

Relationships of Causal Attributions and Academic Attainment among Colleges of Education Students in North- Western Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship of causal attributions and academic attainment of Colleges of Education students in north- west geo- political zone of Nigeria. The study was based on the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between causal attributions academic attainment of students. The questionnaire on Academic Causal Attribution Scale (ACAS) were administered to 389 students (300 level) drawn from eight (8) Colleges of Education. Furthermore, students' Grade Point Average (GPA) was used as measures of academic attainment. Thus, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to determine the degree of relationship of the said variables.. Thus, the findings revealed that there were no significant correlations identified among the causal attributions factors and academic attainment of students except with external attribution of failure in which significant correlation was established with academic attainment. The study therefore, recommends that students should not be reprimanded due to the failure in examination instead; they should be encouraged to put more efforts and they should be involved in teaching and learning activities in a bid to encourage them so that they will record success in their future academic pursuit and as well minimize shifting blame for their failure consistently to external factors.

Introduction

Attribution is related to success or failure in academic environment. Studies revealed that individuals normally expect success in the academic task, and hence have greater tendencies to attribute successful outcome to internal cause. He further revealed that as individuals experience repeated success (such as students who have undergone several assessments successfully) they tend to expect success to the element (Balarabe, 1989)

It is pertinent to note that students who talked and generally managed to make most of their talents on the contrary, self- worth protected and learned helpless students often device various means and ways of attributing their academic outcome to either internal or external factors. Most often than note, students tend to accuse teachers of being responsible for the negative outcome or failure in their academics. Marcus (1988) and Mandel (1999) pointed out that low achieving students would consciously utilize excuses to explain why they are doing poorly and why it isn't their fault. They may go to the extent of saying that the exam did not cover what the teacher said would or everybody did badly or my parents had all kinds of things planned for me the night before the exams. The trouble here is students believe they want to succeed as they utilize their own excuses. This is a typical case of 'self- deception,' and Marcus (1985) described it as "the Crap gap." The differences between what the students think he/she want 'good grade and his/her actual behaviour, (most avoidance of all responsible behaviour through the use of excuses). On the other hand, Elliot (2000) pointed out that even with the need to achieve, student will either succeed or fail, they do and search for reasons for their success.

Hayes (1998) revealed that the attributions which children make about effort and achievement would affect how much effort they put in to succeed. For example, if children attribute failure to lack of ability of some kind, though this will result in their not expecting to be able to achieve much in the future. As a result of this, they will be unlikely to persist in a task that will require effort because they feel that their efforts will not help them to greater success. On the other hand, if students attribute failure to some other causes, such as lack of effort, then faced with familiar task, they will put more effort into it and will be more likely to succeed in the long run.

Furthermore, Narayana (2008) was of the view that the basic principles of attribution as it applies to motivation is that person's own perception or attribution for success or failure determine the amount of effort the person will expend on the activity in the future that there are four factors related to attribution theory that influence motivation in education, they are: ability, task difficulty, effort and luck. Biehler and Snowman (1986) further revealed that students with long history of academic failure and weak need for achievement typically attribute their success to easy question or luck and their failure to lack of ability.

It is however, important to note that the success- oriented students (high need achievers) typically attribute success to ability and effort and failure to insufficient effort. Thus, it is a very common syndrome among students to attribute their success to internal attribution while failure in academics is often being

attributed to external attribution factors.

It is apparent that students in colleges of education have different ways of explaining success and failure in their academic pursuits. More often than not majority of students are not always apt to accept failure, thus, they always used to attribute their academic misfortune to some factors outside themselves ignore the fact they as individuals contributed in one way or the other to such failure. This study therefore intends to investigate the extent to which students explain success or failure in their academic attainment and how it affects their psychological well-being.

Research Question

What is the relationship between causal attributions and academic attainment of students?

Hypotheses

- a. There is no significant relationship between internal attributions of success and academic attainment of students.
- b. There is no significant relationship between internal attributions of failure and academic attainment of students.
- c. There is no significant relationship between external attributions of success and academic attainment of students.
- d. There is no significant relationship between external attributions of failure and academic attainment of students.

Methodology

The correlational design was employed to test the hypothesis formulated in the course of this study. This is because the correlational design describes the degree to which two or more variables are related in quantitative techniques.

Population

The population for this study consisted of all NCE students (300 level) drawn from Federal and State Colleges of Education in North- Western Nigeria. Thus, their total population was 9191.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A sample of 389 students was selected using purposive sampling technique that is out of the total of 9191 as the subjects of this study. The samples were drawn from eight (8) Colleges of Education on proportional basis.

Instrumentation

Academic Causal Attribution Scale (ACAS) questionnaire designed by Balarabe, (1989) was used to collect data from the samples. The questionnaire has four frames, two depicting success and the other two depicting failure situations. Furthermore, each frame consists of 10 attribution items five to internal and five to external factors. The said questionnaires were administered for the purpose of data collection the selected samples. In addition to the questionnaire, students' academic records (Grade Point per Average) were correlated to the responses obtained from students based on the instrument used in generating data.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

The correlation coefficient to the validity of the questionnaire on Academic Causal Attribution and was well established. The instrument had gone through internal and external validation; thus, it was found to be highly acceptable in data collection for attributing causes of academic success or failure amongst student at various levels. On the other hand internal consistency and test-retest reliability measures (Cronbach alpha) indicated 0.69 for internal success; 0.76 for external success; 0.65 for internal failure and 0.63 for external failure.

Method of data Analyses.

Since the study involves establishing relationship among variables, the data were collected organized and analyzed using of Pearson Product Moment.

Results

The data were analyzed and presented in table 1-4 based on the hypotheses formulated.

1. Ho11 There is no Significant Relationship between internal Attributions of Success and Academic Attainment

Table 1 Results of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (Pearson r) Analyses on the Correlation between Internal Attribution of Success and Academic Attainment.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Corr. Index r	df	p
Internal Attribution for Success	389	40.27	5.95	.079	387	.121
Academic Attainment	389	30.96	7.78			

The Table 1 above indicates that there is no significant relationship between internal attribution of success and academic attainment of students. This is because the calculated correlation index r value is obtained as .079. While the calculated p value of .121 is greater than the 0.05 level of tolerance. Therefore, students do not always link their academic success to internal attributions. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained.
 Ho21 There is no Significant Relationship Between internal Attributions of Failure and Academic Attainment.

Table 2: Results of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (Pearson r) Analyses on the relationship between Academic Attainment and Internal Attribution of Failure.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Corr. Index r	df	p
Internal Attribution for Failure	389	32.33	7.49	.028	387	.580
Academic Attainment	389	30.96	7.78			

The table 2 above shows that Pearson Product Moment Correlation (Pearson r) statistics indicates that there is no significant relationship between academic attainment and internal attribution of failure because the calculated p value of .580 is greater than the 0.05 level of tolerance. The results also indicated that .028 is the calculated value obtained as correlation index. Therefore, students are not likely to link their academic failure to internal attribution. Thus, the null hypothesis 2 is retained.

Ho31 There is no Significant Relationship between External Attributions of Success and Academic Attainment

Table 3 Results of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Analyses Between Academic Attainment and External Attribution of Success.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Corr. Index r	df	p
External Attribution for Success	389	37.01	5.58	.019	387	.716
Academic Attainment	389	30.96	7.78			

The table 3 above shows that there is no significant relationship between academic attainment and external attribution of success because the results of the Pearson Product moment Correlation (Pearson r) statistics calculated value of .716 is higher than the 0.05 level of tolerance; while the calculated correlation index r value is .019. Therefore, students' performance in academics could not be link to external attribution for success. Therefore, the null hypothesis 3 is retained.

Ho11 There is no Significant Relationship between External Attributions of Failure and Academic Attainment

Table 4: Results of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analyses on the relationship between Academic Attainment and External attribution of failure.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Corr. Index r	df	p
External Attribution for Failure	389	30.98	7.56	.118*	387	.019
Academic Attainment	389	30.96	7.78			

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The table 4 above shows the results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics which revealed the existence of significant relationship between academic attainment and external attribution of failure. This is because the calculated p value of .019 is lower than the 0.05 level of tolerance as the correlation index r value is .118*. It would be inferred that students have the tendency to link their to external attribution factors. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion

The study investigated the relationships between causal attributions and academic attainment of students of Colleges of Education in North- Western Nigeria. The findings revealed that no significant relationship was established between internal attribution for success and academic attainment. The findings further revealed that no significant correlation between internal attributions for success and academic attainment. Similarly, correlation was not established between internal attributions for failure and academic attainment. In the same vein, there was no correlation between external attribution for success and academic attainment. It is pertinent at this juncture to note that Weiner (1990) in Elliot (2000) made interesting discovery that students usually have no idea on how hard they try to succeed. Students and their other individuals judge their efforts by how well they did on particular task. Even in the task that involves pure chance. However, successful students believed that they tried harder than those who were unsuccessful an important cycle is established. Thus, success increase efforts as efforts produce more success and the educational implication are real and significant.

Similarly, Weiner (1990) in Elliot, Krotocwill, Cook and Travers (2000) also made interesting discovery that students usually have no idea how hard they try to succeed. Students and other individuals judge their efforts by how well they did on a particular task. Even in task involving pure chance, successful students believed that they tried harder than those who were unsuccessful an important cycle is thus established. Success increases effort; effort produces more success and the educational implications are real and significant. If a skill is to be mastered and the teaching is consistent for an entire group, the student performance will vary because of motivation. The importance of ensuring success as a means of encouraging further effort is hereby noted.

The findings also agreed with that of Nicholls (1979), Weiner (1979) in Biehler and Snowman (1986) which indicate that low achieving students attribute failure to low ability and future failure is seen as more likely than future success. Similarly, Balarabe (1989) discovered that the internal attribution of failure could be associated with the feelings of not being 'worried and concerned.' Accordingly, this seems to suggest some lack of will to succeed on the part of individuals, which is linked to perceived lack of ability.

It is pertinent to note that internal attribution factors such as ability and efforts play significant role in determining the levels of individual success or failure in academic situation. Borucovitch (2004) revealed that subjects attribute their success and failure to both internal and external factors. Attributions such as efforts, good teacher, being calm, lack of effort, task difficulty, being nervous and lack of luck were most common reasons pointed out by subjects to explain their experiences of success and failure in mathematics exams. Obviously, the study indicates that student were more apt to attribute failure to external factors such as task difficulty, lack of luck, not being generous and help denied etc.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended teachers should sensitize students to understand that success and failure might be as a result or nature of efforts made by students towards examination. Thus, students should not be unnecessary punished for not performing well in the examination instead rather, they should be actively involved in the teaching- learning process.

Conclusion

It is very important to note that the level of performance plays significant role on the academic attainment of students. Thus, it is worth for teachers to note that failure in academics is not an ultimate indicator of low

achievement. Therefore, students should be encouraged at all times to put more efforts in their studies in order to avoid pent- tension during the examination. Moreover, they should be made to understand that failure in examination might be caused by variety of factors in which they are not excluded.

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