

THE ROLE OF ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION IN EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND PERFORMANCE

Abstract

The article defines the psychological construct of achievement motivation and its influence on students' level of academic's goals and school performance. Thereafter, the idea of McClelland's achievement motivation training, increasing the level of achievement motivation, is presented. According to the research presented in the article, the achievement motivation can be treated as an important psychological predictor of graduates' future success or failure.

Key words: achievement motivation, educational aspirations, school performance.

Introduction

Nowadays, challenging labor-market seeks people not only well educated with good knowledge of foreign languages. Among requirements set in job advertisements very important are those connected with psychological characteristics, like creativity, social skills and increasingly – desire to achieve success, to work under pressure and accomplish ambitious goals. Employers look for high achievers. Therefore, in order to prepare the graduates to the contemporary labor-market, it is very important to supplement the process of students' professional competences' formation with needed psychological competences.

Definition

The term “need for achievement” was used for the first time and introduced into psychology by H. Murray in *Explorations in Personality* (1938). The author defined it as an intense, prolonged and repeated efforts to accomplish something difficult; to work with singleness of purpose towards a high and distant goal; to have the determination to win” [7, p.164]. Murray with Ch. Morgan developed also Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) which is widely used to support assessment of needs

and motives. Thereafter, research on achievement motivation was extended by D. McClelland [10]. According to him, the achievement motivation is a constant drive to improve one's level of performance, to accomplish success in contention. The author also claimed that need for achievement is the result of emotional conflict between the hope to approach success and the desire to avoid failure (Steinmayr, Spinath, 2009) [12].

McClelland's research led him to formulate psychological characteristics of person with strong need for achievement. Those individuals assign realistic goals and consistently strive for its implementation. They also prefer difficult – but not overly – tasks and are capable of prospective thinking. According to McClelland [9; 10] and Winter (1969 cited in Furnham, 1995), following features accompany high level of achievement motivation:

- moderate risk propensity;
- undertaking innovative and engaging tasks;
- internal locus of control and responsibility for own decisions and behaviors;
- need for precise goal setting.

McClelland and his collaborators also developed techniques to measure need for achievement [9].

The construct of achievement motivation was also analyzed and developed by J. Atkinson and his associates. In Atkinson's opinion, strong need for achievement is not the only explanation of those people activity. As a result of his analysis, Atkinson formulated a "risk preference" model (1957, 1964 cited in Schneider, 1978) [11]. The model explained and predicted choice behavior and persistence in achievement – oriented situations with uncertainty, e.g. when the outcome depends on one's activity but is uncertain. Atkinson claimed, that individuals with strong need for achievement, in such conditions select tasks of an intermediate level of difficulty, whereas failure-oriented subjects avoid this level of difficulty.

The role of achievement motivation as a predictor of school performance

According to several research, school achievement is highly related to general intelligence, which explains about 25% of the variance in scholastic achievement (e.g. Kuncel, Hezlett, Ones,

2004 cited in Steinmayr, Spinath, 2009) [12]. Other construct that might add to the explained variance is motivation.

Research analyzing the relation between need for achievement and school performance was conducted by Steinmayr and Spinath (2009) [12], who looked for different motivational constructs, inter alia need for achievement, influencing school achievement. The authors examined a sample of 342 German children from school preparing for university (age $M= 16,94$, $SD=0,71$). Achievement motives were measured with two different methods: The Achievement Motives Scale, based on McClelland's conception, and the need for achievement scale of the Personality Research Form, referring to Murray's view on need for achievement. The indicators of school performance were measured by achievement in two specific domains (math and German) and general school achievement. Results of conducted hierarchical regression and relative weights analyses proved the general importance of motivation, therein achievement motivation, in school context. According to this research, motivation constructs nearly explained as much unique variance in general school performance as intelligence (Steinmayr and Spinath, 2009) [12].

Similarly, positive relation between achievement motivation and school performance was found by Meijer and Wittenboer [6]. The authors analyzed the joint influence of sleeping time, intelligence, eagerness and achievement motivation on school performance in the last two grades of elementary school (age $M=11,7$). Results of the study showed that less chronic sleep reduction, greater eagerness, higher achievement motivation and intelligence rise a better school performance [6]. According to the authors, those variables explain together 43% of the variance in school performance.

The correlation between academic achievement and motivation, therein achievement motivation, was also analyzed with reference to students (e.g. McEwan, Goldenberg [8]; Greene, et al. [4], Martin, Liem [5]). Research showed that the need for achievement is a valid factor of students' commitment and positively correlates with academic performance.

According to the quoted research review, the achievement motivation plays an important role in predicting students' future success or failure. Therefore, it is crucial to put special emphasis

on forming high level of students' need for achievement through special training programs.

Achievement motivation training

The role of society and culture in training need for achievement was emphasize by McClelland. The author claimed that this motive can be taught and consequently he developed training programs, mainly for business people to increase their achievement motivation. Nowadays, those trainings are used not only by managers and entrepreneurs, but also in order to improve school performance by underachieving students and help to find job or start a business by unemployed. The training model was also used in different countries.

There are numerous modifications of classic McClelland's training but usually it takes about 70 hours of work within 5 or more days (Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, 2010) [1]. At the beginning participants are informed of the training objective which is to strengthen their need for achievement. The next part of the training is devoted to presentations defining achievement motivation, the high achievers' characteristic and the relation between achievement motivation and success in work or other participants' activities. Thereafter, discussions about presented information take part and participant in small groups try to find examples of behaviors and decisions made under the influence of achievement motivation.

The aim of his part of the training is to form participants' belief that increase of achievement motivation is possible and desirable. Moreover, effects of group work help participants to understand the construct of achievement motivation and show that higher need for achievement can result in accomplishing both occupational and personal success.

The following part of the training consists on group work aiming to fully understand the concept of need for achievement. Than participants learn methods of scoring achievement motivation in stories and score their own stories. This exercise show them how achievement motivation influence on different situation but also is a possibility to learn about their own level of achievement motive which can result in strong need for change.

Thereafter, participants' work is focused on "achievement thinking", which means writing new stories, saturated with achievement-related thinking [1]. Very important aspect of need for achievement training is also goal setting and therefore participants develop and discuss their own detailed personal goals within two- and five years perspective.

The next activity is focused on playing games regarding real-life situations. Participants' behavior is scored on several criteria and they receive individual feedback. Then participants, aware about their level of achievement motivation, decide about the desired improvement of their need for achievement.

That precedes the last part of the training program which is focused on developing personal plan of change. Participants discuss their individual plans and receive help in choosing useful techniques of increasing achievement motivation. They also discuss methods of recording everyday changes and managing possible difficulties.

The program designers conceptualized the program as involving seven "training inputs". The first is to learn achievement motivation thinking. The second is for the participants to understand their own characteristics and goals. The third is to help the participants practice achievement-related actions in case, role plays and real life. The fourth input is to practice achievement-related actions in business and other games. The fifth input is for the participants to relate the achievement behavior model to their own behavior, self-image and goals. Sixth, the program help participants develop a personal action plan. Finally, the program provides participants with feedback on progress towards achieving goals [1, p.3-4].

Several analysis measuring effects of this training show its efficacy. Kolb [4] in his study tested change in the level of achievement motivation among underachieving high-school boys. Participants of his experiment were 20 boys with IQs above 120 and school grades below C. After receiving the training as a part of a summer-school program, in a 1,5 yr. period their total grade average improved significantly in comparison to the controlled group.

Similarly, Durand [2] conducted a 18-moths study of training program aimed at increasing entrepreneurial activities among

Afro-Americans. Post training measurement indicated that motivation trained participants became more active (hours worked, new investments, employees hired, etc.) than the control group.

Conclusions

Achievement motivation is one of the crucial psychological factors determining future academic and occupational success. Therefore, general and professional education should be completed with trainings focused on psychological skills useful and desirable in everyday life. Formation of students' competence without practicing and developing needed psychological components will not let educate the graduates comprehensively and might result in their failure on labor-market.

References

1. Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations. (2010). Achievement motivation training. www.eiconsortium.org.
2. Durand, D.E. (1975). Effects on achievement motivation and skill training on the entrepreneurial behavior of black businessmen. *Organization Behavior and Human Performance*, Vol. 14(1),76-90.
3. Greene, B.A., Miller, R.B., Crowson, H.M., Duke, B.L., Akey, K.L. (2004). Predicting high school students' cognitive engagement and achievement: Contributions of classroom perceptions and motivations. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, Vol. 29(4), 462-482.
4. Kolb, D.A. (1965). Achievement motivation training for underachieving high-school boys. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 2(6), 783-792.
5. Martin, A.J., Liem, G.A.D. (2010). Academic personal bests (PBs), engagement, and achievement: A cross-lagged panel analysis. *Learning and Individual Differences*, Vol. 20(3), 265–270.
6. Meijer, A.M., Wittenboer G.L.H. (2004). The joint contribution of sleep, intelligence and motivation to school performance. *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 37(1), 95–106.

7. Murray, H.A. (1938). Explorations in Personality. New York: Oxford University Press.

8. McEwan L., Goldenberg, D. (1999). Achievement motivation, anxiety and academic success in first year Master of Nursing students. Nurse Education Today, Vol. 19(5), 419-430.

9. McClelland, D.C. (1958). Methods of Measuring Human Motivation. In: J. W. Atkinson, ed., Motives in Fantasy, Action and Society. Princeton, N.J.: Van Nos-trand.

10. McClelland, D.C. (1961). The Achieving Society.

11. Schneider, K. (1978). Atkinson's "Risk Preference" Model. Should It Be Revised?. Motivation and Emotion. Vol. 2 (4), 333-344.

12. Steinmayr, R., Spinath, B. (2009). The importance of motivation as a predictor of school achievement. Learning and Individual Differences, Vol. 19(1), 80-90.

Рецензент: Уварина Н.А., доктор пед. наук, зам. директора ППИ ЧГПУ, Россия.