Relationship between Achievement Motivation and Personality among Pre and Post Independence Malaysian Malays

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia has undergone a lot of changes politically, socially and economically following its independence. The vast improvements in its physical developments as well as the educational and economic levels of the people contribute to the overall standard of living achieved by the country thus far. With all these developments in the country one may possibly expect some psychological changes among its people, particularly in the aspects of motivation and personality. Thus, this study ascertains the relationship between achievement motivation and personality of pre-independence and post-independence Malaysian Malays. A total of 552 Malay respondents participated in this study. 261 respondents were born before 1957 and 291 after 1957. Two instruments are used; Cassidy and Lynn Achievement Motivation Scale (CLAMS) and NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI). The results show a significant relationship between achievement motivation and neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness for the pre-independence Malaysian Malays and for the post-independence Malaysian Malays. There are significant relationships between achievement motivation and all personality types except for extraversion.

Keywords: Personality, big five personality, achievement motivation, Malaysians

INTRODUCTION

After Malaysia achieved its independence in 1957, various changes have occurred from the perspective of politics, social and economics. The vast improvements in its physical developments are somewhat parallel with the increase in the educational and economic levels of the people. To date,
it has contributed to the country’s overall standard achieved. In spite of its size, Malaysia is now known practically all over the world. One may perhaps expect some psychological changes, particularly in the aspects of motivation and personality, in view of the developments in the country.

The term achievement motivation (nAch) has been defined by McClelland as ‘competition with a standard of excellence’. However, various literature suggest that this is only one aspect of nAch. Clark, Varadarajan and Pride (1974) asserts that achievement motivation is a multidimensional concept defined as a competition with a standard of excellence or as the desire of people to set and realize goals for themselves. Achievement motivation has been an area of frequent research in view of its influence on criteria of interest to both practitioners and academicians. People with high achievement motivation thrive on competition (Ward, 1995). They are potentially energetic performers with intense concentration on the job (Barling & Boswell, 1999). They also tend to focus their thoughts and actions on improving their work (Lewin & Stephens, 1994). Bateman and Crant (1993) believe that high achievers are proactive; therefore, they are considered potential transformational leaders. They are committed to performance goals (Johnson & Perlow, 1992), and have greater management potential (Fletcher, 1991).

There are three dimensions of achievement motivation, such as work ethic, pursuit of excellence and mastery. Work ethic originates from the Weberian concept of Protestant (Weber, 1904). Psychologists adopt it in describing motivation to achieve. It is based on finding reinforcement in the performance itself. It incorporates ‘the desire to work hard’ (Spence & Helmreich, 1983). It is seen as a motivational attribute of the individual which influences attitudes, values and behavior (Furnham, 1982, 1984; Mirels & Garrett, 1971).

The second dimension, the pursuit of excellence, is the factor that McClelland et al. (1953) defines as ‘competition with a standard of excellence’ and describes as motivation that finds reward in performing to the best of one’s ability. Henry Murray (1938) introduces the concept as the basis for all intrinsic achievement motivation. Murray and his colleagues use it as the definition for n Ach. The third dimension, mastery, is also a form of competitiveness, but not with other individuals. To be more precise, it is a competition within oneself to solve problems, tackle a difficult tasks and succeed in the face of challenges. A person who scores high on this factor probably adopts the problem-focused coping approach to life (Coyne, Aldwin & Lazarus, 1981).

The big five domains of personality include conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism and extraversion. A conscientious person is someone who has the traits of orderliness and self-discipline among others. An agreeable person is likely easy to accept, good-natured and relates to people with respect and honour. A person with personality domain
of openness to experience is receptive to aesthetics and ideas. An extraversion person is assertive and active. While, a person with high score of neuroticism is likely to be anxious and depressed (Soto, Gosling, John & Potter, 2011).

Major, Turner and Fletcher (2006) find that achievement motivation is highly correlated with personality. In addition, a study by Richardson and Abraham (2009) on stable personality traits among male and female university students shows that achievement motivation is highly positively correlated with conscientiousness and demonstrates mixed results with the other traits: extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience and agreeableness. Steinmeyer and Spinath (2008) also find that achievement motivation and conscientiousness are positively correlated.

Hart, Stasson, Mahoney and Story (2007) find that conscientiousness, openness to experience and extraversion are positively associated with intrinsic achievement motivation; whereas, extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism are positively related to extrinsic achievement motivation. Conscientiousness is positively related to both intrinsic and extrinsic achievement motivation.

Most researchers implicitly agree that there are individual differences in motivation. These differences can be traced to dispositional tendencies (Judge & Ilies, 2002). Attempts to empirically link personality characteristics to motivational variables have produced inconsistent results (Gellatly, 1996). Relationships between conscientiousness, performance motivation, neuroticism and performance motivation are quite clear. However, relationships between openness to experience, extraversion and agreeableness to motivation are ambiguous and virtually unstudied (Judge & Ilies, 2002). This study aims to examine the relationship between achievement motivation and personality among pre and post independence Malay Malaysians.

**MATERIALS AND METHOD**

This study employs a survey method. A total of 552 respondents of Malay ethnic participate in this study. 261 respondents born before 1957 are categorized as pre-independence; while, another 291 born after 1957 are categorized as post-independence generation. The two instrument used are: (1) the Cassidy and Lynn Achievement Motivation (CLAM) is adapted (Fatimah wati Halim 2012) into scale which measures three types of achievement motivation: work ethics, excellence and mastery; and (2) NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) which measures personality. This adapted (Khairul Mastor et al., 2000) NEO Personality Inventory measures five dimensions of personality: openness to experience; conscientiousness; extraversion; agreeableness; and neuroticism. CLAM contains 21 items on a Likert scale with five response options: strongly agree; agree; not sure; disagree; and strongly disagree. The range of scores for CLAM is 21-105. The second instrument, NEO-FFI contains 60 items on a Likert scale with five response options: strongly agree; agree; neutral;
disagree; and strongly disagree. Each personality domain contains 12 items with range of scores for each domain between 12-60. Both instrument are translated to Malay language. However, both Malay and English versions are used in the study to enable the respondents to have the option of choosing the language they are comfortable with.

RESULTS
The results for relationships between personality and motivation for pre-independence Malaysian Malays are shown in Table 1. Table 2 shows the results for the relationships between personality and motivation for the post-independence Malaysian Malays. Table 1 and Table 2 show significant relationships between achievement motivation and Neuroticism (r=-0.269, p<0.05), Extraversion (r=0.135 p<0.05), Openness (r=0.163, p<0.05) and Conscientiousness (r=0.510, p<0.05) for the pre independence Malaysian Malays and for the post independence Malaysian Malays. There are significant relationships between achievement motivation and all personality types except for Extraversion (r=0.080, p>0.05). Table 1 shows significant negative relationships between neuroticism and ethics and mastery (r=-0.336, p<0.05; r=-0.120, p<0.05, respectively); agreeableness and ethics (r=-0.218, p<0.05). There are positive correlations between extraversion and mastery (r=0.235, p<0.05); openness and excellence (r=0.223, p<0.05); agreeableness and ethics (r=0.218, p<0.05); and conscientiousness and ethics (r=0.384, p<0.05), excellence (r=0.433, p<0.05) and mastery (r=0.305, p<0.05).

Table 2 shows significant negative relationships between neuroticism and ethics and mastery (r=-0.336, p<0.05; r=-0.120, p<0.05, respectively); agreeableness and ethics (r=-0.218, p<0.05). There are positive correlations between extraversion and mastery (r=0.235, p<0.05); openness and excellence (r=0.223, p<0.05); agreeableness and ethics (r=0.218, p<0.05); and conscientiousness and ethics (r=0.384, p<0.05), excellence (r=0.433, p<0.05) and mastery (r=0.305, p<0.05).

TABLE 1
Correlation Between Personality And Motivation For Pre-Independence Malaysian Malays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Ethics</th>
<th>Excellence</th>
<th>Mastery</th>
<th>CLAM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>-.336*</td>
<td>-.080</td>
<td>-.120*</td>
<td>-.269*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.235*</td>
<td>.135*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.223*</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.163*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>-.218*</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>-.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>.384*</td>
<td>.433*</td>
<td>.305*</td>
<td>.510*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05

TABLE 2
Correlation Between Personality And Motivation For Post-Independence Malaysian Malays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Ethics</th>
<th>Excellence</th>
<th>Mastery</th>
<th>CLAM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>-.238*</td>
<td>-.172*</td>
<td>-.118*</td>
<td>-.260*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.135*</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>.204*</td>
<td>.231*</td>
<td>.192*</td>
<td>.295*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>-.243*</td>
<td>-.113</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>-.185*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>.375*</td>
<td>.373*</td>
<td>.143*</td>
<td>.431*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05
relationships between neuroticism and ethics ($r=-0.238$, $p<0.05$); and mastery ($r=-0.118$, $p<0.05$); and between agreeableness and ethics ($r=-0.243$, $p<0.05$). It also indicates that there are positive correlations between openness and ethics ($r=0.204$, $p<0.05$), excellence ($r=0.231$, $p<0.05$), mastery ($r=0.192$, $p<0.05$) and conscientiousness and ethics ($r=0.375$, $p<0.05$), excellence ($r=0.373$, $p<0.05$) and mastery ($r=0.143$, $p<0.05$).

**DISCUSSION**

The results of both pre and post independence Malaysian Malays show negative significant relationship between neuroticism and ethic, excellence and mastery. However, the only difference between the two groups is that there is no significant relationship between neuroticism and excellence for the pre-independence Malaysian Malays. Emotional instability often labels neuroticism. It is the tendency of showing poor emotional adjustment in the form of stress, anxiety and depression. According to Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witte and Barrick, (2004) emotionally unstable individuals experience hopelessness and a lack of energy to perform their tasks. It is no wonder that the results are such, considering highly emotionally unstable persons with high tendency for stress, anxiety and depression, tend to be too preoccupied with their own troubled emotions; thus, expected to be blithe about ethics, achieving excellence and mastery.

Conscientious persons from both pre and post independence are positively correlated with all the three constructs of achievement motivation: ethics, excellence and mastery. Persons with high scores on conscientious are deemed to be more organized, careful, dependable, self-disciplined and achievement oriented (McCrae & Costa, 1987). They are also orderly and deliberate individuals. On the other hand, motivation concerns energy, direction, and persistence which are all the aspects of activation and intention (Sung & Choi, 2009). Conscientiousness encompasses achievement motivation (Richardson & Abraham, 2009). In addition, persistence and industriousness are sub-facets of conscientiousness. Hence, conscientious persons are expected to score high on achievement motivation and be strong on ethics, mastery and excellence.

There is another similarity between the two groups, pre and post independence. There is a negative relationship between agreeableness and achievement motivations in the ethics construct. People with high score of agreeableness tend to be good-natured, considerate and tolerant. In contrast, less agreeable people tend to be manipulative, self-centered and suspicious (Digman, 1990). Agreeable people also tend to care about others feelings and avoid being abrasive or in conflict with colleagues. Therefore they are inclined to engage in cooperation and helping behavior that mostly serve the goal of maintaining existing relationships. Given their strong desire for interpersonal harmony, agreeable people may have difficulty in generating and expressing ideas that are different from others or deviated from existing
or conventional ways (Sung & Choi, 2009). A high achiever aims high and thrives on competition; therefore, it is logical for someone with high scores on agreeableness tends to score lower on achievement motivation (Ward, 1995). High achievers focus on ways to improve their work (Lewin & Stephens, 1994) and commit to performance goals (Johnson & Perlow, 1992). It is not surprising that someone with those characteristics may have a tendency to disregard others feeling as long as he or she achieves his or her goals. This explains the results of this study for both groups, the pre and post independence.

The results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between openness and achievement motivation for both groups of respondents. The more open a person is, the higher his achievement motivation. The results show that openness correlates significantly with achievement motivation on all the three constructs, ethics, excellence and mastery for the post independence group. Whereas, only excellence correlates significantly with openness for the pre-independence group. People with openness to experience tend to allow themselves for greater access to new experiences and perspectives and possess strong tendencies to seek new situations (Goldberg, 1990).

In conclusion, it can be construed that there are plenty of similarities in terms of the relationships between personality and achievement motivation for both pre and post independence Malaysia Malays. Firstly, neurotic Malaysian Malays are found to be not highly motivated in their achievements, particularly achievements involving ethics, excellence and mastery. The generational difference does not have an effect on this matter as both generations, pre and post independence, display the same trend on neuroticism and achievement motivation. Similarly, there is no generational difference in the relationships between achievement motivation with conscientiousness and agreeableness. Both pre and post independence generations indicate positive relationships between conscientiousness and all three constructs of achievement motivation; that is ethics, excellence and mastery. It seems that there is no change in terms of achievement motivation from the perspective of conscientiousness. Conscientious Malaysian Malays tend to be high achievers; this has not changed over the years as well as throughout generations. There is a negative relationship with achievement motivation in the aspect of agreeableness. Malaysian Malays who are agreeable tend to be not high in their achievement motivation. However, Malaysian Malays who are more open to experience, tend to be high in their achievement motivation. The implication of the current findings is that, in terms of personality and achievement motivation, Malaysian Malays have not changed very much since independence. The young generations seem to be highly motivated in their achievement provided they are dominant in conscientiousness and openness to experience.
REFERENCES


