Correlation of Self Esteem and Achievement Goals: The Case of Iranian Students

[1]Donya Bahrami and [2]Mohammad Amin Bahrami

[1]Hazrate Ommolbanin (PBUH) High School, Chabahar, Iran
[2]Healthcare Management Department,
Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd, Iran

Abstract: *Introduction:* The objective of this study was to examine the correlation of general self-esteem with achievement goals among Iranian students. *Methods:* This analytical study was done through cross-sectional method during the last 3 months of 2014 among the students of 8th grade in an Iranian high school. A total of 54 students contributed in the study. We used random sampling method. The required data was gathered using 2 valid questionnaires including Rosenberg's 10-item self-esteem questionnaire (1965) and Elliot and McGregore's 2×2 achievement goals questionnaire (2001). Data analysis was done by using statistical software $SPSS_{16}$ and through descriptive statistics, ANOVA and Pearson correlation coefficient. *Results:* The correlation coefficients of self-esteem with mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals were 0.211, -0.058, 0.296 and -0.060, respectively but only the correlation between self-esteem and performance-approach goal was statistically significant (P=0.037). *Conclusion:* Our results showed that self-esteem can be a positive predictor of approach goals and a negative predictor of avoidance goals. However, the confirmation of the correlation of self-esteem with achievement goals seems to needs more studies.

Key words: Self-Esteem · Achievement Goals · Approach Goals · Avoidance Goals

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is defined as the degree to which a person values himself/herself, the summation based on the emotions, beliefs, feelings and precise self-evaluation or in short it refers to overall emotional placement for self [1]. In the other words, self-esteem is thought as the image or feeling which a person constructs in him/her mind about self over the time. Therefore, it can be defined as the persons' evaluation about themselves [2, 3]. Thus, the basic idea of self-esteem is that each person feels he/she has an intrinsic value and tries to enhance it [1]. Self-esteem is derived from thoughts, perceptions, emotions, aspirations and personal goals and also affects all of them [1, 2 and 4]. Self-esteem is produces over the life and can be either as positive (high self-esteem) which resulted to positive outcomes or negative (low self-esteem) which resulted to negative outputs [1, 5]. According to Pop *et al* (1988), self-esteem has 5 domains including social, academic, family, body and overall scales

[5]. Also, Maslow defines self-esteem as a need and believes that all people need to respect themselves and need to respect the others [4]. Accordingly, self-esteem as a need includes such feelings which a human needs in an interactional social system [6]. Psychologists believe that self-esteem is the core of human's psychological structure [4] and is a character of normal personality [7]. Thus, self-esteem has long been considered as a component of mental health [5] and has been taken into consideration as a vital social capital [4]. For this reason, in recent years, it has attracted much attention from researchers and has been one of the strongest research topics in psychology [5, 8]. Researchers of self-esteem often have examined its 2 aspects. The first aspect or area includes factors affecting an individual's self-esteem. In this context, studies have shown that various factors such as childhood experiences, successes and failures over the life cycle, relationships with parents, family members, teachers, coaches, religious and community leaders, parents' parenting style, self-esteem of parents, gender

---

Corresponding Author: Donya Bahrami, Hazrate Ommolbanin (PBUH) High School, Chabahar, Iran.

differences and cultural forces influence on the development of personal self-esteem [3-5, 9]. In this area of research, Cooper Smith believes that overall 4 factors are important in the development of self-esteem including: [1] The value which a person receives from others, [2] experience with success in a situation where a person sees himself in interaction with the environment, [3] the clarified definition of success and failure and eventually 4) the person's manner in relation to criticism [4]. The second area of research about self-esteem in recent decades has been the effect of self-esteem on the other factors. In this regard, various studies have shown that self-esteem can affect all areas of life including the thinking styles, feelings and performance [7]. These studies have shown that self-esteem can affect one's thinking processes, feelings, interests, emotions, personal goals and values, working behavior, job adjustment, personality, personal and social responsiveness, interactional competencies, public and academic achievements, overall happiness and so on [1, 4-6, 8]. Also, in psychology literatures it is said that people with high self-esteem, feel good about them and are usually better able to resolve their conflicts with others. They deal with problems better than others and they are more resistant in the failure situation. Also, they have better decision-making power, creativity and innovational ideas [2, 10]. These people tend to focus more on their strengths [3] and often their behavior is friendlier [9]. Also, people with high self-esteem, usually are more logical and enjoy more from their life [2]. In contrast, people with low self-esteem, often suffer from anxiety and frustration in the face of difficulties. They usually have trouble in resolving their conflicts with others and often harm their self with self-criticism [2]. Also, researches have confirmed that low self-esteem can be a risk factor of negative outcomes such as aggression, crime, drug abuse, depression and poor academic performance [4].

Achievement goals are defined as goals or objectives that motivate students in academic settings. Its orientation can be defined as an underlying cause of student success. It explains the causes of students' engaging in a particular behavior [11]. In the other words, achievement goal orientations are thought as the generalized tendencies to prefer the certain goals and outcomes which accelerate the certain approaches and response patterns for achievement situations [12]. Therefore, the achievement goals represent a pattern of beliefs that refers to different ways of approaching,

engaging and responding to achievement situations [13]. Research on the achievement goals and achievement goal orientations is one of the most modern approaches to motivation and success-related behaviors [12]. In fact, the achievement goals theory is the latest interpretation of motivation as goals and in the past 3 decades some different conceptual models of achievement goals have been developed and their implementations have taught us a lot of things about achievement motivation and its consequences [14]. The first conceptual model of achievement goals which was presented in the late 1970's and early 1980 used a dichotomy framework based on the differentiation of mastery-performance. Based on this dichotomous framework, achievement goals are divided into 2 types of goals including mastery goals (where the purpose is to develop personal skills and competencies) and the performance goals (where the purpose is to demonstrate the skills and competencies and to obtain a favorable judgment from others) [11, 13-17]. After that, this dichotomous framework turned to a trichotomous framework trough a distinction between approach-avoidance in performance goals by Elliot and his colleagues in which achievement goals include mastery goals, performance-approach goals (where the purpose is to obtain a favorable judgment from others) and performance-avoidance goals (where the purpose is to avoided from getting a negative judgment from others [11, 13-15]. Following the presentation of this trichotomous framework, in another work, Elliott and Mac Gregor (2001), trough entering the avoidance construct to mastery goals developed a 2×2 matrix model of achievement goals which is produced from distinction of approach-avoidance as same as mastery-performance. Therefore, this matrix framework has 4 achievement goals including performance-approach, performance-avoidance, mastery-approach (where the purpose is to develop personal skills and competencies) and mastery-avoidance (where the purpose is to avoid the lack of skills and competencies or avoiding the judgment of incompetence) [11, 14, 16, 18]. This model assumes that each of these goals has a distinct pattern of determinants and their consequences [14]. Also, in another model of achievement goals this achievement goals framework has been revised and a new goal which is named work-avoidance goal has been added to previous goals. According to this model, the students who adopt the work-avoidance goal are looking to do their works with possible minimal efforts and challenges [16]. Moreover, in another conceptualization, achievement goals

have been divided into 5 types of orientations including mastery-intrinsic, mastery-extrinsic, performance-approach, performance-avoidance and work-avoidance [12]. Finally, in the most empirical work in regards to achievement goals, Elliot *et al* (2011) with this assumption that achievement goals can be differentiated based on 2 elements including the manner of goals definition and the manner of their valancing have developed a 3×2 model of achievement goals. This model, has been introduced by putting together the 3 usable standards for competency definition (task, ego/self, others) and 2 manners for their valancing (positive or approach to success and negative or avoidance from failure) and therefore, defines 6 goals including task-approach, self-approach, other-approach, task-avoidance, self-avoidance and other-avoidance goals [14]. To date, studies on the achievement goals have focused on 2 areas: some studies which have attempted to examine the correlation between achievement goals constructs and other variables while some another studies have been aimed to determine the cause-effect relationship between goal achievement and other variables trough manipulating the achievement goals [15]. Although, in past years numerous studies have been done to determine the relationship between achievement goals and other variables such as performance achievements, specifically, the academic performance but their results are very diverse and fragmented [12, 13, 15-19]. Therefore, further investigation seems necessary to enrich the educational literature. Given that self-esteem as a personality trait can have 2 modes including low and high self-esteem and also individuals' orientation to achievement goals, based on the Elliot and Mcgregore's 2×2 achievement goals theory can be as approach or avoidance orientations, so we think that students' self-esteem can be correlated to their orientation of achievement goals. According to our knowledge, to date, few studies have been conducted on the correlation between these two constructs. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the correlation between general self-esteem and achievement goals orientation among a sample of Iranian students.

METHODS

This analytical study was done to examine the correlation between students' self-esteem and their achievement goals through a cross-sectional method during the last 3 months of year 2014 among the students of 8th grade in an Iranian girls' high school (Hazrate Omolbanin (PBUH) School, Chabahar and IR Iran). The total number of students in this school was 91. Sample size was calculated with confidence level of 90% and confidence interval of 8% as 50 using an online sample size calculator. Finally a total of 54 students contributed in the study. We used random sampling in the study. The required data was collected using the following 2 valid questionnaires;

- Rosenberg's 10-item self-esteem Scale (1965): Rosenberg's self-esteem scale is a self-report questionnaire with 10 items that assesses overall self-esteem with measuring both the positive and negative feelings of respondents about themselves. From 10 items, 5 questions are scored directly and other 5 items are scored reversely. Rosenberg's self-esteem scale is a simple and short scale which has a good reliability and validity and can be used for all individuals with at least 5 grades education. In the past decades, it has been the most widely used tool in measuring the overall self-esteem. In this study we used a translated version of Rosenberg's scale in Persian. The reliability of the Persian version of this questionnaire has been approved in the study of Raja and Bohol (2008) by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient as 0.84. Also, Raja and Bohol (2008) in their study have confirmed the validity of the Persian version of Rosenberg's scale (20). In this study, the respondent were asked to answer the questions on 2-scale system (agree or disagree). In the case of direct answer items agree and disagree obtained 2 and 1 point and in the case of reverse answer items agree and disagree obtained 1 and 2 points, respectively. Therefore, the higher scores of respondents indicated their higher overall self-esteem.

- Elliot and McGregor's 2×2 inventory of achievement goals (2001): This questionnaire contains 12 questions which are equally divided between 4 achievement goals (mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals). In this study we used a translated version of Elliot and McGregor's questionnaire in Persian. The validity of Persian version of questionnaire had been approved in the study of Hussein (2008). Also, Hussein (2008) in his study has calculated the Cronbach's alpha

coefficient for the whole questionnaire as 0.84 and for each goal items between 0.64 and 0.87 (21). In this study the respondents were asked to respond the questions on the Liker's 5-scale system (not true about me at all to very true about me which obtained 1 to 5 scores, respectively). Therefore, with this scoring system, the minimum and maximum scores of each goal orientation are 3 and 15 and the minimum and maximum scores of all items are 12 and 60, respectively. The larger scores of respondents in each achievement goal indicate their more preference for that orientation. The gathered data was analyzed with statistical software $SPSS_{16}$ and by using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and ANOVA and Pearson correlation coefficient.

RESULTS

As presented in the table 1, the studied students had a good level of self-esteem.

As presented in the table 2, the studied students had the highest and lowest scores in mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance orientations, respectively. Also, they obtained the higher scores in approach orientation than the avoidance orientation [20-25].

As is clear from the table 3, approach orientation, in both cases of mastery and performance goals had a positive and avoidance orientation had a negative correlation with general self-esteem but only the relationship of self-esteem and performance-approach orientation was statistically significant [26-30].

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of self-esteem and its constructs among studied population

Item	N	Mean ± SD
I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	54	1.88±0.31
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	54	1.90±0.29
I am able to do things as well as most other people	54	1.79±0.40
I take a positive attitude toward my-self	52	1.76±0.42
On the whole, I am satisfied with my-self	54	1.48±0.50
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	54	1.66±0.47
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	54	1.72±0.45
I wish I could have more respect for my-self	54	1.42±0.49
I certainly feel useless at time	53	1.50±0.50
At times, I think I am no good at all	54	1.40±0.49
General self-esteem	51	1.65±0.24

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of achievement goals orientations among studied population

Item	N	Mean ± SD
Performance-approach	53	4.12±0.93
Performance-avoidance	50	3.61±1.14
Mastery-approach	52	3.11±1.28
Mastery-avoidance	51	4.47±0.91

Table 3: Correlation coefficients of self-esteem and achievement goals

	Self-esteem	
Achievement goals	R	P_{value}
Performance-approach	0.296	0.037*
Performance-avoidance	-0.060	0.687
Mastery-approach	-0.058	0.694
Mastery-avoidance	0.211	0.150

* Significant at P<0.05

DISCUSSION

Descriptive results of this study showed that the level of general self-esteem in studied students is good. Also, the studied students obtained the highest and the lowest scores in mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance orientations. Indeed, the mean scores of approach orientations were higher than the mean scores of avoidance orientations in studied population. Because the avoidance orientations of achievement goals, are probably the antecedents of negative outcomes in relation to approach orientations [22], therefore the higher scores of approach orientations which shows that the contributors prefer these orientations more than avoidance ones, can be considered as a promising and hopeful result. The results of research on the relationship between self-esteem and achievement goals showed that the general self-esteem has a negative correlation with avoidance orientations and a positive correlation with approach orientations but only the correlation of self-esteem and performance approach orientation was statistically significant and the correlations between self-esteem and other orientations of achievement goals were weak and not significant. The relationship between self-esteem and achievement goals as two important variables that may affect the students' academic performance have been examined in some other studied, previously, although the number of the same studies is limited [23]. Hemet *et al* (2006), in their study have shown that self-esteem negatively predicts the avoidance goals and also, it acts as a mediator in the relationship of some approach and avoidance indicators such as Behavioral Activity System (BAS) and the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS) and personal avoidance goals in relation to approach goals [22]. Also, Pandemic (2014) in a study of the relationship between self-efficacy and self-esteem, have shown that these are the most important variables which predict approach and avoidance goals, respectively [24]. But, in our study, a significant correlation between self-esteem and avoidance goals was not confirmed. However, Pandemic (2014), Dink (2010) and Tuominen-Soini *et al.* (2008) have confirmed that self-esteem has a negative correlation with avoidance orientations of achievement goals [23-25]. Also, the results of Kandemir (2014), Dinc (2010) and Tuominen-Soini *et al* (2008) have shown that self-esteem is correlated with approach orientations, positively [24-26]. Thus, despite the fact that in our study the observed correlations between self-esteem and achievement goals were not significant, except for performance-approach goal, but according to the results of previous studies and ours, we can conclude that self-esteem can be a positive predictor of approach orientations and a negative predictors of avoidance orientations. It is notable that some other researchers have examined the relationship between self-esteem and achievement goals by using other models of achievement goals. For example, Kavussanu and Harnisch (2000) and Guin *et al* (2000) in their studies with the 3×2 achievement goals theory have found that there is a strong correlation between the self-esteem and task approaches but self-esteem has no significant correlation with self approaches [27,28]. However, in the studies of Kavussanu (2007) and Biddle and Waug (2003), self-esteem has had a correlation with both task and self approaches [23, 29]. In contrast, Newton *et al* (2004), in their study have found that none of task and self approaches has the significant correlation with self-esteem [30]. Soini *et al* (2008) in a study have expressed that the goals which relating to the self-improvement and positive growth have relationship with indicators of subjective well-being such as self-esteem and also, the avoidance tendencies relate to various adjustment problems [26]. In general we can say that the results of studies on the relationship between self-esteem and achievement goals are conflicting and sometimes confusing. Therefore, it seems that further studies are required in this topic. Our study can help to some extent in this matter. However, this study has some limitations that should be noted. The main limitation is that the generalization of our findings should be done with caution due to the cross-sectional nature of research. Also, in this study, the self-esteem and achievement goals data was self-reported.

CONCLUSION

In general we can say that the results of studies on the relationship between self-esteem and achievement goals are conflicting and sometimes confusing. Therefore, it seems that further studies are required in this topic. Our study can help to some extent in this matter. However, this study has some limitations that should be noted. The main limitation is that the generalization of our findings should be done with caution due to the cross-sectional mnature of research. Also, in this study, the self-esteem and achievement goals data was self-reported.

REFERENCES

1. Rosli, Y., H. Othman, I. Ishak, S.H. Lubis, N.Z. Mohd. Saat and B. Omar, 2012. Self-esteem and academic performance relationship amongst the second year undergraduate students of University Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur Campus. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 60: 582-89.

2. Salkan, M. and K. Sattari, 2014. The effect of self-esteem improvement on the educational achievement of students, Learning psychology, 9(3): 23-32.

3. Salmalian, Z. and L.E. Kazemnejhad, 2014. Correlation between self-cencept and academic achievements of students, Comprehensive nursing and midwifery, 24(71): 47.

4. Mirzai Alavijeh, M., N. Rajaei, F. Rezaei, F. Hasanpoor, R. Piroozeh and M. Babaei Borzabadi, 2012. Comparison of self-esteem, locus of control and their relationship with university students, educational status at Shahid Sadoughi university of medical sciences, Yazd journal of medical education and development, 7(1): 58-70.

5. Saadat, M., A. Ghasemazadeh and M. Soleimani, 2012. Self-esteem in Iranian university students and its relationship with academic achievements, Procedia-social and behavioral sciences, 31: 10-14.

6. Sadeghian, F., M.R. Abedi and I. Baghban, 2009. The study of the relationship of organizational self-esteem with organizational feedback and job attachment and different personality traits, The journal of training and psychology research; 4(2): 49-66.

7. Zare. H. and N. Sharif, 2011. The relation of thinking styles with self-esteem among students of girl high school and pre-university, Scientific-research journal of Shahed university (Daneshvar), 17(45): 32-41.

8. Naderi, H., A. Rohani, H.T. Aizan, J. Sharir and V. Kumar, 2009. Self-esteem, gender and academic achievement of undergraduate students, American Journal of Scientific Research, 3: 26-37.

9. Hasanzadeh, R., P. Imanifar. The relation of creativity and self-esteem with educational achievement of young people, The journal of socialism, 1(3): 55-65.

10. Asareh, N., The skills of self-esteem improvement. Available at: http://mashal.mop.ir/691/pdf/41.pdf. Last access: 2015/02/04.

11. Finney, S.J. and S.L. Davis, Examining the invariance of the achievement goal questionnaire across gender. Available at: http://www.jmu.edu/assessment/wm_library/goal.pdf. Last access: 2015/02/04.

12. Pulkka, A.T. and M. Niemivirta, 2013. Predictive relationship between adult students' achievement goal orientations, course evaluations and performance, International Journal of Educational Research, 61: 26-37.

13. Mahmoodi, H., A. Eisazadegan, J. Amani Saribeiglo and A. Ketabi, 2013. The study of the relationship between goal achievements and educational performance among the students of talent and non-talent schools: The mediation role of thinking styles, The Scientific-Research Journal of Research in Cognitive and Behavioral Sciences, 1(4): 49-68.

14. Elliot, A.J., K. Murayama and R.A. Pekrun, 2011. Achievement goal model, Journal of Educational Psychology, 103(3): 632-48.

15. Elliot, A.J., M.M. Shell, K.B. Henry and M.A. Maier, 2005. Achievements goals, performance contingencies and performance attainment: An experimental test, Journal of Educational Psychology, 97(4): 630-40.

16. Barzegar, M., The relationship between goal orientation and academic achievement-The mediation role of self-regulated learning strategies: A path analysis, International conference on management, humanity and economics.

17. Covington, M.V., 2000. Goal theory, motivation and school achievement: An integrative review. Annu. Rev. Psychol., 51: 171-200.

18. Pourmohamadreza Tajrishi, M., M. Ashoori, S.S. Jalil-Abkenar and J. Ashoori, 2011. The Relationship Among Personality Factors, Motivational Strategies and Achievement Goals Orientation in Predicting Academic Achievement of the Students with Intellectual Disability, Iranian Rehabilitation Journal, 11(14): 32-9.

19. Bahrmai, D. and M.A. Bahrami, 2015. The relationship of self-esteem and achievement goals with academic performance, African Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences, 7(1): 65-72.

20. Rajabi, G.H. and N. Bohlool, 2007. Measuring the validity and reliability of Rosenberg's self-esteem scale among the first year students of Shahid Chamran university, Training and psychological research, 2(8): 33-48.

21. Hosseini, F., 2008. The prediction of goal orientation with 5 big personality traits among Shiraz university students. A thesis submitted to Shiraz university in partial fulfillment of PhD degree in educational psychology. Shiraz.

22. Hampel, S.A., A.J. Elliot and J.V. Wood, 2006. Basic personality dispositions, self-esteem and personal goals: An approach-avoidance analysis, Journal of personality, 74(5): 1294-319.

23. Kavussano, M., 2007. The effects of goal orientations on global self-esteem and physical self-worth in physical education students, Hellenic Journal of Psychology, 4: 111-32.

24. Kandemir, M., 2014. Predictors of approach/avoidance achievement goals: Personality traits, self-esteem and academic self-efficacy, International Online Journal of Educational Science, 6(1): 91-102.

25. Dink, Z.F., 2010. Relationship between achievement goal orientation and physicals self perceptions among students attending physical education teaching, World Applied Sciences Journal, 11(6): 662-68.

26. Tuominen-Soini, H., K. Salmela-Aro and M. Neimivirta, 2008. Achievement goal orientations and subjective well-being: A person-centered analysis. Learning and instruction, 18: 251-66.

27. Kavussanu, M. and D.L. Harnisch, 2000. Self-esteem in children: Do goal orientations matter. British journal of educational psychology, 70: 229-42.

28. Guinn, B., V. Vincent, T. Semper and L. Jorgensen, 2000. Activity involvement, goal perspective and self-esteem among Mexican-American adolescents. Research quarterly for exercise and sport, 71(3): 308-11.

29. Biddle S.J.H. and J.C.K.. Wang, 2003. Motivation and self-perception profiles and link with physical activity in adolescent girls, Journal of Adolescent, 26: 687-701.

30. Newton, M., N. Detling, J. Kilgore and P. Bernhardt, 2004. Relationship between achievement goal constructs and physical self-perceptions in a physical activity setting, Perceptual and motor skills, 99: 757-70.