Achievement Goal Orientations and Age

Abdullah Akın[1]

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationships between achievement goal orientations and age. Participants were high school and 473 university students. The 2X2 Achievement Goal Orientations Scale and personal information sheet were used as measures. The relationships between achievement goal orientations and age were examined using ANOVA. As hypothesized learning-approach/avoidance goal orientations have increased while performance-approach/avoidance goal orientations have decreased with age. Results were discussed in the light of literature.

Keywords: Achievement goal orientations, age, ANOVA

Achievement goal theory has emerged as a major new direction in motivational research (Midgley et al., 1998). Ames (1992) defines achievement goals as an "integrated pattern of beliefs, attributions, and affect that produces intentions of behavior" and further adds, "that is represented by different ways of approaching, engaging in, and responding to achievement-type activities" (p. 261). According to classic formulations of achievement goal theory, students use two contrasting achievement goals, learning and performance ones (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988, Ames & Archer, 1988; Archer, 1994; Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Learning goals are also known as mastery goals (Ames & Archer, 1988) or task-involved goals (Nicholls, Patashnick, & Nolen, 1985). Similarly, performance goals are also considered ego-involved goals (Nicholls, Patashnick, & Nolen, 1985) or ability goals (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Learning goals are characterized as the most positive approach, and generally include a desire to increase competence and continually improve oneself. Learning goals are also more learner driven, intrinsically motivating and, focus on mastering materials and concepts, improvement, challenge-seeking, and promote learning as an end itself (Pintrich, 2000). Learning oriented students are interested in and focus on new skill acquisition and knowledge development (Albaili, 1998). Performance oriented students on the other hand, are concerned primarily with demonstrating their ability (or concealing a perceived lack of ability) by outperforming others, particularly if success is achieved with little effort (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986). Students with performance goals see intelligence as fixed, avoid challenging tasks in an effort to avoid negative evaluations, are less likely to be intrinsically motivated to learn. These students are focused on issues of ability, view errors as indicative of a lack of

[1] Dr. omerfaruk7974@hotmail.com

ability, give up easily when they fail and are concerned with being judged able (Dweck, 1986 & Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Some researchers (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Kaplan & Midgley, 1999) however, have recently examined the maladaptive pattern of performance goal orientation and suggested that performance goals are not wholly maladaptive and in some cases performance goals could lead students to better and more adaptive patterns of achievement than do learning goals. Thus performance goals have been partitioned into performance-approach and performance-avoidance orientations (Elliot, 1999; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Midgley et al., 1998). According to this distinction, students who adopt performance-approach goals strive to gain favorable judgments of their competence by trying to outperform others. Performance-avoidance students, on the other hand, are trying to avoid failure by all means, even if they have to avoid working on the task.

Although this approach-avoidance distinction is widely accepted and empirically supported, more recently some researchers (e.g., Pintrich, 2000) have suggested that learning goal orientation can partitioned into approach and avoidance orientations and that learning avoidance goals may be operating for some individuals. There may be occasions when students are focused on avoiding misunderstanding or avoiding not learning or not mastering the task. Some students who are more ‘‘perfectionistic’’ may use standards of not getting it wrong or not doing it incorrectly relative to the task. These students would not be concerned about doingit wrong because of comparisons with others (a performance-avoid goal), but rather in terms of their own high standards for themselves. Elliot and McGregor (2001) have examined the feasibility of a four-goal model and in factor analyses have found empirical support for the differentiation of the four goals.

Achievement goal orientations which students adopt differ from each other. Because there are a lot of variables, like parenting styles (Akin, 2006; Gonzalez, Greenwood, & WenHsu, 2001) and gender (Ablard & Lipschultz, 1998; Roeser et al., 1996) which influenced achievement goal orientations of students. One of these variables is aging. Loevinger (1976) suggested that as ego of individual develops, he/she will use more internally derived standards and goals and move away from externally derived standards and goals. Since learning oriented students mainly have internal standards and performance oriented students have external standards, these suggestions can be related to achievement goal orientations. Thus in this study we examined the relationship between achievement goal orientations and age. We predicted that learning goals would increase with age and performance goals would decrease with age.

Method

Participants. The sample of this study consisted of 497 high school and 473 university students. 164 of the high school students were in 1st grade (mean age 15.4), 160 were in 2nd grade (mean age 16.2), and 173 were 3rd grade (mean age 17). 131 of the university students were in 1st grade (mean age 18.3), 127 were in 2nd grade (mean age 19.7), 109 were 3rd grade (mean age 20.1), and 106 were 4th grade (mean age 21.9). The participants' ages ranged from 15 to 22 years.

Measures. To obtain information about participants' age, sex, academic year and GPA a demographic questionnaire was used and to assess achievement goal orientations of participants 2X2 Achievement Goal Orientations Scale (Akın, 2006) was used. This instrument is a 26-item self-report scale using a five-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*) and has four sub-scales: learning-approach goal orientation, learning-avoidance goal orientation, performance-approach goal orientation, and performance-avoidance goal orientation.. Internal consistencies were .92, .97, .97, and .95 and three-week test-retest reliability estimates were .77, .82, .84, and .86, respectively.

Procedure. The demographic questionnaire and 2X2 Achievement Goal Orientations Scale were administrated to participants in their classes. Total testing time was approximately 30 min. To determine how eight groups will differ from each other in terms of achievement goal orientations Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. Data were analyzed using SPSS 11.5.

Results

An analysis of variance was conducted with age as the independent variable and four achievement goal orientations as the dependent variable. The learning-approach goal orientations mean score for the older group (fourth grade university students) was 4.13 and for the younger group (first grade high school students) was 2.81. This difference was significant $F(6, 963) = 66.287$, $p < .01$. Similarly the learning-avoidance goal orientations mean score for the older group (fourth grade university students) was 3.19 and for the younger group (first grade high school students) was 1.77. This difference was significant $F(6, 963) = 80.568$, $p < .01$. On the other hand the performance-approach goal orientations mean score for the younger group (first grade high school students) was 3.69 and for the older group (fourth class university students) was 1.93. This difference was significant $F(6, 963) = 80.785$, $p < .01$. And lastly the performance-avoidance goal orientations mean score for the younger group (second grade high school students) was 3.99 and for the older group (fourth class university students) was 1.46. This difference was significant $F(6, 963) = 123.653$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationships between achievement goal orientations and age. Results have demonstrated that there are significant differences between eight student groups in terms of achievement goal orientations. According to results, younger students have tended to adopt more performance-avoidance goal orientations and less learning-avoidance goal orientations while older student students have tended to adopt more learning-approach goal orientations and less performance-avoidance goal orientations. These results support the argument that learning goal orientation is related to increasing age at least among students. This may be stem from the reality that, as students age they may become more aware of the usefulness of knowledge and less concerned about external evaluation. Thus classroom activities that encourage a learning-approach goal orientation and that pair younger students with older ones may encourage the development of adaptive academic behaviors in student populations (Burley, Turner, L& Vitulli, 1999).

References

Ablard, K., & Lipschultz, R. E. (1998). Self-regulated learning in high achieving students: Relations to advanced reasoning, achievement goals, and gender. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 90*(1), 94-101.

Akın, A. (2006). 2X2 Achievement Goal Orientations Scale. *Sakarya University Journal of Educational Faculty, 12, 1-13.*

Albaili. M. A. (1998). Goal orientations. cognitive strategies and academic achievement of United Arab Emirates college students. *Educational Psychology. 18(2).* 195–203.

Ames, C. (1992). Classrooms: Goals, structuresa, and student motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology. 84(3).* 261-271.

Ames, C.. & Archer. J. (1988). Achievement goals in the classroom: Student learning strategies and motivation processes. *Journal of Educational Psychology. 80(3).* 260-267.

Archer. J. (1994). Achievement goals as a measure of motivation in university students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology. 19(4).* 430-446.

Burley, R. C., Turner, L. A., & Vitulli, W. F. (1999). The relationship between goal orientation and age among adolescents and adults. *Journal of Genetic Psychology, 160*(1), 84-88.

Dweck. C. S. (1986). Motivational processes affecting learning. *American Psychologist. 41(10).* 1040-1048.

Dweck. C. S.. & Leggett. E. L. (1988). A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review. 95(2).* 256-273.

Elliot, A. J., & Church, M. A. (1997). A hierarchical model of approach and avoidance achievement motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 72,* 218-232.

Elliot. E. S.. & Dweck. C. S. (1988). Goals: An approach to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 54(1).* 5-12.

Elliot, A. J., & Mcgregor, H. (2001). A 2X2 achievement goal framework. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80,* 501–519.

Elliot, A. J., & Trash, T. M. (2001). Achievement goals and the hierarchical model of achievement motivation. *Educational Psychology Review, 13*(2), 139-156.

Gonzalez, A., Greenwood, G. & WenHsu, J. (2001). Undergraduate students' goal orientations and their relationship to perceived parenting styles. *College Student Journal, 35*(2), 182-193.

Kaplan, A., & Midgley, C. (1999). The relationship between perceptions of the classroom goal structure and early adolescents' affect in school: The mediating role of coping strategies. *Learning and Individual Differences, 11,* 187-212.

Loevinger, J. (1976). *Ego development.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.Middleton, M., & Midgley, C. (1997). Avoiding the demonsration of lack ability: An under-explored aspect of goal theory. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 89,* 710-718.

Midgley. C.. Maehr. M. L.. Hruda. L. Z.. Anderman. E.. Anderman. L. H.. Freeman. K. E.. Gheen. M.. Kaplan. A.. Kumar. R.. Middleton. M. J.. Nelson. J.. Roeser. R.. & Urdan. T. (2000). Manual for the patterns of adaptive learning scales. Ann Arbor. MI: The University of Michigan.

Nicholls. J. G.. Patashnick. M.. & Nolen. S. B. (1985). Adolescents' theories of education. *Journal of Educational Psychology. 77(6).* 683-692.

Pintrich, P. R. (2000). An achievement goal theory perspective on issues in motivation terminology, theory, and research. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25,* 92-104.

Roeser, R. W., Midgley, C., & Urdan, T. C. (1996). Perceptions of the school psychological environment and early adolescents' psychological and behavioral functioning in school: The mediating roles of goals and belonging. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 88,* 408-422.