Achievement goals in a presentation task: Performance expectancy, achievement goals, state anxiety, and task performance

Ayumi Tanaka [a,*], Takuma Takehara [b], Hirotsugu Yamauchi [a]

[a]*Department of Psychology, Doshisha University, Kamigyo Kyoto 602-8580, Japan*
[b]*Department of Psychology for Well-being, Hokusei Gakuen University, Sapporo, Japan*

Abstract

The aims of the study were to test the linkages between achievement goals to task performance, as mediated by state anxiety arousal. Performance expectancy was also examined as antecedents of achievement goals. A presentation task in a computer practice class was used as achievement task. Fifty-three undergraduates (37 females and 16 males) were administered self-report questionnaire measures before and immediately following the task performance. As expected, results of regression analyses showed that performance-avoidance goals were positively related to state anxiety. State anxiety was related to poor task performance. The positive relationship between mastery goals and the task score was shown to be independent of anxiety processes. Performance expectancy was related to state anxiety through achievement goals.
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1. Introduction

Achievement goals are cognitive representations of what individuals are trying to attain and that these goals can guide and direct achievement behavior (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2000). This study focuses on three achievement goals: *mastery*, *performance-approach*, and *performance-avoidance* goals. Mastery goals help the individual focus on the task at hand and developing competency. The performance-

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approach and performance-avoidance goals let the individual focus on one's self and are related especially to how ability is judged and how one performs relative to others. These two goals were different in terms of the *valence* of the competence (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Performance-approach goals orient individual to demonstrating ability, and performance-avoidance goals to avoiding the demonstration of the lack of ability. Recently this distinction between the performance goals has been made by a number of different researchers (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Skaalvik, 1997). Performance-approach goals have been found to facilitate several positive outcomes and performance-avoidance goals have been linked to the most negative outcomes (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & McGregor, 1999; Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Skaalvik, 1997).

1.1. Achievement goals and state anxiety

The first purpose of this study was to investigate the linkages between achievement goals to task performance, as mediated by state anxiety arousal. *State anxiety* refers to transitory experiences of tension, apprehension, and activation of the autonomic nervous system in specific situations (Spielberger, 1972). These feelings of excessive tension have proven disruptive to learning and performance. Morris (1979; see also Morris, Davis, & Hutchings, 1981) argued that the occurrence of anxiety is a joint function of person variables and of situation variables. The achievement goal construct seems to well reflect this function and may explain the process to generate anxiety.

Elliot and McGregor (1999) have proposed an integrative model of achievement goals and test anxiety. It was shown that state anxiety was the mechanism responsible for the deleterious influence of performance-avoidance goals on examination performance. In the performance-avoidance regulation, the individuals are preoccupied with their own self-evaluation and the negative possibilities involved in the situation. This form of regulation is likely to elicit anxiety in achievement situations (Sarason, 1975; Sarason & Stoops, 1978). Then, performance may suffer because of the misdirection of attention away from the task at hand (Morris & Engle, 1981). In contrast, mastery goals orient an individual to focus on the content of the task, and performance-approach goals direct an individual to concentrate on positive possibilities of one's self. Mastery and performance-approach goals, therefore, are unlikely to generate state anxiety and likely to be positively related with task performance.

We aimed at replicating the results of Elliot and McGregor (1999) with a different situation and a different task. A presentation task in a university computer practice class was used. It was a task in which students talked about themselves in the front of the audience (other students and the instructor) for about 5 min using computer software. One advantage of this task is to provide an opportunity to evoke a stronger involvement in the task than a typical university examination in Japan. We expected that students' performance-avoidance goals assessed at the beginning of the class were related to state anxiety during the task performance. State anxiety was expected to be related to poor performance. The null relation between mastery and performance-approach goals and state anxiety were also expected.

1.2. Performance expectancy, achievement goals, and state anxiety

The second purpose of the present study was to include the performance expectancy into the model as antecedents of achievement goals. Expectancy is defined as the subjective probability of success on a task (Atkinson, 1964). In this study, it is measured by students' ratings of how well they expect to do in