particularly when outcomes are unexpected or negative. This attributional process helps people make sense of their experiences and influences their future expectations and behaviours.

In the area of student behaviour and academic dishonesty, Attribution Theory is particularly relevant. When students face academic challenges, the way they attribute their successes or failures can significantly impact their motivation and ethical decision-making. For instance, students who attribute their failures to internal, controllable factors like lack of effort may be more likely to work harder and avoid cheating in the future. Conversely, those who attribute their failures to external, uncontrollable factors, such as unfair exam questions or biased grading, may feel less responsible for their outcomes and more justified in engaging in dishonest behaviours (Wu, 2021)[19]. Thus, Attribution Theory provides a valuable lens through which educators can understand and address the psychological underpinnings of cheating behaviour in academic settings.

Locus of Control by Julian Rotter

Locus of Control, a concept developed by Julian Rotter in 1954, is a psychological construct that refers to an individual's belief about the extent to which they can control events that affect them. According to Rotter, individuals with an internal locus of control believe that they have personal control over their life outcomes, attributing success and failure to their own actions, decisions, and abilities. On the other hand, those with an external locus of control believe that their outcomes are determined by external forces such as luck, fate, or the influence of others Obinna-Akakuru, Onyekwere, Anokam & Iheka, 2022)[20] . The theory assumes that these beliefs significantly influence a person's behaviour, motivation, and overall psychological well-being. Rotter's work was pivotal in understanding how perceived control over one's environment affects decision-making and resilience in the face of challenges.

In educational settings, Locus of Control is a critical factor in understanding student behaviour, particularly in relation to academic dishonesty. Students with an internal locus of control are more likely to take responsibility for their academic performance and are generally less inclined to engage in cheating because they believe their efforts directly impact their success. Conversely, students with an external locus of control may perceive their academic outcomes as

beyond their control, leading to a higher likelihood of cheating as they may view dishonest practices as necessary to achieve success in an unfair system.

Empirical Studies

Mei, Ke, Li, Zhang, Gao and Yin (2023) [21] examined whether self-efficacy belief is based upon actual ability (true belief) or prediction errors (false belief). Study 1 showed that self-deception occurred in the effortless (easier access to answer cues) rather than effortful (harder access to answer cues) cheating opportunity conditions, suggesting high ambiguity in attributions facilitates self-deception. Studies 2 and 3 probed the neural source of self-deception, linking self-deception with the metacognitive process. Both studies replicated behavioural results from Study 1. Study 2 (ERP study; N = 55) found that the amplitude of frontal slow wave significantly differed between participants with positive/self-enhancing and negative/self-diminishing self-deceiving tendencies in incorrect predictions while remaining similar in correct predictions.

Alvarez, Dayrit, Dela Cruz, Jocson, Mendoza, Reyes and Salas (2022) [22] investigated the factors affecting cheating-behaviour at undergraduate-engineering. The study-design used a descriptive-survey-approach and a document-analysis. A designed confidential self-report-questioner was applied as the main-instrument for the study, with the sample-size of 100-subjects, and a response-rate of 95%. The study focused on the Attribution-Theory and the Pareto-principle. The data-collection-instrument was subjected to the statistical-analysis to determine its reliability via Cronbach Cos alpha-coefficient, and found high inter-item consistency (a > 0.9). The major-results of the study revealed that 65% of respondents declared that cheating is, in fact, a common-phenomenon in the SOE; 60% of students also affirmed, that it is, actually, difficult to eradicate cheating in examinations in the SOE; and 70% of students acknowledged that they use mobile-phones to Google or to assess notes, during examinations.

Sukidin, Hartanto, Zulianto, Suharso and Hudori (2022) [23] investigated the education of anti-corruption in secondary school. The study described an anti-corruption culture in schools. This research was conducted using naturalistic inquiry methods. The results of this study the main task of anti-corruption education in schools is to provide knowledge to teach how to recognize corruption (and separate it from other types of crime), give arguments on why corruption is a crime, and show how to reduce fraud. In conclusion, Anti-corruption education can be integrated into the contents of the civic, social education curriculum, or separately in extra-curricular activities.

Baran and Janowski (2023) [24] examined the general self-efficacy associations with personality and motivation: psychometric properties and measurement invariance of the polish new general self-efficacy scale. The study determined the validity and reliability of the Polish version of the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSE). In four different samples (N = 1,837), adult respondents completed the Polish version of NGSE (NGSEpl) in combination with questionnaires assessing personality, motivation, and behavioural tendencies. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated a good fit for the one-factor structure. Cronbach's alpha was above .87 in all samples, and the stability of the scale was .68. Measurement invariance of NGSEpl calculated for different age groups confirmed that the scale measures the same construct in both samples. NGSEpl scores were positively related to the frequency of active coping strategies, mastery-goal orientation, and Big Five model traits and negatively to passive coping strategies. Results supported the reliability, stability, and validity of the NGSEpl.

Ferguson, Kaufmann, Brown and de la Piedad Garcia (2024) [25] examined the influences of past moral behaviour on future behaviour: A Review of Sequential Moral Behaviour Studies Using Meta-Analytic Techniques. Experimental research on sequential moral behaviour (SMB) has found that engaging in an initial moral (or immoral) behaviour can sometimes lead to moral balancing (i.e., switching between positive and negative behaviour) and sometimes to moral consistency (i.e., maintaining a consistent pattern of positive or negative behaviour). In two meta-analyses, we present the first comprehensive syntheses of SMB studies and test moderators to identify the conditions under which moral balancing and moral consistency are most likely to occur. Meta-Analysis 1 (k = 217 effect sizes, N = 31,242) revealed that engaging in an initial positive behaviour only reliably resulted in moral licensing (i.e., balancing) in studies that measured engagement in negative target behaviours (Hedges' g = 0.25, 95% CI [0.16, 0.44]) and only resulted in positive consistency in foot-in-the-door studies using prosocial requests (Hedges' g = −0.44, 95% CI [−0.59, −0.29]). Meta-Analysis 2 (k = 132 effect sizes, N = 14,443) revealed that engaging in an initial negative behaviour only reliably resulted in moral compensation (i.e., balancing) in studies that measured engagement in positive target behaviours (Hedges' g = 0.27, 95% CI [0.18, 0.37]).

Yusuf, Pervin and Román-González (2024)[26] examined the generative AI and the future of higher education: a threat to academic integrity or reformation? Evidence from multicultural perspectives. The study addresses this gap by examining the usage, benefts, and concerns of GenAI in higher education from a multicultural standpoint. it employed an online survey that col lected responses from 1217 participants across 76 countries, encompassing a broad range of gender categories, academic disciplines, geographical locations, and cultural orientations. Its findings revealed a high level of awareness and familiarity with GenAI tools among respondents. A significant portion had prior experience and expressed the intention to continue using these tools, primarily for information retrieval and text paraphrasing. The study emphasizes the importance of GenAI integration in higher education, highlighting both its potential benefits and concerns. Notably, there is a strong correlation between cultural dimensions and respondents' views on the benefits and concerns related to GenAI, including its potential as academic dis honesty and the need for ethical guidelines.

3. OBJECTIVES/AIMS

•   To examine the relationship between self-attribution and cheating behaviour among students.
•   To identify specific self-attribution patterns that correlate with higher instances of cheating.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
•   What is the nature of the relationship between self-attribution and cheating behaviour?
•   Which self-attribution styles are most associated with cheating?

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant correlation between self-attribution and cheating behaviour among students.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant correlation between self-attribution and cheating behaviour among students.

Scope of the Study

This study is focused on public secondary schools in Oyo State, Nigeria, aiming to explore the role of self-attribution in influencing cheating behaviour among students. The research will specifically examine self-attribution as the primary psychological factor contributing to cheating behavior, with an emphasis on understanding how students' internal and external attributions for their academic outcomes correlate with their likelihood of engaging in cheating. By narrowing the scope to public secondary schools in this region, the study seeks to provide insights relevant to the local educational context while contributing to broader discussions on cheating behavior.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a correlational descriptive survey design. The descriptive survey component enables the collection of detailed information on students' perceptions and experiences related to these variables.

The target population for the study consists of students attending public secondary schools in Oyo State, Nigeria. This population includes students from senior secondary classes (SS1 to SS3), as they are actively preparing for crucial examinations and are therefore likely to experience significant academic pressure.

A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the study sample. First, a random sampling method was applied to select a representative sample of public secondary schools from various districts within Oyo town of Oyo State. Based on previous studies and anticipated effect sizes, a target sample size of approximately 250 students was aimed for, ensuring robust and reliable results.

Instrumentation

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure self-attribution and cheating behaviour. The questionnaire includes sections on demographic information, self-attribution scales (e.g., internal vs. external, stable vs. unstable), and items related to various forms of cheating behaviour.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, was used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and self-attribution styles associated with cheating behaviour. Correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between self-attribution and cheating behaviour. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ to determine the strength of the relationships observed.

5. RESULT/FINDINGS

Section A: Demographic Variables of the Respondents

Table I: Sex of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	113	45.2
Female	137	54.8
Total	250	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table I shows the gender of the respondent. It was observed that, 113(45.2%) were male, while 137(54.8%) were female. This implies that majority of the respondents were female.

Table II: Classroom of the Respondent

Class	Frequency	Percent
SS 1	83	33.2
SS 2	92	36.8
SS 3	75	30.0
Total	250	19.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The table II revealed the class of the respondents. It was observed that 83 (33.2%) of the respondents were in SS1, 92 (36.8%) in SS2, while the remaining 75 (30%) are in SS3 class. This implies that SS2 students constitute the majority number of the respondent.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant correlation between self-attribution and cheating behaviour among students.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Analysis of the Correlation Between Self-Attribution and Cheating Behaviour Among Students

SAS = Self-Attribution Scale

CBS = Cheating Behaviour Scale

	SAS	CBS
SAS	Pearson Correlation	
Sig. (2-tailed)		

N   1

250   .838**

.000

250

CBS   Pearson Correlation

Sig. (2-tailed)

N   .838**

.000

250   1

250

**. Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Author's Computation, 2024.

6. DISCURSSION/RESULT ANALYSIS

The Pearson correlation analysis presented in table 1 shows a significant positive correlation between the Self-Attribution Scale (SAS) and the Cheating Behaviour Scale (CBS) among students. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = .838) indicates a strong positive relationship between self-attribution and cheating behavior. This means that as students' tendencies towards certain self-attribution styles increase, there is a corresponding increase in their likelihood of engaging in cheating behavior. The significance level (p = .000) confirms that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that the observed relationship is highly unlikely to be due to chance.

This strong correlation suggests that self-attribution plays a critical role in influencing students' cheating behaviors. Specifically, students who attribute their academic outcomes to external or unstable factors may be more prone to cheating as a coping mechanism or rationalization. The findings underscore the importance of addressing self-attribution styles in educational interventions aimed at reducing cheating behavior.

Research Question 2: Which self-attribution styles are most associated with cheating behavior?

Table 2: Analysis of Self-attribution styles that are most associated with cheating behaviour

SN	ITEMS	SA	AD	SD
1	External, unstable self-attribution styles are most associated with increased cheating behaviour.			
	99 (39.6%)	86 (34.4%)	35 (14%)	30 (12%)
2	Students with external attribution often rationalize cheating as beyond their control.			
	42 (16.8%)	108 (43.2%)	54 (21.6%)	46 (18.4%)
3	Unstable self-attribution often leads to situational excuses, fostering cheating tendencies.			
	75 (30%)	98 (39.2%)	40 (16%)	37 (14.8%)
4	Cheating is frequently linked to external attributions, blaming factors outside personal control.			
	100 (40%)	73 (29.2%)	35 (14 %)	42 (16.8%)

5	Students with unstable attribution styles may resort to cheating during unpredictable challenges.

80 (32%)	104 (41.6%)	35 (14 %)	31 (12.4%)

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The data presented in Table 2 illustrates respondents' perceptions regarding the association between various self-attribution styles and cheating behavior among students. For Item 1, a significant majority of respondents either strongly agreed (39.6%) or agreed (34.4%) that external, unstable self-attribution styles are most associated with increased cheating behavior. Similarly, in Item 4, 40% strongly agreed and 29.2% agreed that cheating is frequently linked to external attributions, where individuals blame factors outside their personal control. These findings suggest a prevalent belief that students who do not take personal responsibility for their actions are more inclined to engage in cheating behavior in an examination.

Items 2, 3, and 5 further reinforce this association between self-attribution styles and cheating tendencies. In Item 2, a combined 60% of respondents (16.8% strongly agree and 43.2% agree) believe that students with external attribution rationalize cheating as beyond their control. Item 3 shows that 69.2% (30% strongly agree and 39.2% agree) think that unstable self-attribution leads to situational excuses fostering cheating tendencies. In Item 5, 73.6% (32% strongly agree and 41.6% agree) agree that students with unstable attribution styles may resort to cheating during unpredictable challenges. Overall, these responses indicate a consensus among respondents that external and unstable self-attribution styles significantly contribute to the propensity for cheating behavior among students. This emphasizes the need for educational interventions that promote internal and stable attribution styles to curb cheating behavior.

7. CONCLUSION:

This study explored the relationship between self-attribution and cheating behavior among students in public secondary schools. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between external, unstable self-attribution styles and the likelihood of engaging in cheating behavior. Students who attribute their academic successes or failures to factors outside their control, or who perceive these factors as inconsistent, are more prone to rationalize and justify dishonest practices as a means of coping with academic challenges. The analysis showed that a significant portion of the respondents agreed that self-attribution is closely associated with increased cheating behavior, highlighting the psychological underpinnings that contribute to unethical academic conduct.

In conclusion, the study highlights the critical role that self-attribution plays in influencing students' behavior in academic settings. By understanding how students perceive the causes of their academic outcomes, educators and policymakers can better address the root causes of cheating behavior. Interventions that promote internal and stable attribution styles, where students take responsibility for their actions and believe in their ability to influence outcomes through effort, could significantly reduce the incidence of cheating. This study suggests that fostering a sense of personal responsibility and resilience in students is key to cultivating academic integrity and reducing the temptation to engage in cheating behavior.

8. LIMITATION

The uniqueness of this study is that it specifically examined cheating behavior as an academic dishonesty amongst public secondary school students with self-attribution as a predictor. Despite this, the study still has a number of limitations.

- The study was restricted to respondents in public secondary school and 250 respondents because of financial constraints.
- Also, the study was restricted to senior secondary school students who were considered to be more prone to cheating behavior.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were put forward;

•	Schools should implement programs that encourage students to adopt internal and stable attribution styles. This can be achieved through workshops, counseling sessions, and classroom activities that emphasize the importance of personal responsibility, effort, and perseverance in academic success.

•	Schools should provide regular instruction on the importance of honesty, the consequences of cheating, and the value of ethical decision-making. By embedding these principles in students' education, schools can help create a culture of integrity that discourages dishonest practices.

•	Teachers should be trained to identify and address signs of external and unstable attribution among students. By building strong, supportive relationships with their students, teachers can provide the necessary guidance and encouragement to help students develop healthier attribution.

•	Schools should also ensure that their assessment practices are fair, transparent, and consistent. When students perceive exams and grading systems as fair, they are less likely to attribute their failures to external factors and resort to cheating.

•	Schools should offer additional support for students struggling academically, such as tutoring, mentoring, and counseling services. Early intervention can prevent students from adopting external and unstable attribution styles that lead to cheating behavior.

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