

Full Length Research Paper

Measures of consistency in lecturer and student sensitivity to academic dishonesty intervention approaches in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria

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This paper presents the report of a follow-up study conducted to investigate the degree of consistency in staff and students' Sensitivity (expressions of preference for and willingness to engage in) to each of three approaches to curbing academic dishonesty in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Data for the study were derived from a researcher-designed questionnaire patterned after Hinman's (2000) 'Police', 'virtues' and 'prevention' approaches to curbing academic dishonesty which required respondents to preferentially rank (in terms of degree of preference for and then in terms of degree of willingness to engage in) each of the three approaches. Respondents' preferential rankings of each approach (whether High, Medium or Low) were matched with their indications of willingness to Engage in utilizing the approach (High, Medium or Low) to enable the categorisation of the respondents in relation to three Sensitivity models of Committed, Cautious and Carefree. The findings of the study, among others, showed both staff and students to be generally Committed to the 'Virtues' approach and Carefree to the 'Prevention' approach; while male staff and students were typically more Committed to the curbing approaches than their female counterparts. They also suggested the need for integration of the 'Virtues' approach for which more staff and students expressed willingness to engage in into the traditional method of dealing with academic dishonesty in Nigerian universities.

Key words: Academic dishonesty, curbing approaches, sensitivity models.

INTRODUCTION

Hinman (2000), distinguished between three possible approaches to curbing academic dishonesty: 'Police', 'Virtues' and 'Prevention' approaches. According to the author, while the 'Police' approach has to do with paying attention to catching and punishing students involved in academic dishonesty; the 'Virtues' approach focuses on boosting students' moral and ethical values to the point that academic dishonesty will have no temptation value for them; and the 'Prevention' approach emphasises providing conditions that can discourage students from cheating but also check-mating every possible opportunity for students to engage in academic dishonesty. However, the extent to which any of these approaches would be effective in curbing academic dishonesty is relative to the degree of sensitivity of stakeholders (administration, academic staff and students) in the system to the instituted approach (Dufresne, 2004; Olasehinde-Williams, 2005).

Considering the fact that sensitivity, as used in this stu-

dy, is a behavioural construct, it was considered appropriate to measure it through expression of preference for and willingness to act as suggested by Myers (1999). This was based on the conviction that expression of preference and willingness to engage are expectedly consequent upon conscious cognitive analysis (for instance in terms of perception of effectiveness, and/or implication) of the particular approach. In this study therefore, the dependent variables of 'Preference' and 'Engagement' (whether High, Medium or Low) were taken as determinants of the independent variable of 'Sensitivity' which, in turn, was believed may offer an efficient way to size up the potential viability of any approach to curbing academic dishonesty.

It was however also recognised that Sensitivity may not always be sufficient in itself to predict actual behaviour (that is, whether respondents would actually engage in the preferred approach) because sometimes some respondents may merely supply ambivalent or fake respon-

ses that they deem to be socially and/ or morally responsible. A similar concern prompted Mainka and Raeburn (2006) to engage in a follow-up investigation of staff perceptions of academic misconduct issues in a UK university, who in their report, expressed concern that:

.. a range of effective measures implemented in a strategic 2 year plagiarism action plan was developed and rolled out at a UK university to improve student and staff support, ensure more consistent plagiarism policy and handling procedures and raise awareness for the problem overall at the institution's 15 schools. Despite a series of successes, after the first year into the action plan, the number of academics who have not engaged with issues of educational integrity remains a key matter of concern. Data collected from one school at the university from 2002 - 2005 indicates that only 27 - 38% of the educators were engaged in efforts to report plagiarism in anyone year (Pg 1).

Thus, the urge to enable a more accurate estimation of respondents' Sensitivity to the approaches of curbing academic dishonesty in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria (Olasehinde-Williams, 2008) informed the present study. The main purpose of the study was to determine the degree of consistency in staff and students' expressions of preference for, and willingness to engage in, each of the three approaches of curbing academic dishonesty ('Police', 'Virtues' and 'Prevention') in the University. To sharpen the focus of the study, five research questions were answered:

- i.) What is the typical Sensitivity model of staff and students to each of three approaches to curbing academic dishonesty?
- ii.) What is the typical Sensitivity model of staff to each of the three approaches?
- iii.) What is the typical Sensitivity model of staff to each of the three approaches on the basis of sex?
- iv.) What is the typical Sensitivity model of students to each of the three approaches?
- v.) What is the typical Sensitivity model of students to each of the three approaches on the basis of sex?

Findings of the study, it was hoped, would offer an acid test for penetrating the content of respondents' mind (which is the subject matter of Psychology), to inform viable policy and practice of curbing the menace of academic dishonesty in the University. Importantly, the fact that many existing studies in this area of psychology fell short of this effort, made the current study significant.

Review of the literature

As part of their elaborate survey of the prevalence and profile of academic dishonesty in New Zealand's institutions, Taylor et al. (2002), compared the perceptions and practices of 381 students and 113 academic staff in 14

tertiary institutions. Both students and staff were asked to indicate their perceptions of the effectiveness of their institutions' procedures for dealing with cases of academic dishonesty. Findings of the study showed that 49% of the respondents reported that the procedures employed were effective while only 5.3% reported that their institutions' procedures were ineffective. Similarly Olasehinde-Williams (2008), studied staff and students' preferences for three curbing approaches in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Respondents in the study were requested to rank each of 'Police', 'Virtues' and 'Prevention' approaches. As established in the study, the 'Police' approach was the most preferred among the staff, while the 'Virtues' approach was the most preferred among the students of the University. No attempt was however made either in the study of Taylor et al. (2002) or that of Olasehinde-Williams (2008) to investigate the extent to which respondents who endorsed specific approaches as effective were also willing to engage in utilizing them. Whereas some individuals may not utilize approaches they endorse for various reasons including their perceptions of the process involved in dealing with cases (Keith-Spiegel et al. 1998), fear of personal safety (Schneider, 1999), length of time required (Cabot, 1999), or level of effectiveness of the approach (Olasehinde-Williams, 2005).

For instance, McCabe (1993) investigated the disposition of academic staff to take action against students involved in academic dishonesty in a number of universities in America. Findings of the survey showed that academic staff generally preferred to deal directly with student deviants rather than press cases against them through institutionalised procedures based on such staffers' level of dissatisfaction with the established procedures. Similarly, Keith-Spiegel et al. (1998) investigated the disposition of 127 academic staff to issues of academic dishonesty in their institutions and found that academic staff generally ignored dishonest practice on account of the cumbersome, anxiety-laden and time-consuming procedure of dealing with alleged cases in their institutions. In neither of the two studies was attempt made to ascertain the type of curbing approaches respondents would prefer to engage in. Thus, the need to make up for these gaps in our knowledge of this area of school psychology provided the impetus for this study.

Conceptual model

The present study attempted to gain further insight into additional procedure for inferring action from expressed attitude. It was assumed in the study that respondents' Sensitivity could be a good predictor of the degree of success of a specific approach. Based on this premise it was postulated that if a respondent expressed high (medium or low) preference for an approach, he/she would similarly rank such an approach highly (moderately or lowly) and would consequently express high (medium or

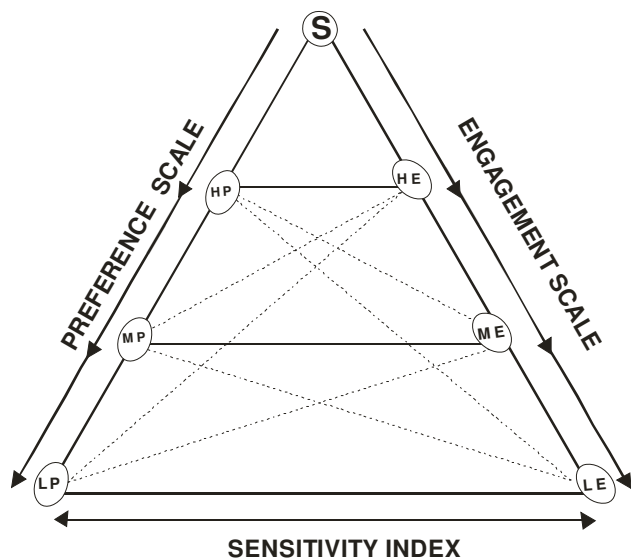


Figure 1. Hypothetical sensitivity links.
Source: (Olasehinde-Williams, 2005).

key

- S-subject
- HP- High preference
- MP-Medium preference
- LP- Low preference
- HE-High Willingness to utilize
- ME-Medium willingness to utilize
- LE-Low Willingness to utilize

low) degree of willingness to participate in its implementation, all other things being equal. Figure 1 presents a triangular schema of this postulation.

As shown in Figure 1, sensitivity is a product of preference (degree of endorsement of an approach as effective) and engagement (degree of willingness to utilize the approach). Based on the analysis adopted in this study, a perfectly consistent preference and engagement ratings should produce an equilateral triangle (that is, expression of high preference matched by expression of high engagement, medium preference matched by medium engagement or low preference matched by low engagement for a particular approach). But because all things are not always equal, other types of triangles, on the basis of degree of consistency in the ratings of the two variables are possible as represented by broken lines in Figure 1 (for instance, expression of high preference matched by medium or low engagement for a particular approach). In relation to this study therefore, three possible sensitivity models were proposed by this researcher for categorising respondents: committed, cautious and carefree. The committed model typifies individuals who express High Preference and an equally high engagement ratings (that is, willingness to actually utilize) for an approach; the cautious model typifies expression of high

Preference but medium engagement ratings for an approach, while the carefree model typifies indication of high preference but low engagement ratings for an approach (Figure 2).

The assumption in the study was that while individuals with committed sensitivity are most likely to utilize any curbing approach they express preference for; the probability of individuals with cautious sensitivity actually utilizing approaches they endorse is uncertain; while individuals with carefree sensitivity are most unlikely to utilize any approach, their expression of high preference for the approach notwithstanding. These proposed sensitivity models not only hold promise as another way of inferring action from attitude they also provide a potential indication of institution-specific and viable academic dishonesty curbing approaches.

METHODOLOGY

All lecturers (called staff in the study) and final year undergraduate students of University of Ilorin, Nigeria in the 2004/2005 academic session constituted the study population while all staff and students in 5 randomly drawn faculties constituted the target population. Forty male and female staff, randomly drawn from each of the 5 faculties of Arts, Business and Social Sciences, Education, Law and Science; and 60 male and female students randomly selected from each of the 5 faculties in the University, constituted the study sample.

Data for the study were generated from responses of staff and students to a questionnaire designed by the researcher, but patterned after Hinman's (2000) "Police, Virtues and Prevention" approaches to curbing academic dishonesty. The questionnaire required respondents to preferentially rank (in terms of degree of preference and then in terms of degree of willingness to utilize) each of the three approaches. To answer each of the five research questions, the extent of consistency in individual respondent's preference for, and degree of willingness to engage in utilizing, each approach were compared. To achieve this, each respondent's preference ranking (whether high, medium or low) of each approach was compared with his/her expressed degree of willingness to engage in utilizing such approach (whether high, medium or low). This procedure enabled the categorisation of the respondents in relation to the proposed sensitivity models of committed, cautious and carefree.

RESULTS

To ascertain the typical sensitivity model of staff and students on each of the three curbing approaches, the proportions of respondents demonstrating consistency in their ratings of each approach were calculated. Of the 319 staff and students who participated in this study, 144(45.14%) each ranked the 'Virtues' approach High in terms of preference and also High in terms of willingness to engage in its utilization. These respondents were thus categorised as committed to the approach. Comparatively, 98(30.72%) and 53(16.60%) similarly manifested committed sensitivity to the 'Police' and 'Prevention' approaches respectively. Typically therefore, staff and students of the University were most committed to the 'Virtues' approach and most carefree to the 'Prevention'

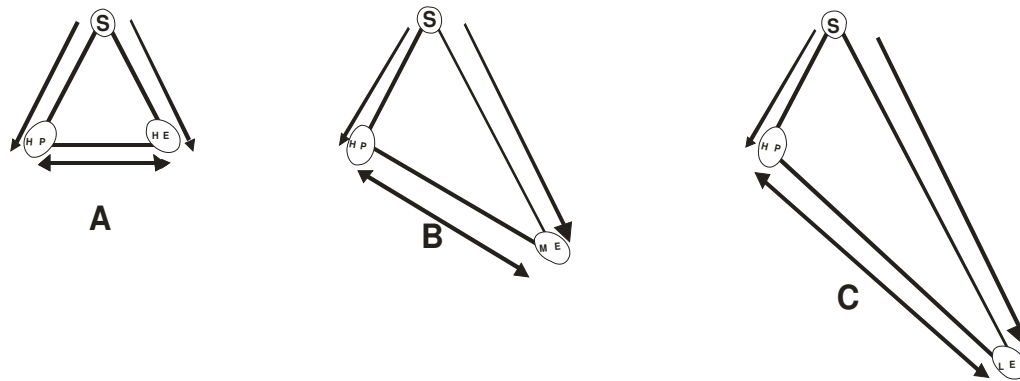


Figure 2. Theoretical sensitivity models.
Source : (Olasehinde-Williams, 2005).

KEY

- A. HP ↔ HE B.: committed sensitivity
High preference matched by High degree of willingness to Engage in utilization of approach
- B. HP ↔ ME Cautious sensitivity
High preference but Moderate degree of willingness to engage in utilization of approach
- C. HP ↔ LE: Carefree sensitivity
High preference but Low degree of willingness to engage in utilization of approach

Table 1. Frequency table of staff and student on sensitivity model by approach and gender

Gender	X	Police			Virtue			Prevention		
		Committed (%)	Cautious (%)	Carefree (%)	Committed (%)	Cautious (%)	Carefree (%)	Committed (%)	Cautious (%)	Carefree (%)
Staff	87	33 (37.93)	5 (5.7)	49 (56.32)	43 (49.43)	Nil	44 (50.57)	13 (14.94)	Nil	74 (85.06)
Student	232	65 (28.02)	3 (1.29)	167 (71.98)	101 (43.53)	5 (1.57)	126 (54.31)	40 (17.24)	Nil	192 (82.76)
Total	319	98 (30.72)	8 (2.05)	216 (67.72)	144 (45.14)	5 (1.56)	170 (53.29)	53 (16.6)	Nil	266 (83.39)

approach. Summary of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

The typical sensitivity model of staff to each of the three curbing approaches was similarly investigated. From the analysis, thirty-three (38%) of the 87 staff surveyed, could be categorised as manifesting committed Sensitivity to the ‘Police’ approach since they expressed high preference for the approach and also expressed high degree of willingness to engage in its utilization. Five others (6%) manifested cautious sensitivity to the approach (that is expressing High preference for the ‘Police’ approach but medium degree of willingness to engage in its utilization), while all 49 (54%) others were inconsistent in their ratings and were therefore categorized as Carefree in terms of their sensitivity to the approach. In relation to the ‘Virtues’ approach, 43 staff (49%) were committed in their sensitivity; while 13 (15%) fitted the committed sensitivity model in relation to the ‘Prevention’ approach. All the others were again unpredictable judging from their inconsistent ratings. A summary of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

In general, therefore, staff in the university of Ilorin were typically committed to the ‘Virtues’ approach and carefree to the ‘prevention’ approach. Specifically, close to 50% would engage in the ‘Virtues’ approach, 38% in the ‘Police’ and 15% in the ‘Prevention’ approach.

Following the same procedure, the extent to which gender influenced the staff’s typical sensitivity model on each curbing approach was investigated. Result of the analysis suggested that male staff were typically more committed to the ‘Virtues’ and ‘Police’ approaches than female staff. Half (50%) of the male staff who endorsed the ‘Virtues’ approach would also engage in it while over 40% others would similarly be committed to the ‘Police’ approach. In comparison, while about 48% of the female staff were committed to the ‘Virtues’ approach, less than 25% was committed to the ‘Police’ approach. On the other hand, while about 30% of the female staff indicated commitment to the ‘Prevention’ approach, less than 21% of male staff would be willing to engage in the same approach (Table 2).

Next to be investigated was the typical sensitivity model

Table 2. Frequency table of staff on sensitivity model by approach and gender.

Gender	X	Police			Virtue			Prevention		
		Committee (%)	Cautious (%)	Carefree (%)	Committed (%)	Cautious (%)	Carefree (%)	Committed (%)	Cautious (%)	Carefree (%)
Male	66	28 (42.42)	4 (6.06)	34 (51.5)	33 (50)	Nil	33(50)	7 (10.61)	Nil	59 (89.39)
Female	21	5 (23.81)	1 (4.76)	15(71.43)	10 (47.62)	Nil	11 (52.38)	6 (28.57)	Nil	15 (71.43)
Total	87	33 (37.93)	5 (5.7)	49 (56.32)	43 (49.43)	Nil	44 (50.57)	13 (14.94)	Nil	74 (85.06)

Table 3. Frequency table of students on sensitivity model by approach and gender.

Gender	X	Police			Virtue			Prevention		
		Committed (%)	Cautious (%)	Carefree (%)	Committed (%)	Cautious (%)	Carefree (%)	Committed (%)	Cautious (%)	Carefree (%)
Male	133	34 (25.56)	3 (2.26)	96 (72.18)	61 (45.86)	5 (3.75)	67 (50.38)	28 (21.05)	Nil	105(78.95)
Female	99	31 (31.31)	Nil	68 (68.69)	40 (40.40)	Nil	59 (59.60)	12 (12.12)	Nil	87(87.88)
Total	232	65 (28.02)	3 (1.29)	167(71.98)	101 (43.53)	5 (1.57)	126(54.31)	40 (17.24)	Nil	192(82.76)

of students to each curbing approach. Out of the 232 students who participated in the survey, 65(28%) were consistent in expressing High preference for 'Police' approach and equally High degree of willingness to engage in utilizing the approach. Only these students were thus categorised as committed in their sensitivity to the 'Police' approach. In relation to 'Virtues' approach, 101 students (43.5%) manifested committed sensitivity; while 40(17%) manifested the committed sensitivity to the 'prevention' approach. Typically, therefore, students in the University were most committed to the 'Virtues' approach and most carefree to the 'prevention' approach (Table 3).

In relation to sex, male students were typically more committed to the 'Virtues' and 'Prevention' approaches than the female students. For instance, while over 45% of male students indicated commitment to the 'Virtues' approach about 40% of the females expressed commitment to the same approach. Conversely, 31% of the females indicated commitment to the 'Police' approach compared with about 26% males in the same category. Both the male and female students were typically most carefree to the 'Prevention' approach (Table 3). Following were the major findings of the study:

- i.) In general, staff and students in the University of Ilorin were most committed to the 'Virtues' approach and most carefree to the 'Prevention' approach.
- ii.) About 50% of the staff (male and female) manifested committed sensitivity to the 'Virtues' approach, 38% to the 'Police' and 15% to the 'Prevention' approach.
- iii.) Half (50%) of the male staff who endorsed the 'virtues' approach would also engage in it while over 40% others would similarly be committed to the 'Police' approach.
- iv.) Compared to the male staff, about 48% of female

staff were committed to the 'Virtues' approach, while less than 25% would engage in the 'Police' approach.

v.) More female (about 30%) than male staff (21%) was committed to the 'Prevention' approach.

vi.) Students in the University were typically most committed to the 'Virtues' approach and most carefree to the 'Prevention' approach.

vii.) Male students were typically more committed to the 'Virtues' and 'Prevention' approaches than female students.

viii.) Both male and female students were typically most carefree to the 'Prevention' approach.

DISCUSSION

As shown in this study, more than 50% of the respondents were generally carefree in their sensitivity to each of the three approaches, even to the approaches for which they expressed high preference. This finding supports the argument of Myers (1996) that attitude does not always infer behaviour. The finding was also consistent with those of McCabe (1993) and Keith-Spiegel et al. (1998) and Simon et al. (2001) who all reported similar findings particularly that academic staff would rarely take formal actions against observed cases of academic dishonesty. Plausible reasons for the finding in this study may be related to respondents' apprehension of possible attack by culprits particularly if such culprits were connected with cult groups (another menace in some of the nation's higher institutions). Besides, as found by Olasehinde-Williams (2005) many staff perceived the instituted procedure for dealing with academic dishonesty as time consuming; and would rather deal with the problem in their own way either by failing the student or asking him/her to write the examination all over under keen supervision.

The indication of committed sensitivity to the 'Virtues' approach, over and above the 'Police' and 'Prevention' approaches has important implication for policy and practice of curbing academic dishonesty in the University. Firstly, the finding offers a plausible explanation for the apparent apathy towards the existing approach of catching and punishing students involved in academic dishonesty ('Police'). Secondly, it is also plausible to reason that if programmes are initiated to empower staff and students to engage in utilizing the 'Virtues' approach; the probability that better engagement will result is high.

Consistent with the finding of Simon et al. (2001) that female academic staff were less likely, than their male counterparts, to use formal administrative approaches to deal with cases of academic dishonesty, male staff in this study were typically more committed to the curbing approaches than the female. This finding might be a reflection of the latter's perception of the existing procedure of handling academic dishonesty as cumbersome.

Among staff and students, the 'Police' approach was endorsed only after the 'Virtues' approach (among female staff, the 'Police' approach actually came third). As observed Schneider (1999), a plausible explanation for the finding might be related to fear of personal safety especially from cultists, many of whom may deal ruthlessly with any one who dare to stand in their way or expose them if they are involved in any act of dishonesty. Many staff and students therefore would rarely report known cases of academic dishonesty and the few who dare to report often do so under strict anonymity, not wanting to be involved. The length of time required, the psychological stress of having to testify before the disciplinary committee, handling colleagues, parents or guardians with vested interests and confronting the culprit him/herself may combine to dissuade many female staff and students from manifesting committed sensitivity to the approaches.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggested no condemnation of the traditional approach in its entirety. Rather, they suggested that sole dependence on the police approach (traditionally employed in our universities) may need to be reviewed and integrated with the Virtues approach for which many staff and students expressed willingness to engage in. Full integration of the three approaches should, in fact, be the ultimate (Hinman, 2000). Curriculum initiatives, behaviour modification workshops and linkages programme with the Centre for Academic Integrity for empowerment in such procedures should be explored for improved policy and practice of handling academic dishonesty in the University.

Conclusion

Expression of preference for any specific approach to

curbing academic dishonesty is not a sufficient measure of the potential potency of the approach. Rather, staff and students' degree of willingness to utilize the preferred approach holds better promise in determining the viability of each curbing approach. It will thus be profitable for administration to evolve viable curbing approaches in the University through an assessment of staff and students' sensitivity models. However, because the proposal of Sensitivity models in this study was relatively new it may require further investigation by other researchers to determine its viability and generalizability across universities and cultures. It is thus hoped that the study will provoke large-scale collaborative studies in related area.

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