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The relationship between self-esteem, achievement goals and academic achievement among the primary school students

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Abstract

The aim of present research is studying relations between self-esteem, achievement goals and academic achievement among the primary school children. Self-esteem and achievement goals orientation are the most important factors that effects on academic achievement among the students. For this reason, 200 primary school students (100 male, 100 female) were chosen randomly and then for data collection two questionnaires were used: Eysenck self-esteem questionnaire (Eysenck,1976) and Students' Achievement Goal Orientations check list (Midgely,et al.,1998). The gold standard for academic achievement was their average academic marks during their academic years. Data were computer analyzed, using SPSS 15.1 and running a couple of descriptive and analytical tests including Pearson Correlation and t-student. Result of research showed that self-esteem, goal orientation components (mastery, approach performance and avoidance performance) and academic achievement are correlated ($p<0.05$).in addition to, Results of t-student also show that there are significant differences between male and female students in scores of self-esteem and achievement goals orientation. The results of this present research revealed that self-esteem and achievement goals are affecting factors on academic achievement among the primary school students.

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1. 1. Intruduction

Academic achievement is one of the most important indicators of learning and understanding in all educational systems. Academic achievement is undoubtedly a research after the heart of educational psychologists. In their attempt to investigate what determines academic outcomes of learners, researchers have come with more questions than answers. Therefore, identifying factors affecting students' performance in this course and determining the size of these effects can be critically important in helping students improve their academic achievement. In recent time, literature has shown that learning outcomes, academic achievement and academic performance could be determined by such variables as: family, school, society, and motivation (Aremu & Oluwole,2001; Ozcinar, 2006). The purpose

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of the present study was to test the relationship between self-esteem, achievement goals and academic achievement among the primary school children.

Self-esteem has long been considered an essential component of good mental health. It is a widely used concept both in popular language and in psychology. It refers to an individual's sense of his or her value or worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). It includes beliefs as to whether he or she can expect success or failure, how much effort should be put forth, whether failure at a task will "hurt," and whether he or she will become more capable as a result of difficult experiences (Coopersmith, 1967, 1981).

In basic terms, self-esteem is an internal belief system that an individual possesses about one's self. The concept of self-esteem has been researched by several social scientists. One major area of research has been the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. Branden (1969) defined self-esteem as a standard by which a person judges her/himself, an estimate, a feeling, and an emotion. This self-evaluation is the single most significant key to behavior, which affects the thinking processes, emotions, desires, values, and goals.

The relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement has been well documented in the literature. Different studies have reached the conclusion that academic achievement and self-esteem are positively correlated (Bankston & Zhou, 2002; Lockett & Harrell, 2003; Schmidt & Padilla, 2003). For example, West, Fish, and Stevens (1980) cited a correlation ranging from 0.18 to 0.50 between general self-esteem and academic achievement. Another study, conducted by Carr, Borkowski, and Maxwell (1991) found self-esteem to be a significant predictor of reading awareness. Purky (1970) found that self-esteem is related to some components of success, either academic or verbal. He concluded that there is continuous interaction between self-esteem and academic achievement. The relationship between gender and self-efficacy was another aim of this research. Some researchers (Knox, Funk, Elliott, & Bush 1998; Skaalvik, 1986) found higher self-esteem scores for males than females, others (Watkins & et al,1997) found higher self-esteem scores for females than males.

Another important and effective factor on academic achievement in this study is Achievement goals. Achievement goals" stands for a comprehensive semantic system of situations or contexts which have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes and learners use them to interpret their performances (Dweck & Legget, 1988; Kaplan & Maehr, 1999). The concept of achievement goals generally denotes the students' reasons for doing tasks (Braten & Stromso, 2004). Recently, Elliot et al. (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Harachkiewicz, 1996) has proposed a three dimensional framework of achievement goals. According to this view, the students with performance-approach goals assume the activity they do to achieve a goal and demonstrate themselves to others a competition. Moreover, these students tend to emphasize demonstrating their skills in comparison with others. Further, those who adopt performance-avoidance goals concentrate on avoiding lack of skills in comparison with peers and classmates and their attention is on avoiding failure. Finally, the outcome of such a goal setting is feeling inefficient. At last, those who adopt mastery goals insist on elaborating their skills, learning, and mastery.

Various researches have investigated the relationship between these achievement goals and academic success. Middleton and Midgley (1997) reported that boys in the sixth grade are more likely to pursue performance-approach goals than girls. Markku (1997) also concluded that boys are more inclined to performance goals than girls.

some studies have shown that mastery goals are positively (Church, Elliot, & Gable, 2001; Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich, 1996), performance-approach goals are positively (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Harackiewicz et al. 2000), and performance-avoidance goals are negatively (Elliot & McGregor, 1999; Rastegar, 2006) related to academic achievement. In contrast, some research in this regard has achieved findings which are inconsistent with the abovementioned ones (Harackiewicz et al. 2000; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Pintrich, 2000). Considering this, it seems that achievement goals, through other variables like self-efficacy can influence academic achievement (Ekizolu & Tezer, 2007). And also gender differences, in particular, have been examined in several studies (e.g., Midgley & Urdan, 1995; Patrick, Ryan, & Pintrich, 1999; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). For several of these studies, examining gender differences was a research question of secondary importance compared to other substantive research questions (e.g., Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Patrick, et al., 1999; Ryan, Hicks, & Midgley,1997), whereas other studies utilized gender simply as a control variable (e.g., Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Kaplan & Maehr, 1999; Midgley & Urdan, 1995). In general, these studies have found that adolescent males display greater performance orientation than adolescent females (e.g., Middleton & Midgely, 1997; Midgley & Urdan, 1995; Patrick et al., 1999; Roeser et al., 1996; Ryan et al., 1997), whereas college-aged females display greater

mastery orientation than college-aged females (e.g., Bouffard, Boisvert, Vezeau, & Larouche, 1999; Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

1.1. Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to examine the relations between self-esteem, achievement goals and academic achievement among the primary school children. Aim of this study is testing following hypothesis:

1) There is a relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement.
2) There is a relationship between achievement goals and academic achievement.
3) There is a difference between achievement goals and self-esteem in predicting academic achievement.
4) There will be significant difference between gender with achievement goals, and self-esteem.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Statistical population comprises male and female students (7-11 years old) of Tabriz city at 2011. Regarding the objectives and study method the sample size was 200(100 female, 100 male), that selected by simple random sampling, matched for age, and family status.

2.2. Measures

Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ;Elliot & Church ,1997): developed by Elliot and Church (1997) was used to measure three achievement goals: mastery, performance approach and performance avoidance. The AGQ consists of 18 questions, with 6 items used to compute a total score for each major achievement goal factor. Participants indicate their relative agreement with statements by using a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).Total scores for each achievement goal could theoretically range between 7 and 42. The reported reliability alphas for the measures of mastery, performance-approach and performance-avoidance achievement goals were .89, .91 and .77 respectively based on a study of a sample of 4 university undergraduates.

Eysenck Self-esteem questionnaire (Eysenck,1976): This questionnaire includes 30 questions. Scoring is in the Yes-No form. Surveys performed in Iran, have reported satisfactory validity and reliability coefficients for this questionnaire. In the survey of Yazdani Moghadam (1998) reliability coefficients of this test obtained by Cronbach's alpha was 0.84.

Academic achievement: in the study the mean of students' academic scores as related to the course in both two semesters were accounted.

3. Results

Research findings are presented here in three sections: descriptive, correlation analysis and independent t-test. Table 1 represents the means, standard deviations and Table 2 revealed the Pearson correlations for students' achievement goals (Performance approach, Performance avoidance, and mastery), and self-esteem with academic achievement.

Table 1: means & SD of difference scores

Variable	N	M	SD
Academic achievement	200	18.68	12.34
Self-esteem	200	15.60	10.83
Approach performance	200	24.96	11.24
Avoidance performance	200	14.50	13.31
Mastery	200	16.30	8.21

Table 2: Correlation coefficients between achievement goals, and self-esteem with academic achievement

Components		Academic achievement	
		P	R
Achievement goals	Approach performance	0.000	0.84
	Avoidance performance	0.000	-0.76
	Mastery	0.64	0.32
	Self-esteem	0.001	0.74

In order to studding relations among components of achievement goals and self-esteem with academic achievement we compute Pearson correlation coefficients (table2). Tow items of achievement goals (approach performance approach, and avoidance performance) and also self-esteem have related to academic achievement except Mastery. As illustrated by the data in table 2, the first two hypothesizes were supported. It means there is a strong positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement(r=0.74) and also there is a very strong positive relationship between approach performance and academic achievement(r=0.84) but there is a strong negative relationship between avoidance performance and academic achievement(r=-0.76).

Table 3: Correlation between achievement goals, and self-esteem with gender

component	Gender	N	Means	SD	t	P
Self-esteem	Male	100	17.23	11.23	2.42	0.09
	Femele	100	13.97	10.32		
Approach performance	Male	100	29.78	10.24	3.46	0.00
	Femele	100	20.14	11.34		
Avoidance performance	Male	100	11.14	12.42	4.38	0.00
	Femele	100	17.86	14.23		
Mastery	Male	100	16.41	7.35	0.51	0.15
	Femele	100	15.19	8.23		

Another concern was that seeing if there are a correlation between the elementary school students' self-esteem and achievement goals with their gender. In this context, the relationship between the self-esteem and achievement goals differentiated to gender (see Table 3). To examine the gender differences in students' self-esteem and achievement goals, we compared the means-scores of the self-esteem, goal orientation components (mastery, approach performance and avoidance performance) of girls and boys. According to the results, boys showed a statistically significant higher level of self-esteem and approach performance than girls did. There was a significant difference between boy and girls regarding the score on the avoidance performance: girls showed significantly more avoidance performance than the boys. But there was no significant difference among boys and girls in mastery scores.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to test the relationship between self-esteem, achievement goals and academic achievement among the primary school children. According to this purpose three hypotheses and one question were examined. We appreciate that the objectives of this study have been successfully met as the above presented results answered the research question and confirmed the hypotheses. We appreciate that the objectives of

this study have been successfully met as the above presented results answered the research question and confirmed the hypotheses.

The observed correlations (self-esteem, approach performance, and avoidance performance with academic achievement) are consistent with the findings of Elliot & McGregor (2001), Harackiewicz et al (2000), Elliot & McGregor (1999); Rastegar(2006) However, while Pintrich (1999) found a negative correlation between performance goals and components of self-regulated learning, the present research indicated that this correlation was weak, but positive, for avoidance performance goal.

Also, the study results revealed a significant difference in the self-esteem of the students with respect to gender. some researchers (Knox, Funk, Elliott, & Bush 1998; Skaalvik, 1986) found higher self-esteem scores for males than females, others (e.g. Watkins, et al.) found higher self-esteem scores for females than males.

Results described above reflect the existence of differences between boys and girls in Approach performance and avoidance performance. Result revealed specifically that while female students show more avoidance performance, boys show more performance approach. But Differences were not found in mastery scores among male and female students as function of gender.

The present study provides strong evidence for the usefulness and importance of self-esteem and achievement goals, as effective factors on children's academic achievement. Considering that the academic achievement is one of the most important indicators of learning and understanding in all educational systems, those involved in children's educational system with identifying and improving the effective factors of children's academic achievement(such self-esteem and achievement goals), can help children to be more successful in academic achievement.

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