**CORRELATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC CHEATING BEHAVIOUR**

**AND**

**ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION**

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**Abstract**

Attempt was made to investigate the relationship between achievement motivation (n-Ach) and academic cheating behaviour. 150 undergraduates drawn from the 200 and 300 levels of the social and management sciences faculty of a Nigeria university were asked to respond to cheating behaviour questionnaire ( Newstead et al, 1996) and the adapted version of Herman’s questionnaire measure of achievement motivation (Eyo, 1986). Using Pearson’s correlation method, findings revealed that academic cheating behaviour index significantly had negative relationships with global score of n- Arch and six of its nine components, namely, achievement behaviour, aspiration level, persistence task tension, time perspective and recognition behaviour. Findings were discussed in light of the literature on relationship between n- Arch and cheating behaviour. Implications of findings were discussed.

Introduction

Academic cheating is a common phenomenon in the education systems of both developed and developing world. ‘Its history and incidence among university students in the developed world have been well documented (Davis, Grover, Becker and McGregor, 1992; Franklyn- Stokes and Newstead, 1995). Its negative effect is perhaps more felt in the developing world where through it the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary for development may become compromised ( Hassan, 1986).

In Nigeria high frequency and incidence of cheating in public examinations have tasked the efforts of educators, government and non government organisations alike. Government has a control measure, come up with draconian laws to punish offenders and discourage would-be offenders ( e.g Decrees No. 27 of 1973 and No. 20 of 1984). Continuous assessment and course work system have also been introduced into the Nigerian system while non- governmental organisation have been going about propagating the ethics of examination.

However, in spite of the high sanctions recommended by the laws and the laboriousness of continuous assessment, academic cheating is still very rampant. This is so, perhaps, because inadequate attention has been paid towards understanding the causes of the problem and the narrow conception and limiting of academic cheating behaviour to only malpractices in examinations. There exist other forms of academic cheating beyond examination malpractices (Michaels and Miethe, 1989; Franklyn- Stokes and Newstead 1995) which may not be curb able by draconian decrees, continuous assessment or course system.

Barnett and Dalton (1981) have attempted a review of studies done outside the shores of Nigeria and have identified six important factors in academic cheating behaviour. The factors are stress, situations, intelligence, personality characteristics, narrow definitions of academic cheating behaviour and moral judgement. Some of these factors have been corroborated by Nigerian researchers ( e.g. Obe, 1985; Ugbuwegbu, 1976; Hassan 1986).

The personality dimension to academic cheating is of particular interest to the present research due to paucity of local studies in this area. One personality trait that may likely explain cheating behaviour is achievement motivation ( n- ach). McClelland defines it as thought to do things better vis-a-vis internal or external standard (McClleland, 1985; McClelland and Winter, 1969). Individuals high on achievement motivation have been known to have urge to accomplish specific goals and to act towards attaining goals with the hope of succeeding ( Kumar and Stoody, 1995). They are also highly competitive and they value excellence (Ibeh, 1985)

Newstead et al (1996) have speculated that individuals high in achievement motivation would more likely have likely have higher propensity to cheat than those with lower levels. This speculation was based on the findings of Pery, Kane, Bernesser and Spicker(1990) and Weiss, Gilbert, Giordano and Davis (1993) which reported significant positive relationship between Type A behaviour and observed and reported cheating. Type A behaviour is said to involve high striving for achievement. The need to investigate the nature of relationship between achievement motivation and academic cheating cannot, however, be foreclosed by studies based on tangentially related concepts. Achievement motivation has many components and some of the components may be critical in predicting academic cheating.

Hermans (1970) has identified nine important components of achievement motivation. The components are aspiration level, upward mobility, persistence, task tension, time perception, time perspective, partner choice, recognition behaviour and achievement behaviour. It will be of theoretical and practical importance to investigate the nature of relationship between components of achievement motivation and academic cheating behaviour. It is because of the above that the present research is conceived. Meanwhile, it is speculated that these components together with the global measure of achievement motivation will have significant positive relationship with academic cheating behaviour.

**Materials and Method**

**Subjects:** One hundred and fifty undergraduates in 200 and 300 levels were drawn from a population of Social Science and Managerial Science Faculty of a Nigerian university. Of this number, 83 were females while 67 were males.

**Measures**

**Achievement Motivation:** Hermans’ (1970) Questionnaire Measure of Achievement Motivation was used. It is a self report achievement motivation questionnaire which contained 29 items. The scale has nine subscales measuring the nine components of achievement motivation that have been theoretically derived. The advantages of the questionnaire over other measurement devices have been discussed by Hermans (1970) and Eyo (1986). Besides the questionnaire has been adapted for Nigerian use with psychometric properties ( Eyo, 1986)

**Cheating behaviour:** The Cheating Behaviour Questionnaire (Newstead et al, 1996) was used to measure cheating behaviour. It contains 21 important behaviours that students engage in both inside and outside examinations but which ipso facto comprises the assessment process. The behaviours include paraphrasing, inventing data impersonation, mishelving, copying book and joint work among others. Factors analysis revealed that the questionnaire measured four important domains of academic cheating, namely, plagiarism/data, collaborative cheating, examinations collusion, lying and examinations noncolloborative.

**Procedure:**

Subjects were requested to respond to the questionnaire. On Hermans’ Questionnaire on Achievement Motivation subjects were required to complete 21 incomplete sentences using either of the three alternative options provided on the right side of each uncompleted sentence.

The alternative options were numbered a, b, and c and were scored 3, 2, 1 respectively if options were arranged in the order that option favouring achievement motivation came first and the reverse was the case if the option favouring achievement motivation came last. A subject’s score on each of the subscale was a total sum of scores on items that made up the scale. Global score on achievement motivation was the summation of a subject’s scores on all the nine components.

On Cheating Behaviour Questionnaire, subjects were required to indicate for each of the 21 behaviours in the questionnaire they had carried out at least once during the previous academic session (1996/97). A changing behaviour index was then computed for each subject by finding the percentage of the behaviours endorsed across the 21 behaviours. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation was used to test the relationships between subjects’ scores on the nine subscales and the global scale of Herman’s Achievement Motivation Questionnaire and their cheating behaviour index.

**Results**

**Table 1**

**Mean Scores and Standard Deviation on the Components of**

**Achievement** **Motivation and Cheating Behaviour Index**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| Achievement behaviour  Aspiration level  Upward mobility  Persistence  Task tension  Time perception  Time perspective  Partner choice  Recognition behaviour  Global  Cheating behaviour | 11.13  9.47  7.55  9.88  9.57  5.91  7.63  4.94  2.69  68.76  35.80 | 1.88  1.52  1.39  1.67  1.84  1.23  1.17  1.09  0.61  7.10  18.01 |

**N**= 150

Table 2 shows that academic cheating behaviour index significantly relates negatively with seven of the nine components of achievement motivation. Cheating behaviour also had a significant negative relationship with the overall score on achievement motivation. Subscales of n-ach that did not have significant relationship with academic cheating behaviour are upward mobility and time perception. In spite of their non-significant relationship they still followed the negative pattern of relationships observed of other components of achievement motivation in predicting cheating behaviour is persistence, followed by recognition behaviour.

**Discussion**

Findings of the present research revealed that seven of the components of

**Table 2**

**Correlation Matrix Table showing Relationships between Components and**

**Global Scores on Achievement Motivation and Cheating Behaviour Index.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **Correlation Coefficient** |
| Achievement behaviour  Aspiration level  Upward mobility  Persistence  Task tension  Time perception  Time perspective  Partner choice  Recognition behaviour  Total (Achievement motivation | -.23\*  -.23\*  -.09  -.39\*\*  -.22\*  -.14  -.21\*  -.17  -.26\*\*  -.39\*\* |

df 148, \*P <.05, \*\*P<.01(two – tailed test)

achievement motivation have significant negative relationships with academic cheating index. Only two were not significantly related but the observed pattern of relationship was also negative. Furthermore global score on achievement motivation significantly had negative relationship with academic cheating behaviour. All this suggests that students who are high on achievement motivation are less likely to cheat in their academic work because they are high on achievement behaviour, aspiration level, persistence, task tension, time perspective and recognition behaviour whereas subjects low on achievement motivation are more likely to cheat in their academic work because they are low on the important components mentioned above.

It is noteworthy that the present findings go against our initial expectation that achievement motivation and its components would relate in a positive direction with cheating behaviour index. The expectation was derived from Newstead et al (1996) inference that people who were high on achievement motivation would more likely engage in cheating behaviour, an inference drawn from previous findings that have observed a strong negative relationship between Type A behaviour and cheating behaviour. Type A behaviour, although tangentially related to achievement motivation on the ground that it involves high striving for achievement, it is not however, equivalent. Measures of Type A behaviour cannot be, ipso facto a substitute for measure of achievement motivation (e.g. Herman’s questionnaire). This, perhaps explains why findings of present research go against findings of Pery et al (1990) and Weiss et al (1993) who found a significant positive relationship between Type A behaviour and reported and observed academic cheating behaviour.

The present findings, are however, a plausible corroboration of Newstaed et al (1996) who found that students who were motivated by high achievement reasons for pursuing a degree programme, (personal development) reported lowest cheating than students with moderate achievement reason (degree as means to get better job opportunity) and those motivated by lowest achievement reason (degree programme as stoppage to avoid getting a job or for social reason).

Students with medium achievement motivation reason reported lower academic cheating than students with low achievement motivation reasons.

Limitation of present research lies in the fact that self reported measure of academic cheating was used to measure levels of academic cheating. As Newstead et al (1996) have observed there was no way to check whether students’ report of cheating were honest report of their behaviour. Second is the fact that the only measure of achievement motivation used was the Hermans questionnaire which also relied heavily on the honest report of the test taker. The problems of unreliability and validity bedevilling the projective techniques of measuring the concept discouraged its use in the present research.

Implications of the findings of the present research are, however, far reaching. It demonstrated that fostering achievement motivation in Nigerian university students can curb the high incidence of academic cheating, the bane of university assessment process. This is especially heart-warming because achievement motivation is a personality trait whose attributes can teach and learnt. Kumar and Stoody (1995) have listed recommendation for fostering human development in developing nations. Furthermore students may be selected for admission through screen them for achievement motivation. This will be an important step towards ensuring quality assurance, an important solution to examination malpractice which Fasasi (2006) has proffered.

Development of achievement motivation in university students can be achieved by introducing achievement motivation training in Nigerian universities’ orientation programmes for new students. Lecturers may also help a great deal by inculcating in their students the value of excellence over the value of pass marks. Furthermore the present situation whereby candidates of different achievement motivation for university education are admitted to the universities does not auger well either for the pursuit of academic excellence or for the control of incidence of academic cheating. Government should create job opportunities for secondary school graduates who may not have the motivation for university education yet. Work therefore becomes a stop gap instead of university admission.

Meanwhile further studies on the relationship between achievement motivation and academic cheating behaviour should be carried out using the multi-trait multi- method approach.

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