

Investigating the Intermediate Role of Achievement Goals among Personality Traits and Educational Self-Handicapping Among University Students

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Abstract: In order to investigate the role of achievement goals among personality traits and educational self-handicapping, 382 university students were selected using the multi-stage cluster sampling and answered questions including subscales of achievement goals, personality traits, and educational self-handicapping. The results of the path analysis showed that neuroticism has an indirect and negative influence on educational self-handicapping through mediating achievement goals. Moreover, the intermediate role of extroversion on educational self-handicapping was not proved. Evidence shows that setting these goals is directed by various events and leads to different patterns of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes.

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Introduction

Self-handicapping is referred to as any kind of activity or practice which enables the individual to attribute failure to an external factor (as an excuse) and success to an internal one (to achieve pride) (Burglass and Jones, 1978). Based on these strategies, students consider failure as the result of some external factors and do not try to improve their performance. In this study, we try to describe the use of self-handicapping strategies based on the theories of achievement goal and personality traits. Being in a social-cognitive perspective of motivation, the theory of achievement goals focuses on how learners interpret their achievements (Shank et al, 2008). Three achievement goals commonly investigated include mastery goals, approach-performance goals, and avoidance performance goals. Students who are mastery oriented emphasize on developing proficiency in one topic. On the other hand, students with performance goals wish to demonstrate their competencies to others. More precisely, students with high performance-approach desires tend to show that they are more competent than their peers, while students with high avoidance performance goals seek to avoid social judgments declaring that they are less competent than their peers.

Evidence shows that setting these goals is directed by various events and leads to different patterns of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes (Eliot, 1999, Shank et al, 2008).

Studies investigating events leading to achievement goals focused on the role of personality traits (De, Radosevich, & Chasteen, 2003; Zweig, & Webster, 2000) and the school and classroom atmosphere (Aimes, 1992, Arden, 2004, Walters, 2004). Outcomes of achievement goals are

referred to as self-effectiveness, self-motivated learning, positive emotions, high interest, and positive attitude towards assignments (Aimes, 1992, Eliot, 1999, Kaplan et al, 2000, Walters et al, 1996), self-handicapping (Eliot and Church, 2003; Eliot, Cury, Fryer, & Huguet, 2006; Midegly and Arden, 2001; Amundsen, 2004).

Personality traits have been investigated in different studies as outcomes of achievement goals (Komarraju, & Karau, 2005; Samani et al, 2008; Khoamraee and Khayer, 2006). One of the most influential personality theories is the Five Factor Model (FFM) (Goldberge, 1992; Wiggins and Pincus, 1992). Five main factors of personality include extroversion vs. introversion, agreeableness vs. antagonism, conscientiousness vs. lack of direction, neuroticism vs. emotional stability, openness to experiences vs. closeness to experiences.

Neurotic people tend to be anxious, moody, and vulnerable to depression (Howard and Howard, 1998). Investigations show that so far, no research has studied the relationships among these variables in a causative model especially in the educational context of Payam-e-Noor University which has a different educational structure from the traditional educational system. Therefore, the present study aims at investigating the relationships among these variables from a different and new perspective. Moreover, studies showed that there is not considerable amount of theoretical and research evidence exploring the direct influence of personality traits on educational self-actualization. Therefore, given the relationship between personality traits and achievement goals on the one hand, and the relationship between achievement goals and educational self-handicapping on the other, the purpose of the present study is to

explore the intermediate role of achievement goals between personality traits and educational self-handicapping (Graph 1). (Figure 1).

Methodology

This is a descriptive correlative study (nonexperimental). The population consisted of all Payame-Noor University students in the Frās Province in different majors ($N=620000$). Using the multistage cluster sampling and based on the Krejcie and Morgan Formula, 382 students (245 females and 137 males) were selected. Data gathering instruments: data were gathered using a questionnaire made up of Jones and Rhodewalt self-handicapping (1982), Middleton and

Midgely achievement goals (1997) and the Goldberge Five Factor Model (1999) subscales. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for educational self-handicapping, mastery goals, and approach-performance, avoidance performance, and personality traits were 0.79, 0.80, 0.71, 0.74, 0.77, respectively.

Findings:

In this study, data analysis was performed using the path analysis. Table 1 presents indirect influences of personality traits on educational self-handicapping. (Table 1).

As table 1 shows, the indirect influence of extroversion on educational self-handicapping is 0.01

and not statistically significant. The indirect influence of openness to experience is -0.08 which is significant at 0.01 (given $t=-3.57$). Since the influence of openness to experiences on approach-performance goals is insignificant (shown in table 2), it is concluded that this indirect influence is only exerted through mastery and avoidance-performance goals. The indirect influence of agreeableness on educational self-handicapping is -0.07 and given $t = -2.70$, it is significant at 0.01. given the insignificant influence of agreeableness on mastery goals (shown in table 2), it is concluded that this indirect influence is exerted only through approach performance and avoidance-performance goals. The indirect influence of task-involvement on educational self-handicapping is -0.12, which, given $t=-4.95$, is significant at 0.01. Since this indirect influence is exerted by all three aspects of achievement goals, it could be concluded that achievement goals play an intermediate role between task-involvement and educational self-handicapping. The indirect influence of neuroticism on educational self-handicapping is 0.07, which, given $t=3.22$, is significant at 0.01. Given the insignificant influence of neuroticism on performance-approach (shown in table 2), it is concluded that this indirect influence is only exerted through mastery and avoidance-performance goals.

Below, graph 2 (the fit graph of predicting educational self-handicapping) with fit properties are presented. (Figure 2).

Discussion and conclusion

Findings indicated that the proposed model has a good fit with the data. In this model, 24% of the variance of educational self-handicapping was explained by personality traits and achievement goals. Although the indirect influence of extroversion on educational self-handicapping was not supported, the results demonstrated that other personality traits influence educational self-handicapping through mediating in achievement goals in a positive or negative way. Based on the findings, openness to experiences has a negative and indirect influence on educational self-handicapping through mastery and avoidance-performance goals. Therefore, students with wisdom, openness to new ideas, cultural interests, educational attitudes and creativity tend to set mastery goals and insist on developing learning and skills. They don't study to escape criticisms and avoid creating obstacles in the way to their success. Moreover indirect and negative influence of agreeableness on educational self-handicapping through approach=performance and avoidance-performance was proved. Given this fact, students with optimistic approaches and adaptability flexibility toward life events often avoid setting avoidance-performance goals and set approach performance ones and therefore, attribute their failures to wrong goal-setting and try to address their shortcomings to improve their chances of success. Regarding the fact that performance-approach goals sometimes have positive outcomes and sometimes produce negative ones, Midgely, Kaplan, and Middleton (2001) believe that approach-performance goals are influenced by the nature of learning output, personality traits, and environment. So, this paradox could be the result of using different instruments, age groups, and educational environments (quoted in Mohsenpoor, 2005). The indirect influence of task involvement on educational self-handicapping was significant and performed through all three aspects of achievement goals. Therefore, students who are task involved, efficient, organized, and responsible always set mastery goals and avoid approach-performance and avoidance-performance goals, which reduces the possibility of adopting educational self-handicapping strategy.

Finally, the indirect influence of neuroticism on educational self-handicapping was positive and performed through mastery and avoidance performance goals. Therefore, students who with negative emotions such as anger, depression, anxiety, etc. tend to set avoidance-performance goals and avoid mastery goals, which increases the possibility of adopting educational self-handicapping strategies.

Regarding the fit model in this study, some studies also supported the relationships between

personality traits and achievement goals (De, Radosevich and Chasteen, 2003; Zweig and Webster, 2000; Samani et al, 2009; Khormaei and Khayer, 2007), and the relationships between achievement goals and educational self-handicapping (Eliot and Church, 2003, Eliot, Cury, Fryer, and Huguet, 2006, Midgley and Arden, 2001, Amundsen, 2004).

Therefore, the intermediate role of achievement goals between personality traits and educational self-handicapping among Payam-e-Noor University students, which is the main finding of this study, is in line with previous literature on this issue. On this basis, it is proposed that the planners and managers of Payam-e-Noor University provide a suitable and pleasant cultural and scientific environment and, in this way, facilitate forming positive traits such as agreeableness, task-involvement, and openness to experiences in learners. Obviously, these conditions provide appropriate context for accepting mastery goals and avoiding performance-avoidance goals and reducing the use of educational self-handicapping among students.

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