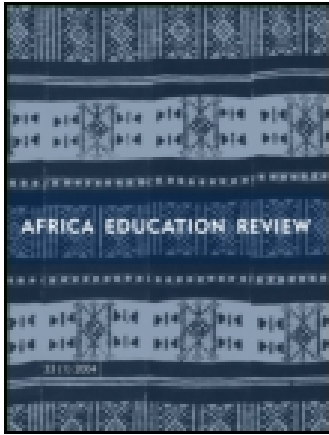


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The relationships among students' commitment, self-esteem, organisational citizenship behaviour and academic performance

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The relationships among students' commitment, self-esteem, organisational citizenship behaviour and academic performance

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Abstract

As one of the most important dependent variables in education and work research, performance has been operationalised either as the proficiency with which core tasks are performed (task performance), or as extra-role behaviours that support core activities (organisational citizenship behaviours). Relative to academic performance (core academic achievement), there has been little research on the extent to which students practise organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) in their academic work. The aim of the present study was to explore some correlates of both OCB and academic performance. Data used in the study were obtained from 185 students enrolled in a business course at the National University of Lesotho. Survey questionnaires inquiring about students' commitment, self-esteem, and OCB were administered to 204 third-year students. These were correlated with formal academic performance before and after the survey. Students' commitment was significantly related to both OCB and academic performance. Self-esteem was significantly correlated with OCB, but not academic performance. Two dimensions of OCB (altruism and civic virtue) were moderately but significantly related to academic performance. Results suggest that improving self-esteem might affect OCB, and improving commitment and certain elements of OCB might improve academic achievement.

Keywords: academic performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, self-esteem, commitment, learning

Introduction

There is a broad consensus that performance is a multi-dimensional construct which is central to many research studies in work psychology (Borman, 2004; Viswesvaran and Ones, 2000; Werner, 2000). Traditionally performance has been operationalised as the proficiency with which core tasks or activities of the job are performed (Borman, 2004:238). This narrow view of the content domain of performance construct has been labelled task performance (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993) or in-role performance (Organ, 1988). The other view of performance, variously labelled contextual performance (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993), organisational citizenship behaviour (Organ, 1988), or simply OCB; according to Borman and Motowidlo (1993:71) ‘shapes the organizational, social and psychological context that serves as the critical catalyst for task activities and processes’, and includes behaviours such as helping others with their jobs; supporting organisational objectives; and volunteering to carry out activities that are not formally part of own job.

In the same way that performance within work-settings can be defined along core tasks and activities of the job (task performance) and extra-role discretionary activities that support core tasks (OCB); academic work of students can arguably be defined along core activities of doing well in designed courses (academic performance), and OCBs such as helping others with their school work; supporting university-related activities; and attending meetings one is encouraged but not required to attend (Allison, Voss and Dryer, 2001).

Within learning environments, researchers have mainly focused on antecedents of academic performance; paying little or no attention to OCB of students. This is surprising because OCBs provide a context within which academic performance of students takes place. The aim of this paper is to examine the relationships among students’ commitment, self-esteem, OCB and academic performance.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. The next section derives testable hypotheses from existing literature, and this is followed by methodology. The results of the study are then provided, and finally the discussion of the results, limitations of the study, and directions for future research in this line of inquiry are provided.

Hypotheses

Commitment to the university, OCB and academic performance

Organisational commitment has been defined as one’s ‘emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation’ (Meyer and Allen,

1991:67). According to this definition, a committed person has the desire to maintain membership of an organisation; values and accepts the goals of the organisation; and is willing to work hard on behalf of the organisation (Guest and Dewe, 1991). It is therefore conceivable that a student who is committed to their institution of learning would identify with such an institution, and would be proud to be a learner in such an institution. Such a student could further encourage their close friends to be learners in the same institution, and they could readily be involved in activities that promote the image of their institution. They would probably also be happy to continue being a student in such an institution.

According to Organ (1988), OCB is a multi-dimensional construct comprising five dimensions – *altruism*, *civic virtue*, *conscientiousness*, *courtesy* and *sportsmanship*.

Allison et al. (2001) have illustrated the academic setting examples of each dimension of behaviour. A student who shows *altruism* would likely be ready to help others with their academic work (e.g. to complete an assignment, or revise for an examination). A student who displays *courtesy* would notify team members if they would not be present in team meetings or a lecturer if they would not be present in class sessions. A student may show a *civic virtue* by supporting university-related activities, and attending the meetings they are encouraged but not required to attend. A student may show *sportsmanship* by refraining from complaining about instructor's feedback, and about lack of contribution of other students in team projects. Finally, a student may demonstrate *conscientiousness* by attending classes regularly; by handing assignments in on time; and by participating in class discussions.

As the above points suggest, a student who is committed to their institution of learning would be likely to identify with the values of the institution, be actively involved in its activities, and hence would be likely to exhibit OCB. Thus based on research from organisational psychology indicating that individuals who feel emotionally attached to their organisations show more OCB (Christ, Dick, Wagner and Stellmacher, 2003), it can be hypothesised that students who report high commitment to their institution would report high OCB, and those who report low commitment would report low OCB.

Hypothesis 1: Students' commitment to their university is positively related to their OCB.

Based on some rather discouraging conclusions that the relationship between work attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction and commitment) and task performance was

weak or non-significant (e.g. Iaffaldano and Muchinsky, 1985), some researchers posited that work attitudes and personality could be predictors of OCB; and task-related knowledge, skills and abilities could be better predictors of task performance because OCB is less likely than task performance to be constrained by limitations of cognitive ability (Borman, 2004; Borman and Motowidlo, 1993; Borman, Penner, Allen and Motowidlo, 2001). Based on this assertion, it can be argued that cognitive ability (IQ) might be a better predictor of academic performance (core academic task); and attitudes and personality could be better predictors of OCB within learning environments. Although this postulate makes some theoretical sense, Viswesvaran and Ones (2001:221) suggested that ‘empirical support for this argument has been mixed’, and concluded that ‘each performance dimension is complexly determined (jointly by ability and personality) and it is impossible to specify a sole cause or antecedent of a particular dimension of job performance’ (224). While this study was not designed to test this assertion within academic settings, it was still expected that attitudes such as commitment could have some impact on academic performance such that students who reported high commitment to their university would have higher academic performance records than those who reported lower commitment.

Hypothesis 2: Students’ commitment to their university is positively related to their academic performance.

Self-esteem, OCB and academic performance

Self-esteem has been regarded as a dispositional factor relating to the evaluative component of self. It is a person’s general evaluation of their worth, value or importance (Beauregard, 2006). A proposition that self-esteem might influence performance is based on some sound theory. People with high self-esteem set challenging goals, persist in the face of adversities, and never easily succumb to the feelings of incompetence and self-doubt (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger and Vohs, 2003). While these characteristics theoretically lend themselves to effectiveness, empirical studies find little or no relationship between self-esteem and performance. In an extensive review of studies on self-esteem and desirable outcomes, Baumeister et al. (2003) concluded that there were only modest correlations between self-esteem and academic performance. It has also been argued that self-esteem and academic achievement are reciprocally related (Yu, Chan, Cheng, Sung and Hau, 2006:334).

As discussed above, Borman and colleagues (Borman, 2004; Borman et al., 2001; Borman and Motowidlo, 1993) made some persuasive arguments that

dispositional factors are better predictors of OCB than task performance, and task-related knowledge, skills and abilities explain task performance better. Within academic setting, it is possible that self-esteem (a dispositional factor) has more impact on OCB than academic performance, hence the modest relationship established between self-esteem and academic performance. Even though many studies on self-esteem have been on its relationship with academic performance, and there is as yet little consistent empirical evidence to support any causal relationship, it was expected in this study that there could be some relationship because there is some persuasive theoretical basis to expect some relationship.

Based on the above arguments, the relationship between self-esteem and performance can be advanced in two hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Students' self-esteem is positively related to their OCB.

Hypothesis 4: Students' self-esteem is positively related to their academic performance.

OCB and academic performance

One of the defining features of OCBs is that in aggregate they promote the effective functioning of the organisation (Organ, 1988). Within academic settings, the current author is aware of only a few studies that suggested a relationship between OCB and academic performance. DiPaola and Hoy (2005:35) found some relationship between student achievement on standardised tests and the level of OCB of faculty in the high school sample studied. However, their study differs from the current study in that OCB in their study was measured among the faculty members and not among students themselves. Allison et al. (2001) established empirically that within the academic setting OCB was positively related to average cumulative grade point (GPA) and student load (measured in credit hours). Khaola (2008) found that only the altruism dimension of OCB correlated positively and significantly with academic performance.

On the basis of the above findings, it was expected that students who reported high OCB achieved better academic results than those who reported lower OCB.

Hypothesis 5: Students' OCB is positively related to their academic performance.

Method

Participants and procedures

Participants were registered third-year undergraduate business students of the National University of Lesotho (NUL).

Survey questionnaires were administered to 204 students enrolled in a business course at the university. One hundred forty-seven students were Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com) majors, and 57 were Bachelor of Business Education (B. Ed) majors. The questionnaires were pre-coded so that they could be matched with students and their academic performance. The students were informed that participation in the study was optional, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Of the 204 questionnaires distributed, 190 questionnaires were returned (138 B. Com and 52 B. Ed), but five were eliminated because they were incomplete, resulting in a net usable return of 185 questionnaires (91%). Of the respondent sample, 65% were females and only 7% had full-time paid jobs. 63% of respondents were in the age group 18 to 24; 34% were in the age group 25 to 35; and 3% were over 35 years of age.

Measures

The responses on *OCB, commitment and self-esteem* were reported on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

OCB: 10 items recommended by Allison et al. (2001) to measure OCB within learning environments were used to measure this construct. The items measure all five dimensions of OCB, and their wording was modified by the authors from the scales developed by MacKenzie, Podsakoff and Fetter (1993).

The altruism dimension was measured with two items as follows: 'I willingly give of my time to help other students who have university-related problems', and 'I am willing to take time out of my busy schedule to help other students with their schoolwork' (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80).

Courtesy was measured with two items as follows: 'I check with other students before initiating actions that might affect them (e.g. in team project)', and 'I take steps to prevent problems with other students in my classes' (Cronbach's alpha = 0.60).

Civic virtue was measured with two items as follows: 'I attend special classes or other meetings that students are encouraged but not required to attend', and

'I attend and actively participate in university meetings' (Cronbach's alpha = 0.70).

The items meant to measure *conscientiousness* and *sportsmanship* were dropped after failing to reach an acceptable level of internal reliability.

An 'aggregate' of OCB was finally measured as an average of the six items mentioned above (Cronbach's alpha = 0.72).

Commitment to the university: Commitment to the university was measured with seven items adapted from the scale developed by Cook and Wall (1980), and one item adapted from the scale of Meyer and Allen (1984). The items were worded in a manner that reflected the learning environment (e.g. I sometimes feel like leaving this university for good). The Cronbach's alpha of the items was 0.89.

General self-esteem: General self-esteem was measured with 10 items developed by Rosenberg (1965). One item, 'I wish I could have more respect for myself', was dropped because its deletion resulted in Cronbach's alpha improving from 0.65 to 0.70.

Academic performance: Students' year means, taken directly from students' formal records before and after the survey at second year and third year levels respectively, were used as a measure of academic performance. The year mean is the weighted mean of students' percentage mark, and it is calculated from 36 credit hours of courses taken in a particular year for all students of the university. Overall weighted mean (OWM), which in this case was the simple average of second year and third year means, was also used as a 'composite' measure of academic performance.

Academic performance records were separated at second year and third levels for two main reasons: first, to ensure that at least for third-level performance, the design was predictive; and second, to check whether the relationships between cumulative performance (OWM) and survey variables were not influenced mainly by past (second-year level) performance (Wright, Gardner, Moynihan and Allen, 2005).

Results

Means, standard deviations and inter-correlations among the study variables are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and intercorrelations among study variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3.1</i>	<i>3.2</i>	<i>3.3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>4.1</i>	<i>4.2</i>
1. Commitment	5.20	1.28	(0.89)								
2. Self-esteem	5.93	0.77	0.12	(0.70)							
3. Citizenship behaviour	5.01	1.04	0.28**	0.34**	(0.72)						
3.1 Altruism	5.39	1.29	0.29**	0.31**	0.77**	(0.80)					
3.2 Courtesy	5.31	1.24	0.09	0.24**	0.72**	0.48**	(0.60)				
3.3 Civic Virtue	5.65	1.30	0.88**	0.21**	0.26**	0.31**	0.12	(0.70)			
4. Performance (OWM)	59.74	7.10	0.32**	-0.02	0.12	0.23**	-0.01	0.20*	-		
4.1 Second year mean	61.20	7.36	0.33**	-0.03	0.06	0.19*	-0.06	0.28**	0.94**	-	
4.2 Third year mean	57.96	7.70	0.28**	0.00	0.13	0.22**	0.02	0.20*	0.94**	0.76**	-

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed), **Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Reliability coefficients, where relevant, are reported in parentheses.

With the exception of courtesy which only reached moderate levels of internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.60$), all other scale variables reached high internal reliabilities which ranged from 0.70 to 0.89.

On a scale ranging from 1 to 7, the mean figures of study variables were above midpoint, indicating that the participants were somewhat committed to their university ($M = 5.2$, $SD = 1.28$); reported high self-esteem ($M = 5.93$, $SD = 0.77$); and somewhat practised OCB ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 1.04$).

Commitment correlated positively and significantly with OCB ($r = 0.28$, $p \leq 0.01$) and two of its dimensions, namely: altruism ($r = 0.29$, $p \leq 0.01$) and civic virtue ($r = 0.88$, $p \leq 0.01$). This suggests that the students who reported high commitment were more likely to report high OCB than those who reported low commitment. This provided support to hypothesis 1. Of particular interest was the very high correlation between commitment and civic virtue. This is however not surprising because the two constructs share some similarities. A relevant target for both is an organisation. A student committed to the university would be emotionally attached to the organisation, and someone who exhibits civic virtue would attend and actively participate in university meetings, and arguably both would strongly identify with its vision and goals. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine and Bachrach (2000:525) suggested that 'civic virtue represents a macro-level interest in, or commitment to, the organization as a whole'; in other words, it is the OCB directed at the organisation, and in this case, the university as an institution. Commitment was also positively and significantly associated with the OWM ($r = 0.32$, $p \leq 0.01$), academic performance before and after the survey at second year ($r = 0.32$, $p \leq 0.01$) and third year ($r = 0.28$, $p \leq 0.01$) levels respectively; suggesting that students who reported higher commitment performed better than those who reported lower commitment. This provided support to hypotheses 2.

Self-esteem was positively and significantly related to OCB ($r = 0.34$, $p \leq 0.01$) and all three of its dimensions, namely: altruism ($r = 0.31$, $p \leq 0.01$), courtesy ($r = 0.24$, $p \leq 0.01$) and civic virtue ($r = 0.21$, $p \leq 0.01$). This suggests that students with higher self-esteem reportedly practised OCB than students with lower self-esteem. This provided support to hypothesis 3. There was no relationship between self-esteem and academic performance at any level ($p \geq 0.05$), providing no support to hypothesis 4.

Though overall OCB was not significantly related to academic performance at any level, its altruism and civic virtue dimensions were moderately but significantly related to OWM ($r = 0.23$, $p \leq 0.01$ and $r = 0.20$, $p \leq 0.05$,

respectively), academic performance at second-year level ($r = 0.19$, $p \leq 0.05$ and $r = 0.28$, $p \leq 0.01$), and academic performance at third-year level ($r = 0.22$, $p \leq 0.01$ and $r = 0.20$, $p \leq 0.05$, respectively); suggesting that the higher the student's altruistic behaviour and civic virtue, the higher the academic performance and vice versa. This partly provided support to hypothesis 5.

As could be expected, OCB correlated significantly with its dimensions, namely: altruism ($r = 0.77$, $p \leq 0.01$), courtesy ($r = 0.72$, $p \leq 0.01$) and civic virtue ($r = 0.26$, $p \leq 0.01$). Similarly, OWM correlated strongly with second-year and third-year level means ($r = 0.94$, $p \leq 0.01$).

Discussion and conclusion

Summary of findings and their discussion

The primary aim of this article was to explore some correlates of students' OCB and academic performance. It was hypothesised that students' commitment to their university and self-esteem were both positively associated with their OCB and academic performance respectively. The positive relationship was also expected between OCB and academic performance.

As predicted, commitment to the university was positively and significantly related to OCB. Thus, in the same way that workers who are committed to their organisation would go beyond the call of duty to assist colleagues and their organisation (OCB), learners who feel attached to their university would go the extra mile to assist colleagues, and would actively be involved in extracurricular activities on behalf of their university. This is in line with the reviews of Podsakoff et al. (2000), and the meta-analytic review of Organ and Ryan (1995), both of which reported that organisational commitment was one of the consistent predictors of OCB. Commitment was also positively correlated with objectively determined academic performance. It is possible that students who are emotionally attached to their institutions work harder in their studies to improve the image of their institution.

Self-esteem was significantly related to OCB but not academic performance. It is possible that students with high perceptions of self-worth participate with confidence in university-related voluntary meetings (civic virtue), and relate selflessly with others (altruism and courtesy). As posited by Borman and colleagues (Borman, 2004; Borman et al., 2001; Borman and Motowidlo, 1993), it is also possible that dispositional factors are better correlates of OCB than task performance.

While the aggregate measure of OCB failed to correlate significantly with measures of academic performance in this study, two of its dimensions – altruism (helping behaviour) and civic virtue – were moderately and slightly related to academic performance respectively. It might be that students who assist others in assignments and revisions have the opportunity to hone their skills, and therefore perform better in tests and examinations. It might also be that as these altruistic learners help others, they become aware of their own weaknesses in different courses, and hence become more able than others to reduce their weaknesses before tests and examinations.

This finding differs slightly from that of Allison et al. (2001:286) in which the 'composite' measure of OCB and both sportsmanship and conscientiousness became significant predictors of average cumulative grade point. The differences between the studies may be due to the following reasons. First, in this study the 'aggregate' measure of OCB did not include sportsmanship and conscientiousness, the dimensions that were apparently responsible for the influence of OCB on academic performance in Allison et al.'s (2001) study. Second, even though Allison et al. (2001) used specific and verifiable measures of academic performance, these measures were self-reported and related only to the previous academic term.

Practical implications

The results of this study have some implications for educators. It is possible that educators, in addition to imparting core skills such as reading critically and reflectively, can encourage learners to become good citizens of their institutions to improve their academic performance. Though some researchers have questioned the utility of improving students' self-esteem for the purposes of academic achievement (e.g. Baumeister et al. 2003), this study suggests that improving self-esteem might well affect OCB of students.

Limitations and prospects for future research

Like many studies of this nature, this study had some limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of the study restricted the findings to correlational rather than causal relationships. Thus reverse causality in which for example, academic performance affected commitment rather than the assumption made here cannot be ruled out. It is possible for instance that a student who performs well academically feels emotionally attached to their university than a struggling student. Even though this study used academic performance before the survey (past performance) and academic performance after the survey

(subsequent performance), longitudinal studies are required to establish causality between variables of the study and academic performance.

While care was taken to ensure that different sources of information were used between self-reported variables and objective performance measures to reduce common method bias, this bias could not be totally eliminated because self-esteem, commitment and OCB measures in this study constituted self-report survey measures. It would be interesting to examine whether these relationships could be established when OCB was reported by either colleagues or instructors. There is also the potential of bias caused by socially desirable responses (social desirability), which generally refers to ‘the tendency of some people to respond to items more as a result of their social acceptability than their true feelings’ (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff, 2003:882). Future studies can control this bias by including the measure of social desirability in statistical analysis and ‘partialling out its effects’ by means of partial correlation procedures.

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