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A BRIEF HISTORY OF ACHIEVEMENT GOALS ORIENTATIONS THEORY AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

MEHRDAD NAZARIEH

Department of English Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Kerman Institute of Higher Education, Kerman, Iran

ABSTRACT

It is worth mentioning that research in the area of human motivation has grown rapidly in the last two decades with a special attention to the studies of achievement goal orientations (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984). Within the current research in motivation area, achievement goal orientations is definitely the most researched constructs as there has been a recent increase in achievement goal research in, social, educational, and sport psychology. Achievement goals function as a framework which enables the learners to interpret and react to events; consequently, they comprise reasons for the individuals' learning related behavior (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Centered at the heart of self-regulated learning and motivation research, motivational achievement goal theory, proposes that certain types of goals lead to certain types of behavioral patterns (Pintrich, 2003). This paper will provide a brief history of Achievement Goals Orientations (AGOs) theory and those antecedent theories which paved the way for the emergence of AGOs.

KEYWORDS: A Brief History of Achievement Goals Orientations Theory, AGOs.

INTRODUCTION

Self-regulated Learning

According to Bandura (1986), self-regulation is described as a moderator of human motivation and behavior. Bandura believed that the individuals' self-regulation process operates through the three different sub-functions of self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction. Self-observation can be defined as the process of monitoring individuals' own actions in order to persistently evaluate their behavior, provide realistic standards for themselves, and to be able to take their own actions under control. As for self-judgment, it can be described as the procedure used by individuals to evaluate their performance in relation to others or a specified standard, and whether their judgment is considered positively or negatively identified. Lastly, self-reaction can be regarded as the individuals' reaction to the result of their actions, which will either produce a positive or negative self-reaction (Bandura, 1986). Bandura continues that, individuals have a tendency to pursue positive self-reactions, and try to avoid behaviors that would produce negative and undesirable self-reactions (Bandura, 1986; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). These three sub functions work together to produce the individuals' overall self-regulation ability, which can deeply affect their motivation level (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).Another definition of self-regulation was presented by Zimmerman and Schunk (1989) who described it as learners' self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions oriented toward their goal achievement. It was some years later when Zimmerman (2000) extended the former definition as follows: "self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals" (p. 14). This definition put more emphasis on self-regulated actions as being of both adaptive and modifiable nature.Winne and Perry (2000) described self-regulated learning as a construct which includes three constituents of metacognition, motivation, and strategic action. Based on the aforementioned

definitions of self-regulation, it can be comprehended that this concept is made up of several diverse sub-processes. Thus, different studies on self-regulated learning have emphasized different aspects; for instance, metacognitive processes (e.g., Winne, 1995), learning strategies (e.g., Paris & Paris, 2001; Weinstein, 1996; Zimmerman & Martinez Pons, 1986), self-efficacy (Schunk, 1994; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Zimmerman, 1989), motivational regulation (Wolters, 1998, 2003), and emotional self-regulation (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002). Even though there was a slight difference in different studies' theoretical emphasis on self-regulated learning, the great number of research in the field exhibited that the concept of self-regulated learning carried an explanatory power by letting researchers and academics to describe different constituent parts of fruitful learning, relating these constituent parts to each other and set out the dynamics between them, and, eventually, relating learning and achievement to an individual's emotion, cognition, and motivation (Boekaerts, 1999).

MOTIVATION

According to Slavin (2000), motivation plays a crucial role in learning and functions as an internal process which guides our behavior. This proposes that if pupils are to be academically successful, then they need to be academically motivated in order to include themselves in high quality levels of learning. So, the central question to be asked is, who is responsible for learners' motivation? Even though motivation is an extremely individualistic concept which depends on personality factors, it is possible to regard it as a product of the individual's environment (Slavin, 2000). As a result, we can say that even with the instructors' incapability to control each and every learners' personality structures, it is feasible for them to affect the environmental features of the construct in order to influence students' motivational levels in a positive way. A great number of studies has been dedicated to prove the importance of motivation within the educational setting. Slavin (2000) found that motivation as an indispensable part of learners' engagement, could affect learners' involvement in academic tasks, and could even establish the quality of learning that learners would acquire from classroom activities. In another study, Sungur (2007) also found that students' motivation could be the main reason for their level of participation and commitment while carrying out the assigned tasks. Moreover, the study demonstrated that the more motivated the students were on the tasks, the more likely they were to frequently utilize the right metacognitive skills within the academic setting (Sungur, 2007).

Motivation Related Theories

During therecent years, there has been an abrupt increase in theories and concepts relating to the psychological construct of motivation, therefore creating trouble in providing a standard definition acceptable to all (Arias, 2004). Difference in motivational theories and constructs related to motivation is well documented. These consist of motivational theories such as the expectancy-value theory (Atkinson, 1957), the attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1974, 1979, 1984), the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), and the achievement goal theory (Ames & Ames, 1954, 1984; Ames & Archer, 1988; Ames, 1992; Anderman, Noar, Zimmerman, & Donohew, 2004). Each of these theories tried to explain and define the multifaceted construct of motivation, and how it worked in the academic environment.

Covington (2000) stated that, there seems to be two different approaches dominating the literature in the area of academic motivation. Initial research in the field of motivation regarded that as a drive, where motivation was largely an internal condition directing the individuals to specific behaviors. The expectancy-value and attribution theories adopted such a viewpoint which placed a great emphasis on the emotions that influence and guide our motivation. Covington (2000) continues that the second perspective considered the idea of motivation as goals, where individuals' goals provided meaning, direction, and purpose for the behaviors that individuals involved in. This was the main approach adopted by the

achievement goal theory due to its considerable emphasis on learners' goals and motivation.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND DIMENSIONALITY OF ACHIEVEMENT GOAL ORIENTATION AS A DISTINCT THEORY

Achievement goal theory, which included and supported many ideas that were proposed on academic motivation by the attribution and social cognitive theories, developed from the joint work of Dweck (1986), Nicholls (1984), and Ames (1992), and initiated a novel research area within the academic motivational field. For Ames (1992) achievement goals were some particular purposes that learners have for their achievement related behavior, and can be used to clarify the way learners will respond to, move towards, or engage in academic tasks of different nature. Therefore, according to Ames (1992), it was concluded that goals had the capacity to influence, or motivate students' academic behaviors on the way to classroom projects or activities. In another definition which was put forward by Pintrich and Schunk (1996), achievement goals were defined as integrated patterns of learners' beliefs regarding their reasons for engaging themselves in a learning task. According to Elliot (1999), what goals were supposed to do was creating a framework for learners' experiences and interpretations in an achievement setting.

The theorists of achievement goal also stated that learners' understanding of their interactions with principals, teachers and others that worked within the academic setting may well effect their success in learning. In fact, these perceptions were supposed to form their behavior and beliefs (Ames, 1992; Maehr & Midgley, 1991; Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006). Achievement goal researchers and theorists have traditionally identified a dichotomous model of motivational goal approach including the mastery versus performance goals. Later on, these two concepts have alternatively come under varying labels such as learning versus performance (Elliot & Dweck, 1988); task-focused and ego-involvement goals versus ability-focused goals (Nicholls 1984, Maehr & Anderman, 1993; Maehr & Midgley, 1991) and mastery versus ability (Ames, 1992; Ames & Archer, 1988). The current study used the terms "mastery goals" versus "performance goals" in describing the motivational goal orientations of learners.

Based on achievement goal theory, mastery goal oriented learners mostly focus on increasing their knowledge base and mastering the new material, which is learning for the sake of learning (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986). These learners focus on developing new skills, having a comprehensive understanding of their academic work, and rely on their own effort as a factor which determines their success (Ames, 1992). It is widely believed that learners adopting mastery goals are more intrinsically motivated towards academic tasks and strive for challenging activities and learning rather than being motivated and inspired by external factors such as rewards, prizes and grades (Elliot & Church, 1997; Nicholls 1984).

Conversely, those performance goal oriented learners focus mostly on their academic output (Ames, 1992). In fact, what matters for these type of learners is how successful they are in demonstrating their ability and competence to others to see their judgments or evaluations. Therefore, they hardly attempt to avoid negative feedback and try to outperform others (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986). According to Grand and Dweck (2003), learners with a performance goal orientation tend to experience feelings of helplessness and debilitation after receiving negative feedback or setback on an academic task. Performance goal orientated students are more likely to be extrinsically motivated through the outcomes of their work, such as grades, positive judgments, or through receiving tangible items (Morrone & Schutz, 2000).

As stated before, goal orientation had formerly been viewed as a uni-dimensional construct; individuals were

thought to be either performance or mastery goal oriented. However, research conducted by Button, Mathieu, and Zajac (1996) showed that goal orientation was in fact a construct with some other dimensions, and that mastery and performance goal orientation were to be considered as two independent scales on which a learner fell.

Later on a trichotomous model of achievement goals was developed by Elliot and church (1997) and Middleton and Midgley (1997) that further made a distinction between performance-approach goals and performance-avoidance goals. Three achievement goals were identified in this new model: (a) mastery goals focusing on improving competence, (b) performance-approach goals that focused on demonstrating competence, and (c) performance-avoidance goals which were focusing on avoidance of demonstrating low competence and failure comparing to others (Elliot & Church, 1997; Middleton & Midgley, 1997).

Performance-approach oriented learners focused upon attaining academic success within their classes and demonstrating high ability in academic tasks (Grant & Dweck, 2003), and were found to be engaged in more adaptive academic behaviors that were similar to mastery goals oriented learners, and were more expected to be tenacious and put more effort into accomplishing an academic task (Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999).

Moreover, it was proposed that the more successful performance-approach students were, the more likely they were to continue to become involved in the adaptive academic behaviors; though, the maladaptive outcomes were more likely to be observed when learners did not have a high sense of ability or enough successful academic experiences (Grant & Dweck, 2003).

Learners who are performance-avoidance orientated have a tendency to avoid any negative judgments or insights in relation to their competence or ability and have a fear of failure. Based on the motivational research focusing on achievement goals, the performance-avoidance orientation was in fact related to various maladaptive educational outcomes, for instance producing a negative and harmful effect on learners' intrinsic motivation levels (Elliot & Church, 1997). Another study conducted by Wolters (2004) found that performance-avoidance oriented learners were more disengaged and detached from involving in different academic tasks, gave up easily on performing tasks, and showed lower levels of motivation toward their schoolwork and projects.

The trichotomous model was further developed into a four-factor model by applying the approach-avoidance distinction to the mastery goal orientation (Elliott & McGregor, 2001). Noticeably, the four-factor model includes mastery-approach, mastery avoidance, performance approach and finally performance avoidance.

For mastery-approach oriented learners the task at hand is more of a challenge; so, these learners have a feeling of excitement, and are invigorated to immerse cognitive and affective factors in that task in order to develop their skills and satisfy a desire for self-improvement (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999). On the other hand, learners with dominant mastery-avoidance goals may experience neither the benefits nor the costs associated with the other achievement goals, as they are not interested in social comparisons, and do not care for self-improvement. (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Individuals, holding mastery approach goals, strive for achieving task mastery and improvement while those with mastery avoidance goals prefer to avoid failing achievement of task mastery (Elliot, 1999; Pintrich, 2000).

The achievement goal orientation theory, the most recent theory of academic motivation, provided the field of

motivation with a new perspective on how a combination of goals, affect and cognitive processes, functioned regarding students' academic motivation. It also tried to provide another unique, research-based opinion, on how students' motivation levels were influenced within the educational environment.

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