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Effects of honor codes and classroom justice on students' deviant behavior

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of honor codes and classroom justice on students' deviant behavior. One hundred and two final year undergraduate students studying in various higher institutions of learning in Nigeria participated in the study, including Bayero University, Kano, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Federal Polytechnic, Kaura Namoda, Kano State Polytechnic and Federal College of Education, Zaria. Pearson correlation analysis, multiple linear regression analysis, independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA analysis were conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the data. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that Honor codes had a significant negative effect on students' deviant behavior. On the contrary, the results showed that classroom justice had no significant effect on students' deviant behavior. Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed a significant difference in student deviant by gender, age categories and ethnicity. The managerial implications for the school administrators, lecturers and educational policy makers are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Deviant behavior among students of higher education institutions (i.e., universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) is prevalence and a major concern of organizational researchers, practitioners and the public at large (Aluede, Omoregie, & Osa-Edoh, 2006; Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005; Chapman & Lupton, 2004; Kidwell & Kent, 2008). For example, in a global survey on academic dishonesty, Lin and Wen (2007) reported that in Taiwan the prevalence rate for all types of deviant behaviors among university students was 61.72%. They further reported that some of the most practiced forms of deviant behaviors among university students in Taiwan include writing assignments for other students and giving prohibited help to others on their assignment among others. In Nigeria,

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deviant behaviors among students of higher education institutions have been frequently reported in the news media. Some of these behaviors include academic plagiarism, examination misconduct, forgery of certificates, fighting, indecent dressing, late coming, sexual harassment and cult-related offences among others (Adeniyi & Taiwo, 2011; Bello, 2012; Ibok, 2012; Omede, 2011; Osogbo, 2012).

In an attempt to better explain why students engage in deviant acts in the universities and colleges, scholars in the field of educational psychology, criminology and sociology have advocated the use of honor codes (e.g., Gertz & Gould, 1995; Imran & Ayobami, 2011; McCabe & Trevino, 1993; 1997; Molnar & Kletke, 2012; Passow, Mayhew, Finelli, Harding, & Carpenter, 2006). Honor codes has been defined by Pauli, Arthur and Price (2002) as “a policy statement of an institution’s position regarding student conduct as it relates to academic integrity” (p.3). From theoretical perspective, the use of honor codes in explaining students’ deviant behavior is grounded in the social cognitive theory of moral thought and action (Bandura, 1991). Social cognitive theory of moral thought and action (Bandura, 1991) suggests that students’ deviant behavior is a function of environmental factors, including honor codes, social norms, moral thought/development and classroom justice. In particular, if students perceived that the honor codes instituted by the university or college are being enforced properly, they are less likely to engage in deviant acts than if they perceived that such honor codes are fully enforced (Lau, Caracciolo, Roddenberry, & Scroggins, 2011). Furthermore, if a student experience injustice in the course of relating with other students and faculty members he or she is more likely to engage in deviant acts, thereby seeking to restore justice (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004; Morris, 2010).

While Bandura’s (1991) social cognitive theory of moral thought and action suggested honor codes and classroom justice among the significant predictors of students’ deviant behavior, however there is a paucity of studies combining the two factors to predict students’ deviant behavior. The purpose of the present study is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge concerning social cognitive theory of moral thought and action. Specifically, the objective of this study was to investigate the effects of honor codes and classroom justice on students’ deviant behavior among undergraduate students from various higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. In so doing, remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section we review previous studies on the relationship between students’ deviant behavior, honor codes, classroom justice and individual characteristics. Next, we then describe the method used in the present study, followed by presentation of the results. The final section captured discussion and conclusion.

2. Literature review

2.1 Relationship between honor codes and student deviant behavior

Previous studies have examined the effect of honor codes on students’ deviant behavior (Arnold, Martin, & Bigby, 2007; Cole & McCabe, 1996; Konheim-Kalkstein, Stellmack, & Shilkey, 2008; McCabe, 1993; McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2002). For example, McCabe and Trevino (1993) conducted a study to examine the influence of perceived formal controls (i.e., honor codes or set of rules and regulations governing student conduct) on deviant behavior (e.g., copying other student’s work during a test, helping other students to cheat during a test and cooking or fabricating data) among 6,096 students from thirty-one colleges and universities in the United States. Multiple regression results revealed a significant negative relationship between honor codes and students’ deviant behavior, suggesting that perception of formal control reduces students’ predispositions to engage in deviant acts. In a similar study, McCabe, et al. (2002) included students from 21 colleges and universities in the United States to examine the effects of modified honor codes, defined as an alternative to traditional honor codes that place responsibility for maintaining academic honesty faculty and/or administrators rather than on students) on students’ academic dishonesty. The findings of the study showed a significant negative relationship between modified honor codes and students’ deviant behavior, suggesting that modified honor codes are far more significant in reducing students’ tendency to engage in deviant acts than traditional honor codes. Thus, drawing from foregoing literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Honor codes will be negatively related to student deviant behavior.

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