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Achievement and Motivation: A Different Perspective On Familiar Concepts

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Abstract

Motivation, the powerful force behind our behavior, takes place in various areas of one’s life. As globalization has a great impact on the world, individuals not only compete with their peers but also contend with the universe in terms of self-actualization. In psychological terms, self-actualization is a prevalent need for everybody, enabled by the success in different majors. To understand this mechanism, motivation should be considered as an inner force of accomplishments. In this article, achievement and motivation were evaluated thoroughly based on the constructive approaches such as Sternberg’s Triarchic Intelligence Theory, Dweck’s Implicit Theory of Intelligence, and Achievement Goal Conceptualization. The notion of achievement in educational areas was appreciated with respect to competent-relevant, self-related, relational, demographic, environmental variables and neuropsychological tendencies. They were regarded as the effects on the achievement goal orientations, leading to the processes and consequences of the success. As a result of the analysis in the study, it was observed that in one’s academic motivation, mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach and performance-avoidance inclinations provide a meta-analytic insight for him. The suggestions pertinent to these concepts were proposed precisely to the ones dealing with the challenges in this area.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Motivation, the powerful force behind our behavior, takes place in every field of our lives. Especially, academic motivation, pertinent to the success in the world of knowledge, is critical in various areas such as

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education, business, human resources, sports and so on (Elliot and Fryer, 2008). Competitive atmosphere of the business environment not only makes the employers seek this quality but also regulates it among the employees. When we look at the unit of the human resources, it is taken into account the fact that the projects aimed at leading the career progress in the organization causes the academic motivation of the individual to become pivotal. Besides this, in the educational settings, in order to do an effective counseling for the students, who face the struggles at the time of the transitional periods of their development, and who encounter challenges relevant to the process of goal attainment – in particular, the significant achievement necessary for the entrance into the high school, the university and so on, the academic motivation is revealed as an important concept. Therefore, the psychologists and psychological counselors must have a general understanding of this term and its underlying mechanisms contributing to the success of the person.

The purpose of this article was to demonstrate the general picture of achievement motivation based on the different theoretical approaches such as social-cognitive approach, hierarchical model of achievement motivation, Sternberg’s Triarchical Intelligence Model and so on. Starting with the definition of achievement motivation, the theoretical models were analyzed in terms of facts, concepts, procedures and strategies in the study. The result of the analysis was demonstrated in a detailed way.

Academic motivation can be depicted as the total of the skills, achievements and effectiveness shown by the individual under the circumstances he is exposed to. According to Elliot (1999), the one forms this concept through directing every thought, behavior, emotion and attribute based on his competences. In other words, it is the usage of one’s own perception relevant to his competences in the guidance of his thoughts and behaviors. For Elliot and Dweck (2005), the person needs them so as to adapt the environmental conditions he is part of. Butler (2000) states that the individuals utilize these environments to get an idea about themselves. It means that they try to shape their self-knowledge depending on the degree of their competences evaluated in reference to themselves or the other criteria. In this respect, he focuses on two aspects of information-seeking behavior of the person: namely, “competence acquisition” and “competence assessment”. Competence acquisition pays attention to the enhancement of competences and leads the one to search for individual growth. On the other hand, competence assessment involves the process of the social comparison and causes the one to consider the feedback information as an evaluating tool for himself or as a mentoring tool for his improvement. In addition to contemplating both the competence assessment and competence acquisition as spontaneous activities the individual does, they represent the guiding principles for institutional purposes of the agents and personal growth. Yet, he claims that the underlying system behind competence acquisition and assessment resides in the achievement goals embraced by the individual.

To comprehend the concept of the achievement goal of the person, we need to take into account the achievement goal theory profoundly. This theory reflects a social-cognitive approach trying to understand the goals and the processes followed by the individual in his academic world (Midgley, Kaplan, Middleton, Maehr, Urdan, Anderman, L., Anderman, E.and Roese, 1998). Specifically, the focal point of the theory is to get the picture of the assessment tool utilized for appreciating one’s competences in an endeavor (Meece, Anderman, E. and Anderman, L., 2006). The norms are created by the one who would like to evaluate the degree of the competent-relevant effectiveness in the pathway of achievements. Therefore, in educational circumstances, the goals of the student and the reasons behind his behaviors displayed in various learning activities become an essential research area for the ones who investigate the latent mechanisms of academic motivation (Urdan and Maheer, 1995).

According to Ames (1992), achievement goals are the factors having a fundamental impact on the formation of a successful behavior. For Elliot and Trash (2001), such goals are cognitive systems managing the activities of the person. From their point of view, they represent both the purposes and the inceptions of the conducts. In the “hierarchical model of achievement motivation” proposed by Elliot and Church (1997), they make a distinction between the “goals” and “motives” pertinent to accomplishments. As a result of this, “achievement motives” are regarded as the structures regulating one’s success as well as failure. Yet, they play a critical role on endorsing
the achievement goals. Thus, as shown in Figure 1, the model presents the variables configuring the achievement goals (Elliot, 1999, p.177).

![Achievement goals in the context of the hierarchical model of achievement motivation](image)

**Fig. 1. Achievement goals in the context of the hierarchical model of achievement motivation** (Elliot, 1999, p.177).

Moreover, in the hierarchical model of achievement motivation, “…… motive dispositions (achievement motivation and fear of failure) represent higher order motivational constructs, achievement goals (performance-approach, performance-avoidance, and mastery) represent midlevel "motivational surrogates," and task-specific competence expectancies are conceptualized as an independent antecedent of achievement goal adoption……”(Elliot and Church, 1997, p.219). This relationship was indicated in Figure 2.

![A hierarchical model of approach and avoidance achievement motivation](image)

**Fig. 2. A hierarchical model of approach and avoidance achievement motivation** (Elliot ve Church, 1997, s. 220).

In sum, the individual sets the standards for his own performances in his academic or business areas, which reflect his achievement goals (Pintrich, 2000). They express his belief in his skills, competencies or abilities. But what are the dimensions of these goals? Which kind of goal leads the one to success, which one contributes to failure? In order to answer these questions, the conceptual features of achievement goals are to be handled thoroughly.

In the achievement goal theory, the keyword – competence - determines the types of achievement goals. The notion of achievement becomes individualized and differentiated depending on his subjective perception of his competent-relevant skills. Based on how competence is defined, there are three kinds of competence: absolute, intrapersonal and interpersonal competence. Absolute competence represents one’s comprehension of the problem accurately. Intrapersonal competence encompasses the aim of increasing the level of knowledge and abilities. On the other hand, in normative competence, the individual makes great effort to display himself as superior than others. In this respect, performance becomes more essential than the learning activity itself. For normative competence, social comparison takes part in the process of one’s attainments. Furthermore, the concept
of competence can be divided into two dimensions in accordance with how it is appreciated: approach and avoidance. When the achievement goal emphasizes on the way of obtaining favorable outcomes, it expresses an approach tendency. However, when it pays attention to the means of shunning aversive outcomes, it reflects an avoidance predisposition (Elliot and Thrash, 2001; Elliot, 2005).

In accordance with the interpersonal and intrapersonal feedback from the environment, the individual determines his achievement goal orientation and regulates his behaviors. As it was displayed above, in the hierarchical model, the social, cognitional and emotional variables shape one’s manipulation of his academic motivation. It can be interpreted as the formation of self-management.

Depending on the delineations of competence, there are two types of achievement goals: “mastery” and “performance”. Mastery goal motivates the one to acquire lots of information from learning activities, which in turn leads to the enhancement of skills, knowledge and abilities. Success is measured with respect to the degree of self-improvement. In spite of facing the struggles, feeling joy in the learning process is prevalent in mastery goal. Yet, performance goal instigates the person to display himself as better than others. He longs for being more successful and excellent than anyone else. Thus, the accomplishment is assessed on the basis of social comparison (Ames, 1992; Meece, Anderman, E. and Anderman, L., 2006; Molden and Dweck, 2000).

Based on the discourse mentioned above, the process of mastery goals and performance goals seems to work in apart. Yet, the individual compares himself with the others in his academic environment and turns to himself so as to determine whether he is close to his achievement goal or not. Performance goal is the information-provider of the mastery goal. Deriving from this understanding, should these two goals be considered as separate procedures of goal orientation? Does mastery goal involve only the intrapersonal process? Does performance goal encompass only interpersonal process?

For Elliot and Thrash (2001), mastery goal involves the drive for self-growth. It portrays the advancement in competence. Therefore, it utilizes task-oriented criteria for appraising competent-relevant behaviors. On the other hand, performance goal includes the intention for self-embodiment. It underlines the aim of manifesting competence in the eyes of others. This idea leads to examination of competencies through normative criteria. In this regard, absolute and intrapersonal competence can be part of mastery goal, while normative competence can be seen as an aspect of performance goal.

Dweck and Leggett (1988) state the fact that the individuals embracing different goals cannot demonstrate similar attributes towards the predicaments. The ones adopting performance goals withdraw themselves when they encounter dilemmas and failures. But the ones pursuing mastery goals do not give up and avoid from the bad situation. Instead, they insist on completing their lacking sides and seeing the challenge as an opportunity for self-development. Thus, mastery goals contain competence acquisition, just as performance goals entail competence assessment (Butler, 2000).

According to Daron, Butera and Harackiewicz (2007), the previous researches cannot make a definite distinction between mastery and performance goals. For them, the reason lies in the fact that the social environment in which the individual pursues these goals is not taken into account effectively. Especially, the reciprocal interaction with the other ones in the context leads to different outcomes with respect to one’s learning progress. Doise and Mugny (1984) claims that “the socio-cognitive conflict” the person is exposed to makes him contemplate about his thinking pathway. This conflict encompasses both the disharmony with others and the loss of faith in his problem-solving methods. Therefore, how he deals with such a struggle determines his choice of achievement goal. If he wants to learn the subject in hand, he will adopt the mastery goal. Yet, if he wants to display his competencies, he will embrace the performance goal.

In addition to this, Daron, Butera and Harackiewicz (2007) assumes that the type of the subjects the one copes with also differentiates the kinds of goals. When he deals with a facile task, mastery and performance goals result in similar consequences. However, if the task is uneasy, mastery goals cause him to get a benefit from the situation unlike performance goals. Thus, the degree of ambiguity in the task plays a pivotal role on one’s goal
orientation. The vagueness brings into the socio-cognitive conflict, which in turn leads to the re-evaluation of the knowledge and skills.

Therefore, in educational counseling, the counselors should be aware of the mastery and performance goals of the students and the educational context they are part of. In this context, the kind of lessons, teachers’ methods of teaching and teachers’ understanding of success have a great influence on whether the students follow mastery or performance goals. At this point, the counselors should make the students create awareness of where their destination of success is via mastery or performance goals.

When dealing with the concepts of competence and achievement goal orientations, the place of intelligence should be considered profoundly. How is intelligence related to these notions? What makes intelligence unique when it is compared with competence and goal inclinations? To answer those questions, Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory of Intelligence is to be analyzed thoroughly.

For Sternberg (2011), intelligence has three components, namely “Analytical”, “Practical” and “Creative Thinking” abilities. Analytical process allows the one to criticize and figure out the content in hand. Especially, such a kind of thinking is used in the solution of well-known obstacles. Practical procedure in thinking facilitates the application of opinions in accurate settings. This skill is crucial for the adaptation to new conditions. Yet, creative operation in mind permits the formation of original ideas, contributing to dissolving atypical challenges. In this sense, it highlights the significance of experience in thinking world. Based on this theoretical schema, Sternberg (2011) proposed the concept of successful intelligence. It depicts the fact that the person tries to take advantage of his capacities so as to obtain an achievement. According to Sternberg, the individual identifies his powerful and fragile sides concurrently, and makes great effort to recompense them. Thus, everyone devotes themselves to discover their original way of being intelligent.

In addition to Sternberg’s approach, there is another theory addressing the concept of achievement motivation from a different point of view. Especially, Dweck’s theory of intelligence clearly explains how the achievement goals are formed by the one who takes part in the academic pathway. According to Dweck (1986), no individual has a similar understanding about intelligence. Some of them consider intelligence as an unchangeable identity no matter what they are exposed to throughout their lives. On the other hand, some of them regard intelligence as a pliable feature. They think that the challenges they encounter cause them to modify their skills as well as their knowledge. In this respect, the first group reflects entity theory of intelligence. Yet, the second group indicates the incremental theory of intelligence. For Dweck (1986), the underlying mechanism behind the choice of achievement goals resides in the preference of intelligence theory. Thus, for the ones embracing the entity theory, the performance goal becomes pivotal. However, for the ones adopting the incremental theory, the mastery goal / learning goal appears as an important purpose in the attainment of success. Dweck’s theory of intelligence and its relation with achievement goals were displayed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory of intelligence (Intelligence is fixed)</th>
<th>Goal orientation (Goal is to gain positive judgments/ avoid negative judgments of competence)</th>
<th>Confidence in present ability (If high but)</th>
<th>Behavior pattern</th>
<th>Mastery oriented (Seek challenge, high persistence)</th>
<th>Mastery oriented (Seek challenge (that fosters learning) High persistence)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entity theory (Intelligence is fixed)</td>
<td>Performance goal</td>
<td>If high</td>
<td>Mastery oriented (Seek challenge, high persistence)</td>
<td>Mastery oriented (Seek challenge (that fosters learning) High persistence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental theory (Intelligence is malleable)</td>
<td>Learning goal (Goal is to increase competence)</td>
<td>If high or low</td>
<td>Mastery oriented (Seek challenge (that fosters learning) High persistence)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Achievement Goals and Achievement Behavior (Dweck, 1986, p.1041).
While Dweck regards a direct one-way relationship between intelligence and achievement, Mayer (2011) interprets these concepts as mutual qualities affecting each other. “Academic intelligence” allows the one to gain “academic achievement” and vice versa. Consequently, the academic intelligence can be assessed via the tests relevant to academic achievement just as the academic accomplishment can be examined through the inventories pertinent to academic intelligence. The link was indicated in Figure 3.

![Intelligence enables achievement](image)

**Fig 3. The reciprocal relation between intelligence and achievement (Mayer, 2011, p.740)**

In accordance with that formulation, Elliot (1999) and Pintrich (2000) proposed 2X2 Achievement Goal Conceptualization. Despite presenting the same ideas relevant to achievement motivation at different times, both of them emphasized the akin point on this issue. In the model, there are four types of achievement goals: “mastery approach, mastery-avoidance, performance approach and performance avoidance”. “Mastery approach” and “mastery avoidance” concepts emerge as novel structures in the literature. “Mastery approach concept” refers to the idea that the individual has the aim of improving his knowledge, skills and abilities. Yet, “mastery avoidance concept” reflects that the person is afraid of losing these skills and forgetting them. He worries about misunderstanding the materials or tasks given to him. Therefore, the one adopting such a goal organizes his life in accordance with this. He tries not to make any mistakes or miscomprehend the subjects he deals with (Elliot, 2005; Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2002). The four types of achievement goals best summarized in 2X2 Model by Pintrich (2000) was shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Approach state</th>
<th>Avoidance state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mastery orientation</td>
<td>Focus on mastering task, learning, understanding</td>
<td>Focus on avoiding misunderstanding, avoiding not learning or not mastering task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of standards of self-improvement, progress, deep understanding of task</td>
<td>Use of standards of not being wrong, not doing it incorrectly relative to task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance orientation</td>
<td>Focus on being superior, besting others, being the smartest, best at task in comparison to others</td>
<td>Focus on avoiding inferiority, not looking stupid or dumb in comparison to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of normative standards such as getting best or highest grades, being top or best performer in class</td>
<td>Use of normative standards of not getting the worst grades, being lowest performer in class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barron and Harackiewicz (2000, 2001) claim that both the mastery and performance-approach goals play an essential role on the progress in one’s education. However they differ in terms of the evaluation process the individual engages in his improvement. If he embraces the mastery goals, he will make himself a reference point. Yet, if he prefers the performance-approach goals, the other ones in his environment will become his referee. Besides this, these two goals predict distinctive educational outcomes for the person. For example, the student with high level of mastery goal and low level of performance approach goal is the best one in the educational setting. On the other hand, the student with high level of both mastery and performance-approach goal gets stressed in every examination and behaves like a perfectionist. He cannot demonstrate his abilities efficiently due to the pressure of performance-approach goal (cited in Harachiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot and Trash, 2002).

In conclusion, the diverse approaches in the literature of achievement motivation lead us to form a qualitative analysis table based on the facts, concepts, procedures and strategies. As it is indicated in Table 3, the models suggested by Butler (2000), Elliot and Church (1997), Dweck and Legget (1988), Dweck (1986), Mayer (2011), Pintrich (2000) give us a comprehensive look at the concept of achievement motivation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison units</th>
<th>Butler</th>
<th>Elliot and Church</th>
<th>Dweck and Leggett</th>
<th>Dweck</th>
<th>Mayer</th>
<th>Pintrich</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facts</td>
<td>Competence acquisition = longing for self-improvement Competence assessment = longing for being the best among others</td>
<td>Achievement motives have a direct effect on the formation of achievement goals unlike competence expectancies.</td>
<td>Mastery goals contain competence acquisition, just as performance goals entail competence assessment.</td>
<td>Entity theory of intelligence regards that intelligence is a fixed identity unlike incremental theory of intelligence.</td>
<td>Academic intelligence and achievement have a reciprocal relationship, which in turn leads to mutual influences among them.</td>
<td>Mastery-approach = Focusing on mastering task Mastery-avoidance = Focusing on avoiding misunderstanding, Performance-approach = Focusing on being superior Performance-avoidance = Focusing on avoiding inferiority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>Shaping the self-knowledge depending on the degree of the competences evaluated in reference to oneself or the other criteria -environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bringing about achievement goals through being influenced by different variables (competence-based, relationally-based and so on)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forming the strategies in the face of difficulties, which is constructed by the type of achievement goals (performance vs. mastery)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building the goal orientations via the preference of entity vs. incremental theory of intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizing the goal orientations depending on the level of intelligence, and achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arranging the goal orientations in accordance with the approach-avoidance concepts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>The individual with the idea of competence acquisition longs for self-improvement. Yet, the one with the opinion of competence assessment consistently compares himself with others and based on this, he organizes his self-growth.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence-based and self-based variables are relevant to the formation of mastery goals while relationally-based, environmental and demographic variables are pertinent to the construction of performance goals. Neurophysiological variables have direct effect on the goal orientation (mastery vs. performance)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ones adopting performance goals withdraw themselves when they encounter dilemmas and failures. But the ones pursuing mastery goals do not give up and avoid from the bad situation. Instead, they insist on completing their lacking sides and seeing the challenge as an opportunity for self-development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the ones embracing the entity theory, the performance goal becomes pivotal. However, for the ones adopting the incremental theory, the mastery goal / learning goal appears as an important purpose in the attainment of success.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the level of intelligence is quite well for the individual, he will compare himself with others based on his achievements. Yet, if the level of intelligence is not efficient for him, he will prefer developing his skills, which in turn enhancing the level of achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The individuals with mastery-approach goals search for self-enhancement. The ones with mastery-avoidance goals try to keep his current level of knowledge, avoid losing it. The ones with performance-approach goals long for the best positions in every setting. The ones with performance-avoidance goals devote their efforts not to be claimed as being the worst by the others.</td>
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</table>

Consequently, in the literature, the components of academic motivation are stated in a different way, depending on the different theoretical approaches. In addition to academic goals and academic motives, the social, cognitive, emotional, relational and neurophysiological factors in the goal orientation shape one’s tendency toward the success attainments. Furthermore, competence acquisition and competence assessment have a direct influence on this issue. How one evaluates and regards the competence concept determines one’s academic goal. Besides this, Sternberg’s Theory of Intelligence and Dweck’s Theory of Intelligence claim that the individuals have diverse understandings about intelligence, which leads to the establishment of either mastery or performance goals. Moreover, 2X2 Achievement Goal Conceptualization presents four types of goals (mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, performance-avoidance) and explains them in a detailed way so as to indicate how achievement motivation can be configured by one’s approach-avoidance predisposition.

The models mentioned in the study can be regarded as the ones emphasizing the person’s evaluations of his achievements both in the cognitive, emotional, neurophysiological level, which display his internal assessments, and in the social level, which indicate the external factors. Thus, one’s management of academic motivation is a two-way street; the feedbacks from inside and outside concurrently direct his choice of occupation, his job status, as well as his academic career. Such a kind of self-regulation requires a socio-cognitive capacity.
However, these models are inadequate in terms of paying attention to one’s social goals. As Urdan and Maehr (1995) claim that, the individual possesses “social welfare goals”, which shape his academic orientation. These goals include being productive member of the society, living for the family, making the family proud of him, getting praise, and so on. Although 2 X 2 Achievement Goal Model provides lots of information about the process of learning and academic motivation, it cannot bring about the role of social issues residing in the culture. In this respect, besides cognitive studies, the researches focusing on social as well as spiritual factors in the interpersonal relationships should be carried out in order to give a comprehensive way of looking at the academic motivation.

References


