



LETTER to EDITOR

Are you a mastery-oriented or a performance-oriented medical learner?

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Dear Editor,

There has been a rapid growth in human motivation research in the last two decades, with a special emphasis on achievement-oriented studies. Recent research in the motivation area has focused on achievement goal orientations, as there has been an increase in achievement goal research in social, psychological, and specifically educational studies (1,2). Achievement goal theory which included and supported many ideas, were proposed on academic motivation by the attribution and social cognitive theories. This theory developed from the joint work of Dweck (1986), Nicholls (1984), and Ames (1992), and initiated a novel research area within the academic motivational field (1,3). For Ames, 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, it was concluded that goals had the capacity to influence or motivate students' academic behaviors on the way to classroom projects or activities (3).

In the context of Iranian's educational system, every year many students enter universities based on academic achievement during their high school period. Among them, some find the way to enter medical universities with different motivation factors. Learners' motivation to succeed as university students varies; however, motivation is crucial to their performance. Taking into account the competitive nature of medical education and the responsibilities upon medical students and their critical role in patient care, it is significant to know the types of achievement goals namely "mastery-oriented goals" and "performance-oriented goals" that medical students develop in their educational career. In addition, the medical teachers' perspective regarding these goals, as well as the approach adopted by them are of utmost importance in terms of learning. As the practice and learning of medicine, by the same token, is dynamic and sustainable, mastery-oriented learning can ensure that graduates are more qualified for their future tasks as medical doctors.

Mastery-oriented Vs performance-oriented learners

At the beginning, the achievement goal theorists (2,4,5) proposed a uni-dimensional model of achievement goals including two-goal orientations: first, mastery goals in which individuals were concerned with developing their competence or mastering a task, and second performance goals in which individuals were concerned with showing their competence relative to others (3,6). Initially, performance goals are either to approach favorable judgments and demonstrate competence compared to others or to avoid unfavorable judgments and demonstrate incompetence. Performance goals are divided into performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals based on this distinction, so according to this division the trichotomous model of achievement goals was proposed. According to research on achievement goals, performance-approach goals are related to effort, persistence, competitiveness, and high grades. In contrast, Performance-avoidance goals were associated with test anxiety, low grades, and low self-efficacy (7).

A large body of research was conducted to find the relationship between goal orientations and students' behaviors and attitudes in an academic setting (8). While mastery-goal oriented students are more intrinsically interested in learning, have a positive attitude towards learning, and enjoy challenging work (9-11), performance-goal oriented students avoid challenging tasks and use superficial learning strategies (11,12). Since different students have quite different learning objectives, the following table illustrates the differences between performance and mastery- goal oriented learners.

Medical teachers' role in promoting mastery-oriented goals

A mastery approach to learning relies on emphasizing understanding rather than performance or outcomes in the long run. As a medical teacher, the emphasis on understanding over competition and ability encourages students to take advantage of opportunities to improve their understanding instead of avoiding them.

Furthermore, encouraging medical students to choose

Table 1. Characteristics of performance versus mastery-oriented learners

Performance – goal oriented learners	Mastery-goal oriented learners
Demonstrating competence to others is what they focus on	Task mastery and Enhancing competence
Not taking on challenging tasks	Applying for more demanding tasks
Failure is attributed to inadequacy on their part	Failure is attributed to effortlessness
Quick learning or no learning whatsoever	Various rates of learning are believed to exist
Negative outcomes lead them to reduce their efforts	When faced with negative outcomes, they increase their efforts

more demanding tasks, even if they encounter negative outcomes, appears to result in an increased effort and go beyond the established norms of learning. Medical students play a pivotal role in patient care; furthermore, learning the tasks and responsibilities of a professional physician means that they have fully acquired the competencies required of a medical doctor during their education as a medical student. It is highly recommended that further research shed light on the real and authentic competencies acquired by medical students after graduation through conducting research concerning how mastery or performance-oriented these learners are. In addition, regarding the background theory related to mastery and performance-oriented goals

and our concluding remarks, further research should be designed and carried out on graduated medical students to identify the practicality of their mastery or performance-oriented goals.

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