

The Relationship of Self-Esteem and Achievement Goals with Academic Performance

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Abstract: The examination of factors associated with educational achievements is a high interesting area of research in educational systems. This study was aimed to examine the relationship of self-esteem and achievement goals with educational performance of students. This analytical and cross-sectional study was done during the 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. We used students' mathematics scores and their mean scores in the last semester as the indicators of academic achievements. Other required data was gathered using 2 valid questionnaires including Rosenberg's 10-item self-esteem questionnaire (1965) and Elliot & McGregore's 2×2 achievement goals questionnaire (2001). Data analysis was done by using statistical software SPSS₁₆ and through descriptive statistics, ANOVA and Pearson correlation coefficient. Results showed that: Our findings indicated that none of self-esteem and achievement goals orientations (mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals) have statistical correlation with students mean scores but all of them with the exception of mastery-avoidance goals have statistical achievements with students' mathematics scores. In conclusion: Our results showed that applying enhancing strategies for improving students' self-esteem and their orientations to achievements will lead to better performance at least in some courses.

Key words: Academic achievements • Self-esteem • Achievement goals

INTRODUCTION

High efficacy and quality of educational system is among the most influential factors of national development. Preparing of individuals to acquire knowledge and skill and training of effective man power is the main task of educational systems [1, 2]. Thus, students' academic performance is a fundamental priority and concern of all countries [2]. Academic success of students enriches the human resources of the society and guaranties the future development of country. In contrast, educational failures make the communities' impossible to use its potential of human capital and endanger the sustainable development in addition to great monetary losses [1-3]. Therefore, the examination of factors associated with educational achievements has been became a high interesting areas of research in recent decades. In the nearly a past century psychologists widely has attempted to identify the predictors of academic achievements. Among the different

factors affecting academic achievements, intelligence has long been regarded as the main factor but today it is believed that it cannot be considered as a successful determinant of students' performance [4]. Thus, in recent decades, many studies have examined the relationship of different variables such as time management, study environment, peer education, effort organizing, help seeking, self-esteem and other personality traits, motivational strategies, goals and goal orientations and other variables with academic achievements [1, 4-6].

Self-esteem can be defined as one's evaluation from him/herself or the degree to which a person values, respect or approves him/her [2,7]. Also, according to Maslow's theory of hierarchical needs, self-esteem (self-respect) can be considered as a need for humans [8]. Self-esteem is created and developed in effect of variety of factors [1, 2, 9]. Having high self-esteem which is the core of human's psychological structure based on the psychological perspective, can lead to many positive outcomes. In contrast, lack of self-esteem

(low self-esteem) can lead to poor outcomes during the life [9-11]. Pop *et al.* [9] believe that self-esteem has 5 domains including academic, social, family, body and general self-esteem. In recent decades, much attention has been attracted to self-esteem from researchers, specifically, psychologists [9, 12]. In this regard, the most studies of self-esteem have examined 2 important issues which are the predictors/determinants of self-esteem and its outcomes or consequences [1, 9, 12]. One of these consequences, which in recent years have attracted a great attention, is academic achievements. Although, to date several studies have been conducted to study the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance but it is impossible to make a definite conclusion from these studies due to the inconsistency of the results. Some studies have shown a positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievements [3, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13], however, some another have not confirmed the same correlation [1, 2]. Also, Pullman & Allik [14] in their study have stated that despite the popular belief that high self-esteem accelerates academic achievements, but only a moderate correlation between self-esteem and school performance is confirmable. Also, longitudinal studies don't support from the important role of self-esteem in improving academic performance. So it seems that the confirmation of self-esteem's effect on the academic success needs more examinations.

Achievement goals orientation is another construct which its relationship with academic performance has been a controversial area of educational researches. Achievement goals are defined as the goals which motivate students in educational settings [15]. In the other words, achievement goals means as a pattern of beliefs that presents the different ways of approaching, engaging and responding to success situations [16]. In the past 3 decades, a number of different conceptual models of achievement goals have been developed and applied [17]. The first of these models is dichotomous model which was designed based on the distinction of 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) in the late 1970 and early 1980 [15, 18, 19]. This dichotomous model, in the following years, was changed to a trichotomous model by Elliot and colleagues through a distinction between approach and avoidance orientations in performance goal which represents 3 types of goals (mastery,

performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals) [17, 20] and then to a 2×2 matrix model with entering the avoidance orientation in mastery goal which represents 4 types of achievement goals as followings:

- Mastery-approach (where the purpose is to develop personal skills and competencies)
- Mastery-avoidance (where the purpose is to avoid the lack of skills and competencies or avoiding the judgment of incompetence)
- Performance-approach (where the purpose is to demonstrate the skills and competencies and to obtain a favorable judgment from others)
- Performance-avoidance (where the purpose is to avoid the unfavorable judgment from others) [5, 15, 20].

Since the launch of this model, many studies have examined the relationship between achievement goals and academic performance by using it. But the mystery that these studies have dealt with is the conflicting results about the impact of various aspects of the achievement goals on the academic achievements. For the mastery goals, some studies, have reported a positive correlation of this kind of goals with using the deep learning processes and academic success while some other studies have not found significant correlation between mastery goals and academic performance [16]. The results of studies, about the performance goals have been more inconsistency from those of mastery goals. In this regard, some studies have shown a positive while some other studies have reported a negative relationship between performance-approach goals and academic achievements [15, 16]. However, most studies have indicated a negative correlation between performance-avoidance goals and academic performance [4]. Although some researchers have attempted to explain this inconsistency of the results on the relationship between achievement goals and academic achievements with some explanations such as multiple objectives (students' focus on the different goals in different situations), or the influence of other variables as a mediator in the relationship between achievements goals and academic performance [16] but it seems that more studies can also help to solve this puzzle.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a developing country with public basic education system. In IR Iran, as well as in other countries, academic failure imposes a high cost on educational system and wastes human capital [2]. Also, considering the population structure of IR Iran, currently, more than half of the students and applicants to

higher education are girls. Given of this issue and also the importance of the identification of educational achievements predictors in order to optimize the educational efforts, in this study we attempted to examine the correlation of 2 controversial constructs including self-esteem and achievement goals with academic achievements in a girl high school of IR Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This analytical study was done through a cross-sectional method during of year 2014 among the students of 8th grade in an Iranian girls' high school (Hazrate Ommolbanin (PBUH) School, Chabahr, 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. The authors used random sampling in the study. The required data was collected as using the following measures:

Academic Achievements: In this study we used the mathematics scores and the mean scores of all courses of last semester based on the descriptive scoring system of Iranian schools (0-8 = need to more effort, 8-12 = improvable, 12-16 = good and 16-20 = very good) as the indicators of academic achievements.

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

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of self-esteem among studied students

	N	Mean ± SD
General self-esteem	51	1.65±0.24

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 Rajabi and Bohlool (2008) by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient as 0.84. Also, Rajabi and Bohlool (2008) in their study have confirmed the validity of the Persian version of Roseberg's scale [21]. 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 Mcgregore'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 McGregore's questionnaire in Persian. The validity of

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of achievement goals and its item in studied students

No.	Item	N	Mean ± SD
1	My goal this semester is to get better grades than most of the other students	54	3.87±1.25
2	It is important for me to do well compared to other students	53	4.24±1.05
3	I want to do better than other students this semester	54	4.24±1.04
Performance-approach		53	4.12±0.93
4	I just want to avoid doing poorly compared to other students this semester	54	3.88±1.56
5	The fear of performing poorly this semester is what motivates me	53	3.35±1.64
6	My goal this semester is to avoid performing poorly compared to other students	50	3.40±1.57
Performance-avoidance		50	3.61±1.14
7	I'm afraid that I may not understand the content of my classes as thoroughly as I'd like	52	3.44±1.43
8	I worry that I may not learn all that I possibly could this semester	52	3.21±1.49
9	I am definitely concern that I may not learn all that I can this semester	52	2.69±1.54
Mastery-avoidance		52	3.11±1.28
10	Completely mastering the material in my courses is important to me this semester	51	4.27±1.20
11	I want to learn as much as possible this semester	52	4.55±1.03
12	The most important thing for me this semester is to understand the content in my courses as thoroughly as possible	52	4.48±1.14
Mastery-approach		51	4.47±0.91

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

	Mean score of all courses in semester		Mathematics' score of semester	
	R	P value	R	P value
Self-esteem	0.321	0.078	0.392	0.027*
Performance-approach goals	0.336	0.060	0.489	0.004*
Performance-avoidance goals	0.219	0.229	0.375	0.032*
Mastery-avoidance goals	0.322	0.067	0.299	0.086
Mastery-approach goals	0.338	0.058	0.359	0.040*

* Significant at P<0.05

Persian version of questionnaire had been approved in the study of Hosseini (2008). Also, Hosseini (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 [22]. In this study the respondents were asked to respond the questions on the Likert'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 SPSS₁₆ and by using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and ANOVA and Pearson correlation coefficient.

As presented in above table, the studied students obtained lower scores in avoidance orientations than the approach orientations in both performance and mastery goals.

As noted in above table, none of self-esteem and achievement goals have a significant correlation with students' mean score of all courses in semester but all of them, with the exception of mastery-avoidance goals have a significant correlation with students' mathematics' score of semester.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of our study showed that the self-esteem of students has not a statistical correlation with their mean of their semester's scores but it positively correlated with the mathematic score. Numerous studies have been conducted on the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement, but the results are variable and inconsistent. Rosli *et al.* (2012), in their study have reported that the general self-esteem measured with Rosenberg's scale has a positive correlation with academic performance (R = 0/32, P <0.005) [10]. Some

other studies such as Sam-kan and Sattari (2014), Ahmad *et al.* (2013), Vishalakshi & Yeshodharac (2012), Colquhoun *et al.* (2012), Mirzaei Alavicheh *et al.* (2012), Harris (2009), Owayed (2005), Hosseini *et al.* (2008) and Fathi-Ashtiani (1998) also have confirmed the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievements [3,7,13,23-28]. Also, Rahmani (2011), Schemidt & Padlla (2003), Bonkston & Zhou (2002) and West, Fish & Stevens (1980) have confirmed the same relationship [29-32]. However, Salmalian and Kazemnejhad (2014), Hasanzadeh and Imanifar (2011) and Naderi *et al.* (2009) in their study have not confirmed the relationship of self-esteem with academic achievements [1, 2, 12]. Also, some other studies have indicated that general self-esteem has an effect on the academic performance only trough a mediator or control variable such as academic self-esteem or gender. In this study, we approved only the correlation of self-esteem with mathematic scores of students.

Indeed to this, we assessed the relationship between achievement goals and students' academic performance which its results were more surprising than from those of self-esteem. In this regards, our findings, showed that none of achievement goal orientations has statistical correlation with academic achievements. The same studies on the relationship between these 2 variables have also shown conflicting results. However, it can said that totally, previous studies on this matter have shown that typically, approach goals and avoidance goals, are the positive and negative predictors of performance, respectively. For example, studies of Harakiewicz, *et al.* (2008), Sideridis (2008), Elliot *et al.* (2005), Church, Wolters (2004), Barron & Harackiewicz (2003), Harakiewicz *et al.* (2002), Elliot & McGregore (2001), Elliott and Mac Gregor (2001) and Lopez (1999), have demonstrated that performance approach goal has a positive correlation with educational performance [18, 33-40]. However, this relationship was been negative in the study of Lai *et al.* (2006) [41]. Also, Chan (2008), Lan & Nie (2008) and Hsieh *et al.* (2007) have reported that achievement goal

has not a statistical relationship with academic performance [42-44]. In regards to performance-avoidance goal, also, Harackiewicz *et al* (2008), Lau & Nie (2008), Hsieh *et al* (2007), Rastegar (2006) Elliot *et al* (2005), Pintrich & Cortina (2005), Pajares & Valiante (2001), Zusho, Elliot, McGregore & Galbe (1999), Halvari & Kjormo (1999) and Elliot *et al.* (1997) have shown that this type of goal has a negative relationship with academic achievements [18,38,43-50]. About the mastery goals, Barzegar (2012), Pourmohammadreza Tajrishi *et al* (2011), Lai *et al* (2006) and Church (2001) have confirmed a positive direct correlation [5,15,16,33,41] and Dupeyrat & Marine (2005) and Albaili (1998) and have shown a positive but indirect correlation of these type of goal orientations with academic achievement [51, 52]. Also, Chuech, Elliot & Gable (2001) and Wolters, Yu & Pintrich (1996) have confirmed the positive relationship of mastery goals with academic performance [33,53]. However, Dupeyrat and Marin (2005) and Elliott and Mac Gregor (2001) have shown that mastery goals have not relationship with academic performance [36, 52]. Also, Lau & Nie (2008), Hsieh, Sullivan & Guerra (2007), Witkow & Fuligni (2007), Finney, Pieper & Barron (2004) and Elliot & McGregore (1999) in their study have expressed that these types of achievement goals have not direct correlation with academic achievements [43, 44, 46, 54, 55].

Due to discrepancies in the results of the abovementioned studies and the findings of this study it seems that the confirmation of exact relationship between achievement goals and academic achievements needs to be studied more. It should be noted that the present study had some limitations. First, this study was cross-sectional and therefore, it has the limitations of this kind of studies. Also, the data was analyzed in this study was self-reported.

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