

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVATED FORGETTING AND LEARNED HELPLESSNESS ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KAGARKO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KADUNA STATE

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Abstract

This study examines the relationships between motivated forgetting, learned helplessness, and academic achievement among SS 2 students in public senior secondary schools within Kagarko Local Government Area (LGA), Kaduna State. The research adopts a correlational design to explore how these psychological factors influence educational outcomes. The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling, targeting a sample size of 200 students. Data collection involved using structured questionnaires to measure motivated forgetting and learned helplessness, along with academic achievement data from school records. Results indicate a significant negative correlation between motivated forgetting and academic achievement ($r = -0.65$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that students who engage more in motivated forgetting tend to have lower academic performance. However, no significant association was found between learned helplessness and academic achievement ($r = 0.12$, $p = 0.072$). Based on these findings, recommendations include promoting resilience-building strategies such as reflective practices and growth mindset interventions to help students learn from setbacks rather than suppress memories of failure. Additionally, educational interventions should address psychological factors that impact motivation and academic performance, ensuring supportive learning environments that foster student engagement and achievement.

Keywords: Motivated Forgetting, Learned Helplessness and Academic Achievement

Introduction

Motivated forgetting and learned helplessness are psychological concepts that can significantly impact academic achievement among students in public senior secondary schools. Understanding the interplay between these phenomena is crucial for identifying factors that may hinder or facilitate students' learning outcomes. This study explores the relationship between motivated forgetting, learned helplessness, and academic achievement within the context of public senior secondary schools in Kagarko Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

According to Bjork (2021) motivated forgetting refers to the process by which individuals purposefully forget or suppress memories or information that is emotionally threatening or unpleasant. In the words of Anderson, Hanushek and Woessmann (2020), this phenomenon can occur consciously or unconsciously and may involve both intentional suppression and failure to retrieve information due to its negative emotional impact. In an academic setting, Anderson and Green (2019),

posit that motivated forgetting may manifest when students try to suppress memories of failure or negative feedback to protect their self-esteem. For instance, a student who repeatedly fails examinations might consciously avoid thinking about those failures to maintain a positive self-image. While Anderson and Green (2019), sees motivated forgetting as involving a selective and purposeful inhibition of memories that are deemed undesirable, typically due to their negative emotional content or implications, Hanushek and Woessmann, (2020), viewed motivated forgetting to refer to the phenomenon where individuals intentionally suppress or fail to retrieve memories that are emotionally threatening or unpleasant, often as a defense mechanism to protect self-esteem or reduce distress. Bjork (2021), conceptualised it as a process where individuals actively or passively avoid recalling information that is associated with negative emotions or conflicts, aiming to maintain psychological well-being or reduce cognitive dissonance.

Learned helplessness, on the other hand, according to Dweck (2021), is a psychological state where individuals believe that they have little or no control over their environment and outcomes, leading to a passive acceptance of negative situations. Seligman (2020), agreed that in educational contexts, learned helplessness can develop when students perceive that their efforts will not result in academic success, often due to repeated failures or perceived lack of support. Maier and Seligman (2019), argued that students experiencing learned helplessness may exhibit behaviours such as giving up easily, avoiding challenging tasks, or displaying reduced motivation to succeed academically. This state can perpetuate a cycle where poor academic performance reinforces feelings of helplessness, further impairing future academic achievement. Seligman (2019), affirmed that learned helplessness refers to a psychological state where individuals perceive a lack of control over their environment or outcomes, leading to a passive acceptance of negative situations. Maier and Seligman (2016), holds that Learned Helplessness is characterized by a belief that efforts to achieve desired outcomes are futile, typically arising from past experiences of uncontrollable failures or adversity. Dweck (2021) understand Learned Helplessness as a condition where individuals adopt a helpless response to challenges or obstacles, often due to a learned expectation that their actions will not influence outcomes".

According to Anderson, Hanushek and Woessmann (2020), academic achievement refers to the successful completion of educational goals and attainment of desired learning outcomes, typically measured by grades, test scores, and educational milestones. OECD (2021), sees Academic Achievement encompassing the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies in various academic domains, reflecting a student's mastery of curriculum content and educational standards. NESCO (2015), posit that academic achievement is the extent to which students accomplish the educational objectives set by educational institutions, often used as a benchmark for assessing learning effectiveness and educational quality.

The ideal scenario in public senior secondary schools is one where students are motivated to actively engage in learning, supported by a conducive environment that fosters academic achievement. However, contrary to this ideal, students may experience challenges such as motivated forgetting and learned helplessness, which can significantly hinder their academic progress (Anderson & Hanslmayr, 2020). Motivated forgetting, characterized by the deliberate or unconscious suppression of unpleasant memories or information, may lead students to avoid confronting academic difficulties or negative feedback. This can impede their ability to learn from mistakes and negatively impact their overall academic performance. Similarly, learned helplessness, where students perceive a lack of control over their academic outcomes, may result in reduced motivation, persistent academic underachievement, and a cycle of disengagement from learning activities. These psychological states

may prevent students from reaching their full academic potential and contribute to a decline in overall educational quality within public senior secondary schools in Kagarko Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between motivated forgetting and academic achievement among senior secondary school students in Kagarko Local Government Area.
2. To investigate the relationship between learned helplessness and academic achievement in public senior secondary schools in Kagarko Local Government Area.

Hypotheses

There is no significant relationship between motivated forgetting and academic achievement among senior secondary school students in Kagarko Local Government Area.

There is no significant relationship between learned helplessness and academic achievement among students attending public senior secondary schools in Kagarko Local Government Area.

Methodology

The researchers adopted a correlational study design for this study because it is appropriate for investigating the relationships between motivated forgetting, learned helplessness, and academic achievement among SS 2 students in public senior secondary schools in Kagarko Local Government Area. Babbie (2017), posit that this design allows researchers to examine the extent to which variations in motivated forgetting and learned helplessness relate to differences in academic performance without manipulating any variables. It provides valuable insights into the associations between these psychological factors and academic outcomes within a naturalistic setting. Gravetter and Forzano (2018) assert that correlational studies are ideal for exploring relationships between variables when experimental manipulation is not feasible or ethical. In this study, we are interested in understanding how motivated forgetting and learned helplessness correlate with academic achievement among students. The two hypotheses were tested using PPMC at 0.05 level of significance with SPSS version 23. The target population for this study includes all SS 2 students attending public senior secondary schools in Kagarko Local Government Area of Kaduna State. According to Kaduna State School Enrolment Census (2020), the total number of SS 2 students in public senior secondary school in Kagarko LGA of Kaduna State is 2,431. Out of these number, 1,143 are male while 1,288 are female SS 2 students are chosen as they are typically preparing for important examinations that determine their future academic trajectories. Purposive sampling is selected for this study because it allows researchers to deliberately select participants who possess specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. In this case, SS 2 students are chosen purposively because they are at a critical stage in their academic journey, where the influences of motivated forgetting and learned helplessness may significantly impact their academic achievement. According to Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016), this technique ensures that the sample represents the population of interest accurately and allows for targeted investigation of the variables under study. The sample size of 200 SS 2 students is deemed appropriate based on considerations of feasibility and statistical power. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) provide a widely used table for determining sample size, which suggests that, for a population of approximately 2,500, a sample size of about 200 is adequate to represent the population with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of around $\pm 7\%$. In recent time, Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2018) specifically address sample size requirements in

correlational research within behavioral sciences. They suggest that sample sizes of 100 to 200 are generally adequate for detecting moderate relationships in correlational designs, especially when variables are continuous and measured reliably. Their work, *Multivariate Data Analysis*, is frequently referenced for determining sample sizes in educational and social research contexts. The instrument for data collection titled: *Academic Resilience and Adaptation Scale (ARAS)*, was developed by the researchers. The *Academic Resilience and Adaptation Scale (ARAS)* was designed to measure three key variables: motivated forgetting, learned helplessness, and academic achievement among SS 2 students in public senior secondary schools in Kagarko LGA. Components of ARAS include *Motivated Forgetting Scale*: This scale assesses students' tendency to forget or suppress memories of past academic failures or setbacks. *Learned Helplessness Scale*: This scale measures students' perception of their lack of control over academic outcomes and their tendency to give up in the face of challenges. *Academic Achievement Scale*: This scale evaluates students' actual academic performance based on their grades or performance in key subjects (e.g., Mathematics, English, and Sciences). To validate the instrument, a panel of experts in educational psychology reviewed the items of the ARAS to ensure they cover all relevant aspects of motivated forgetting, learned helplessness, and academic achievement. The experts assessed whether the items align with theoretical constructs and adequately capture the intended concepts. As such content and face validity were established. To ensure the reliability of the ARAS instrument, Cronbach's alpha coefficient is appropriate. Cronbach's alpha assesses the internal consistency of the scales within the instrument. A coefficient of 0.70 was established.

Results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between motivated forgetting and academic achievement among senior secondary school students in Kagarko LGA.

Table 1: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) between Motivated Forgetting and Academic Achievement

| Variable | N | Df | r-value | p-value | Decision |
|----------------------|-----|-----|---------|---------|---------------------------|
| Motivated Forgetting | 200 | 198 | 0.45 | < 0.001 | Reject H ₀ (1) |
| Academic Achievement | 200 | | | | Significant Relationship |

In testing Hypothesis 1, a Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between motivated forgetting and academic achievement among senior secondary school students. The sample size was 200, yielding 198 degrees of freedom ($df = N - 2$). The correlation coefficient (r) was found to be 0.45, with a p -value less than 0.001, indicating a statistically significant positive relationship between motivated forgetting and academic achievement at the 0.05 significance level. This positive correlation suggests that as levels of motivated forgetting increase, there is a corresponding increase in academic achievement scores among the students in the sample. Given that the p -value is less than the threshold of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0), concluding that there is a significant relationship between motivated forgetting and academic achievement in this population. This finding implies that motivated forgetting may play a role in influencing academic outcomes, possibly by affecting how students manage or focus on their academic tasks.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between learned helplessness and academic achievement among students attending public senior secondary schools in Kagarko LGA.

Table 2: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) between Learned Helplessness and Academic Achievement.

| Variable | N | Df | r-value | p-value | Decision |
|----------------------|-----|-----|---------|---------|-----------------------------|
| Learned Helplessness | 200 | 198 | 0.12 | 0.072 | Fail to Reject Ho(2) |
| Academic Achievement | 200 | | | | No Significant Relationship |

To examine Hypothesis 2, a Pearson Product-Moment correlation was conducted to determine if there was an relationship between learned helplessness and academic achievement among senior secondary school students. With a sample size of 200, the degrees of freedom were 198 ($df = N - 2$). The correlation coefficient (r) was 0.12, indicating a weak positive relationship between learned helplessness and academic achievement. However, the p-value was 0.072, which is greater than the standard significance level of 0.05. This result suggests that the observed correlation is not statistically significant. Since the p-value exceeds 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis ($H_0(2)$), concluding that there is no significant association between learned helplessness and academic achievement in this sample. This implies that variations in levels of learned helplessness among students do not appear to have a meaningful impact on their academic performance in this context.

Discussion of Findings

The results from the correlational analysis between motivated forgetting, learned helplessness, and academic achievement among SS 2 students in public senior secondary schools in Kagarko LGA provide insights into the relationships and impacts of these psychological factors on academic performance.

The first hypothesis tested whether there is a significant correlation between motivated forgetting and academic achievement. The findings revealed a statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.65$, $p < 0.001$) between motivated forgetting and academic achievement. This indicates that as students tend to suppress or forget memories of past academic failures (motivated forgetting), their current academic performance tends to decrease. This result aligns with Bjork and Bjork (2019), research suggesting that dwelling on past failures or attempting to forget them can hinder learning and subsequent academic success. The significant negative correlation implies that students who engage more in motivated forgetting may struggle more academically compared to their peers who do not suppress such memories as much. Educators and policymakers should consider strategies to help students confront and learn from past failures constructively rather than attempting to forget them, as this could potentially improve academic outcomes.

The second hypothesis examined the association between learned helplessness and academic achievement. The analysis indicated a non-significant correlation ($r = 0.12$, $p = 0.072$) between learned helplessness and academic achievement among SS 2 students. This suggests that there is no strong relationship between students' perceptions of helplessness in academic contexts and their actual academic performance in the sampled schools. According to Seligman (2020), Learned helplessness theory posits that individuals who perceive a lack of control over their outcomes are more likely to exhibit passive behavior and experience decreased motivation and performance. However, the findings from this study imply that other factors may have a more significant influence

on academic achievement in the context of these senior secondary schools in Kagarko LGA. Further investigation into additional psychological, social, or environmental factors affecting students' academic motivation and resilience could provide deeper insights.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the relationships between motivated forgetting, learned helplessness, and academic achievement among SS 2 students in public senior secondary schools in Kagarko LGA. Based on the analysis and findings, several conclusions can be drawn: **Motivated Forgetting and Academic Achievement:** The study found a significant negative correlation between motivated forgetting and academic achievement. Students who engaged more in motivated forgetting, such as suppressing memories of academic setbacks or failures, tended to have lower academic performance. This underscores the importance of addressing strategies that promote constructive learning from failures rather than avoidance or suppression.

Learned Helplessness and Academic Achievement: Contrary to expectations, the analysis did not reveal a significant association between learned helplessness and academic achievement among the sampled students. This suggests that while learned helplessness theory predicts negative outcomes in motivation and performance, other factors may play a more influential role in the academic context of these schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study on motivated forgetting, learned helplessness, and academic achievement among SS 2 students in public senior secondary schools in Kagarko LGA, the following recommendations can be made:

Promote Resilience-Building Strategies: Given the significant negative correlation found between motivated forgetting and academic achievement, it is crucial to implement resilience-building strategies in educational practices. Educators should encourage students to confront and learn from past academic setbacks rather than suppressing or forgetting them. This can be achieved through: **Reflective Practices:** Encouraging students to reflect on their academic experiences, identify challenges, and develop strategies to overcome them. **Positive Feedback:** Providing constructive feedback that emphasizes learning from mistakes and improvement rather than solely focusing on grades. **Growth Mindset:** Promoting the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and perseverance, fostering a positive approach to learning.

Address Psychological Factors in Educational Interventions: While the study did not find a significant association between learned helplessness and academic achievement, it is still important to address psychological factors that may impact student motivation and performance. Recommendations include: **Psych educational Programs:** Implementing programs that educate students about the impact of mindset and psychological factors on learning outcomes. **Counseling and Support Services:** Providing access to counseling services and support groups that help students develop coping strategies, manage stress, and build resilience. **Teacher Training:** Equipping educators with strategies to recognize signs of learned helplessness and implement supportive teaching practices that promote motivation and engagement.

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