

Correlation between Academic Cheating Behavior and Achievement Motivation

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Abstract: Attempt was made to investigate the relationship between achievement motivation (n-Ach) and academic cheating behavior. 150 undergraduates drawn from the 200 and 300 levels of the social and management science faculties of a Nigeria university were asked to respond to Cheating Behavior 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 behavior index had significant negative relationships with global score of n-Arch and six of its nine components, namely, achievement behavior, aspiration level, persistence task tension, time perspective and recognition behavior. Findings were discussed in light of the literature on relationship between n-Arch and cheating behavior. Implications of findings were discussed.

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1. 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 organizations alike. Government has, as 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 educational system while non- governmental organizations 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 behavior to only malpractices in examination halls. There exist other forms of academic cheating beyond examination malpractices (Michaels and Miethe, 1989; Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead 1995) which may not be curbed 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 behavior. The factors are stress, situations, intelligence, personality characteristics, narrow definitions of academic cheating behavior and moral judgment. 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 behavior is achievement motivation (n-ach). McClelland defines it as thought to do things better vis-a-vis internal or external standard (McClelland, 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 Stoodly, 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 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 behavior and observed and reported cheating. Type A behavior 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 behavior and achievement behavior. It will be of theoretical and practical importance to investigate the nature of relationship between components of achievement motivation and academic cheating behavior. 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 behavior.

2. Materials and Methods

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.

2.1 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 Behavior: The Cheating Behavior Questionnaire by Newstead et al (1996) was used to measure cheating behavior. It contains 21 important behaviors that students engage in both inside and outside examinations but which ipso facto comprises the assessment process. The behaviors include paraphrasing, inventing data impersonation, misshelving, 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 non-collaborative.

2.2 Procedure:

Subjects were requested to respond to the questionnaire. On Hermans' Questionnaire on Achievement Motivation subjects were required to complete 21 incomplete sentences using any 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 favoring achievement motivation came first and the reverse was the case if the option favoring 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 Behavior Questionnaire, subjects were required to indicate for each of the 21 behaviors in the questionnaire they had carried out at least once during the previous academic session (1996/97). A changing behavior index was then computed for each subject by finding the percentage of the behaviors endorsed across the 21 behaviors. 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 behavior index.

3. Results

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation on the Components of Achievement Motivation and Cheating Behavior Index

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

N= 150

Table 2 shows that academic cheating behavior index significantly relates negatively with seven of the nine components of achievement motivation. Cheating behavior 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 behavior 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 behavior is persistence, followed by recognition behavior.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix Table showing Relationships between Components and Global Scores on Achievement Motivation and Cheating Behavior Index

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

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

4. Discussions

Findings of the present research revealed that seven of the components of 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 behavior. 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 behavior, aspiration level, persistence,

task tension, time perspective and recognition behavior 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 the initial expectation that achievement motivation and its components would relate in a positive direction with cheating behavior 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 behavior, an inference drawn from previous findings that have observed a strong negative relationship between Type A behavior and cheating behavior. Type A behavior, 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 behavior 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 behavior and reported and observed academic cheating behavior.

The present findings are, however, a plausible corroboration of Newstead 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 behavior. 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 poor reliability and validity bedeviling 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 be taught and learnt. Kumar and Stoody (1995) have listed achievement motivation as part of their recommendations for fostering human development in developing nations. Furthermore students may be selected for admission through screening them for achievement motivation. This will be an important step towards ensuring quality assurance, an important solution to examination malpractices, 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 levels for university education are admitted to the universities does not augur 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 behavior should be carried out using the multi-trait multi- method approach.

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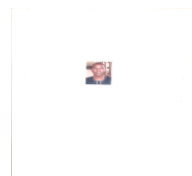
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