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Research Paper



Achievement Motivation in College Students as A Function of Their Belief in Gender Roles

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the relationship between college students' achievement motivation and gender role beliefs. Achievement motivation is the fuel that ignites a passion for learning and helps students stay focused on their studies. Apart from economic and personal factors, a student's achievement motivation may be affected by social concepts like gender role beliefs (traditional or egalitarian beliefs) too. The pressure on Indian students to balance gender role expectations and family responsibilities might impact their career aspirations. The present study is quantitative research conducted on a sample of 185 students (112 females and 73 males) from Salesian College (Siliguri). The sample was selected using the purposive sampling technique. Standardized scales were employed to collect the data, and the quantitative data was scored based on test norms to obtain raw scores. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 26. Based on Pearson's correlation, a statistically significant correlation between achievement motivation and gender role beliefs was observed in females. Additionally, no gender differences were found in the levels of achievement motivation. The study also highlights the need for interventions and support systems to enhance motivation among college students.

Keywords: Achievement Motivation, Gender Role Belief, College Students, North Bengal

hat makes a student attend a university and obtain a degree? Why does an employee work hard to earn a salary? Why does an athlete train every day? What drives people to act like this? Some feel that genetics and biology have a great effect on human behaviour, while others believe that environmental circumstances play a larger role. Some argue that it is a blend of nature and nurture. Some are driven by a desire for power or position, while others are motivated by a need for love and connection with others. Some people seek adventure and excitement, while others prefer stability and regularity. Regardless of the underlying causes, it is apparent that people are motivated by a variety of factors. Thus, all human behaviour is governed by a psychological process called *motivation*. *Motivation* is the process by which activities are started, directed, and continued so that physical or psychological needs or wants are met (Petri., 1996). This is a process that considers the strength, direction, and persistence of an individual's efforts to reach a goal.

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The purpose of the study is to learn about the achievement motivation in college students concerning their belief in gender roles. Thus, learning about the motivation to achieve in life is the key focus of this research.

The term *achievement motivation* can be defined by considering the words *achievement* and *motivation* separately. (Spence, 1989) define *achievements* as "task-oriented behaviour." Achievement, therefore, refers to *competence* (effectiveness, ability, sufficiency, or state or quality of success). As mentioned earlier, motivation refers to energization (activation) and direction (goal) of behaviour. It can thus be defined as the energization and direction of competence–relevant behaviour or the reasons and ways in which people strive towards competence (success) and away from incompetence (failure). David McClelland and his colleagues (McClelland, 2015) described **achievement motivation** as "a stable personality characteristic that reflects the tendency to strive for success." Thus, achievement motivation is the type of motivation that drives a person to achieve something in life. Understanding achievement motivation is important because it may impact a person's choices, objectives, and performance in a variety of domains such as school, sports, and jobs.

Achievement motivation varies across different academic streams, influenced by the unique demands and career paths associated with each discipline. In her study titled 'Achievement Motivation Among Students,' Veena Shastri (2013) discovered significant differences in achievement motivation between students pursuing pure science and applied science courses. As revealed by the study, it can be concluded that students pursuing applied science courses are motivated by both academic excellence and tangible results. They are driven to apply scientific knowledge to solve real-world problems, develop innovative technologies, and provide practical solutions to societal needs.

In the same vein, Rani and Reddy (2019) conducted a study to investigate the influence of gender and academic majors on achievement motivation among adolescent students. The research involved 80 undergraduate students from the Hyderabad district. The findings revealed significant differences in achievement motivation between students pursuing science and arts streams, as well as between male and female college students. The results indicated that science college students exhibited higher levels of motivation compared to arts college students.

Another study by Upadhyay and Tiwari (2009) found that students in the science faculty exhibited higher achievement motivation compared to Social Science, Humanities, and Commerce faculties, but no significant difference was observed between the science faculty and vocational courses.

The exploration of gender differences in achievement motivation has captivated researchers for an extended period, sparking debates and generating considerable interest. It is interesting to note that numerous studies have both confirmed and refuted the presence of gender differences concerning achievement motivation.

Various studies have demonstrated the existence of a gender differences in achievement motivation. For instance, Shekhar and Devi (2012) discovered a notable distinction in the achievement motivation levels of male and female college students. A study conducted by Mary Devakumar (2018) also aimed to investigate whether there are still perceptions of women (girls) as being weaker or less capable in terms of physical, intellectual, and emotional strengths. The results indicated a significant difference in achievement motivation

scores, with girls scoring higher than boys. However, there was only minimal difference in academic self-concept scores based on gender.

Contrary to the previously mentioned studies, numerous other research studies have found limited or no gender differences in levels of achievement motivation. For instance, research conducted by Smith et al. (2018) examined a large sample of students across various academic disciplines and found no notable gender disparities in their levels of achievement motivation.

Karim Ansary et al. (2021) conducted a study to find significant differences in different socio-demographic variables like sex, the locale of the students, etc. of undergraduate college students regarding their level of achievement motivation. It was found that there were no significant differences between different socio-demographic variables like gender and the locale of the students.

Gender refers to socially constructed characteristics of people. It includes norms, behaviours, and roles related to men, women, girls, boys, etc. It is different from *sex*, which is the anatomical or biological differences between males and females distinguished by genes, hormones, reproductive organs, etc.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines **gender roles** as "socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women." Common beliefs people hold about gender roles are: Men are naturally more aggressive, strong, task-oriented, and funny. Women, on the other hand, are considered as weak, fragile, dependent, submissive, and sensitive.

Gender roles may differ across various societies and periods. Berridge et al. (2009) in their study, have differentiated between Traditional/non-egalitarian and feminist/egalitarian gender role viewpoints. In the traditional framework, men are typically expected to exhibit traits such as strength, assertiveness, and being the primary breadwinners. They are often associated with roles that involve leadership, decision-making, and providing for the family. On the other hand, traditional gender roles dictate that women should possess qualities such as nurturing, empathy, and being homemakers. They are often expected to prioritize family and caregiving responsibilities over pursuing careers or leadership positions. Alternatively, the theory of egalitarian gender roles is grounded in the idea of an egalitarian society, where the core belief is that all individuals should be regarded as equal, treated fairly, and granted equal access to opportunities. As per this ideology, there is a strong focus on equal opportunities and the sharing of responsibilities between genders. It encourages both men and women to actively pursue careers while also collaboratively engaging in domestic tasks. Gender role belief and achievement motivation are two essential psychosocial elements that can have a significant influence on an individual's perspective and attitude towards life success. If a person feels that women are less capable than men in specific areas, they may be less inclined to pursue such fields. Most cultures see males generally possessing superior mechanical and analytical abilities, whereas women are viewed as emotional and sensitive. This may have a detrimental impact on individuals, preventing them from pursuing professions that deviate from their gender-role expectations. For example, society may believe that women find it harder to thrive in areas of work that involve mechanical and logical abilities, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Men and women might have varying motivations to succeed in specific areas and could hold different perspectives regarding their capabilities, which could impact their drive and ambition (Helgeson, 2012). While it is important to respect individual choices, it is also important to recognize the societal and cultural pressures that can influence those choices. For instance, some cultures hold that women should prioritize their domestic responsibilities over their education or careers when compared to men who are encouraged to pursue education and careers. This can lower women's motivation for achievement and result in lower levels of success. However, with more access to education and opportunities for gender equality, these cultural stereotypes can be overturned and people of all genders can succeed more.

A counterargument might be that some women prefer to focus on their domestic responsibilities over their education or careers and that this decision should be respected rather than seen as a barrier to their motivation for achievement. These patriarchal and nonegalitarian views can hinder students' academic progress due to family and societal pressures to conform to gender norms and roles.

In today's society, where success is often measured by societal expectations, it becomes imperative to explore how gender role beliefs can influence a student's drive to achieve. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the beliefs of Indian college students regarding gender roles. This can directly or indirectly affect their motivation to achieve as well as their overall academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

To investigate the impact of Gender Role Beliefs on Achievement Motivation of college students.

Objectives

- To identify and compare the levels of achievement motivation between male and female students.
- To examine the correlation between achievement motivation and gender role beliefs of college students.

Hypotheses

- H1: There is a significant difference in the levels of achievement motivation between male and female students.
- H2: There is a significant correlation between achievement motivation and gender role beliefs.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

After identifying the population, the researcher used the Purposive Sampling technique to select the sample for the study. A sample of 185 students of Salesian College (Siliguri) hailing from the three districts of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Jalpaiguri was selected for the study. It comprised of 73 male and 112 female unmarried college students between the age of 19 to 25 years.

Research Instruments

- Gender Role Beliefs Scale: The Gender Role Beliefs Scale by Kerr & Holden, 1996, is a self-report tool that measures prescriptive attitudes toward appropriate behaviours for men and women. With 20 items, it is a tool using a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 4=undecided, 7=strongly disagree), with six reverse-scored items. Scores range from 20 to 140, with higher scores indicating more feminist beliefs. Scale's reliability using Pearson's Correlation is 0.68 and test-retest method is 0.87.
- Achievement Motivation Scale: The Achievement Motivation Scale by Dr. P.S. Goregaonkar & Dr. R. D. Helode, 2007, is a self-report tool comprising of 40 items that aims to explore the psychological aspect of achievement motivation in both work and life contexts. Scores on this scale range from a minimum of 40 to a maximum of 200, with higher scores indicating stronger achievement motivation. A raw score of 144 or below signifies low achievement motivation, while 135 or below signifies very low motivation, both suggesting a need for psychological support. The scale's reliability is notably high at 0.97, determined through the split-half method.

Procedure

The permission to conduct the research was received by the researcher from the Principal of Salesian College (Siliguri) and various Heads of Department (HODs). The data was then collected by the researcher with the help of Google Forms after it was circulated with the students. Before filling up the questionnaire, the students were briefed by the researcher regarding the ethical considerations telling them that confidentiality will be maintained and they were encouraged to give their honest opinions. Then the instructions were given to the participants to fill up the questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis

As the data was collected using Google Forms, the primary data gathered by the researcher were sorted, classified, edited, tabulated in a suitable form, and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools within the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. T-test was also used to measure the levels of achievement motivation between males and females. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used for pair-wise correlation.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Result of Independent Sample T-test for Gender Differences in Achievement Motivation

Independent Samples Test					
Variance	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Equal variance	183	-0.682	0.495		
Unequal variance	151	-0.678	0.498		

Table 1 displays the results of the independent sample t-test conducted to assess gender differences in achievement motivation, considering both equal and unequal variances (two-tailed).

The degrees of freedom (df) was calculated as 183, the t-value was recorded as -0.682, and the p-value was determined to be 0.495 assuming equal variance. On the other hand, with

the df calculated as 151, the t-value was -0.678, and the p-value was 0.498 assuming unequal variance.

Both computed p-values for equal and unequal variance exceeded the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis suggesting a gender difference in achievement motivation levels is rejected.

Table No. 2 Relation between Achievement Motivation and Gender Role Beliefs using Pearson's Correlation

Respondents	N	r	Verbal	Level of
			Interpretation	Significance
Combined (Male and Female)	185	-0.129	Weak Negative	0.05
Male	73	-0.142	Weak Negative	0.05
Female	112	-0.187*	Negative	0.05

Table 2 presents correlation analysis results between Gender Role Beliefs and Achievement Motivation using Pearson's Correlation. Overall results show a weak negative correlation (-0.129) using combined data, implying no significant link. Among males, a weak negative correlation.

(-0.142) was observed, which was not statistically significant. Yet, results from female data showed a negative correlation (-0.187), revealing a statistically significant correlation between Gender Role Beliefs and Achievement Motivation. This supports the hypothesis, affirming a correlation between these variables and thus the hypothesis is accepted.

DISCUSSION

H1: There is a significant difference in the levels of achievement motivation between male and female students.

This hypothesis predicts that there is a significant difference in the levels of achievement motivation between male and female students. To test this hypothesis, the researcher employed the Independent Sample t-test, considering both equal and unequal variances, as indicated in Table 1. The results are discussed below:

The hypothesis which indicated differences in achievement motivation levels between male and female students, was rejected. This indicates that there is no substantial difference in achievement motivation between males and females in the sample population. The findings suggest that gender does not play a significant role in determining the levels of achievement motivation among college students.

This conclusion aligns with the results of previous studies conducted by Sood (2006) and Pandey & Ahmad (2007), which also found no statistically significant gender differences in achievement motivation among college students. The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Eccles, J. S., Wigfield et al., (1993), who found no significant gender differences in achievement motivation among adolescents. This challenges the belief that one gender has higher or lower levels of achievement motivation. Other factors, such as individual characteristics and environment, may play a more

prominent role in shaping achievement motivation. Further analysis is needed to understand the complexities of gender and achievement motivation.

H2: There is a significant correlation between achievement motivation and gender role beliefs.

This hypothesis suggests a connection between achievement motivation and gender role beliefs in college students. It proposes that individuals who conform to traditional gender norms may display varying levels of motivation to achieve compared to those with more egalitarian attitudes. This concept has significant implications for addressing gender differences in areas such as education and career advancement. To test this hypothesis, the researcher employed Pearson's Correlation test with combined data from male and female respondents, as shown in Table 2. For further investigation, the researcher assessed the hypothesis using data from male and female students separately. The findings are discussed in more detail below.

The correlation coefficient for the combined and male data did not reveal a statistically significant correlation between the two variables. Surprisingly, the correlation coefficient using female data yielded an interesting result. The findings showed a noticeable and statistically significant relationship between Achievement Motivation and Gender Role Beliefs. Also, the computed correlation coefficient value was found to be greater than the table value, indicating the existence of a negative correlation. Consequently, the data imply that in the case of females, the hypothesis that there is a relationship between achievement motivation and belief in gender roles is acceptable. A negative correlation here may imply that as the dependent variable increases, the independent variable tends to decrease. In this case, it can be said as females who held more traditional beliefs about gender roles may have had higher levels of achievement motivation or a strong desire to succeed in life and modern/egalitarian women may have had lower achievement motivation levels.

There may be various possibilities for explaining this outcome. One such possibility could be the stereotype threat. A stereotype threat is defined as a "socially premised psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies" (Steele & Aronson, 1995). In simple terms, it is a psychological phenomenon in which people experience anxiety before or during a task due to the negative stereotypes they have internalized.

One of the most prominent and well-known instances of this phenomenon can be observed in the anxiety experienced by women when they engage in mathematical or mechanical tasks. For instance, if there is a widely held stereotype suggesting that women are less skilled in math compared to men, women who are aware of this stereotype may encounter stereotype threats while taking a math test or driving a car. The resulting anxiety and fear of confirming the stereotype can undermine their confidence and cognitive abilities, ultimately leading to decreased performance on the test. Similarly, this concept can be applied to progressive and modern women who aspire to learn to drive or pursue careers in STEM fields. The likelihood of women choosing to pursue fields within the acronym "STEM" (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) is lower compared to men (Hill, Corbett, & Rose, 2010). They may experience fear and concern due to the negative stereotypes suggesting that women are vulnerable and weak in scientific disciplines. Consequently, this can further diminish their motivation to excel both in their careers and personal lives. However, it is important to note that not all individuals from stereotyped groups experience

the same impact on their achievement motivation. Some individuals may be resilient and able to overcome stereotype threats, maintaining or even increasing their motivation to achieve.

Another similar reason for this result could be the fear of success. In the early 1970s, an explanation was proposed for the limited achievement of women, suggesting that they experienced a "fear of success." Matina Horner (1972) observed that qualities like competence, independence, and intellectual achievement were inconsistent with societal expectations of femininity but aligned with expectations for masculinity. Consequently, women faced a dilemma when it came to achieving success. They might avoid pursuing achievement due to concerns about the threat it posed to their gender role. Horner (1972) defined the fear of success as the association of negative consequences with achievement. For women, these negative consequences included feeling unfeminine and experiencing social rejection. A woman who believed that achieving top grades would lead to dislike, teasing, or avoidance from others could be said to have a fear of success. On the other hand, a woman who believed that achieving top grades would garner respect from peers and parents would not have a fear of success.

Another compelling factor could be that traditional women, who adhere to societal expectations and gender norms, may have high aspirations driven by the desire to break free from these social constraints. They may see excelling in their careers and life as their only means of achieving emancipation and challenging the boundaries imposed on them. These women may feel the pressure to prove themselves and overcome societal limitations, leading to a strong motivation to excel in various aspects of their lives. The pursuit of success becomes a way for them to assert their autonomy, challenge stereotypes, and gain recognition and respect. Consequently, due to their strong aspirations, their achievement motivation may be high, despite holding more traditional beliefs about gender roles. It is important to recognize that this explanation assumes that traditional women perceive success and achievement as a means of breaking free from societal boundaries. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that individual experiences and motivations can vary, and not all traditional women may share the same aspirations or perceive achievement in this way.

Implication of the findings

The purpose of this research was to investigate the association between achievement motivation and gender role beliefs among college students. Unlocking the power of achievement motivation is crucial in the quest for success in academics as well as life. Understanding the elements that drive and boost motivation is essential for teachers, parents, and students. Each group plays an important role in establishing and fostering a culture of motivation as stakeholders in the educational experience.

Takeaway for the Stakeholders: PARENTS, TEACHERS, and STUDENTS

The findings on achievement motivation in college students concerning gender role beliefs offer valuable insights and actionable guidance for parents, teachers, and students alike. Parents can shape their children's attitudes by promoting gender equality, fostering positive views on education, creating a supportive home environment, and recognizing individual differences. For teachers, the results emphasize the importance of differentiated instruction, constructive feedback, collaboration with parents, promoting inclusivity, and emphasizing student autonomy. Students, on the other hand, can benefit by reflecting on their beliefs, setting meaningful goals, seeking support and guidance, embracing a growth mindset, taking

ownership of their learning, and celebrating their achievements. By integrating these insights and strategies, parents, teachers, and students can collectively nurture and sustain achievement motivation, ultimately leading to enriched educational experiences and personal development.

The study also addresses a gap in the literature by delving into the specific context of college students in the unexplored territories of North Bengal, as previous research has primarily focused on younger students. Thus, the study also contributes to the existing body of knowledge on student motivation within this unique setting.

Beyond the realm of individual impact, this study also holds broader implications for our nation's growth and development. Identifying the motivation levels among the nation's prospective scholars act as a compass, guiding us towards shaping a better tomorrow. Educators play a vital role in fostering a culture of motivation by challenging students with attainable goals, recognizing their achievements, and encouraging them to take ownership of their learning journey. Motivated students are better prepared to overcome life's challenges and succeed in their chosen paths.

Limitations

- Self-report measures may introduce response biases like social desirability and acquiescence. As the study employed the use of self-report tools, it may have been susceptible to these biases.
- Broader social and cultural context was not deeply explored, potentially missing societal, cultural, and institutional influences.
- The study focused on a specific geographic area, impacting generalizability due to demographics and cultural norms.
- Collecting data at a single point in time may have made it difficult to establish a strong connection between achievement motivation and gender role beliefs.
- In some cases, the students' workload during the research period could have impacted their achievement motivation.

Recommendations

- The current study has specific criteria, but there is potential for further research beyond these limitations. Recommendations include:
- Further research including all districts of North Bengal, having a larger sample from different cultures and religions for more generalized results
- Comparing achievement motivation levels among students from various colleges in the region could provide valuable insights.
- Career counselling, such as orientation programs for teachers and parents, are suggested.
- To comprehensively understand the complex relationship between gender roles beliefs and achievement motivation, future research could adopt a mixed-method approach.
- Exploring links between socio-demographic variables like ethnicity and religion with achievement motivation could offer deeper insights.
- Promoting diversity and inclusivity in academic and professional settings can help break down stereotypes and prejudices, allowing all students to thrive and succeed.

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to understand the relationship between achievement motivation and gender role beliefs. Considering the research as a whole, it can be concluded that the study contributes to our understanding of achievement motivation and its relationship with gender role beliefs among college students. The result adds valuable insights to the existing literature by shedding light on the nuanced complexities of achievement motivation among college students. It emphasizes the importance of ongoing research to gain a better understanding of the multifaceted factors that influence individuals' motivation to achieve. Future studies could explore the inclusion of additional psychological, social, or cultural variables to understand the complex influences on achievement motivation. Longitudinal designs or qualitative approaches could also be considered to provide deeper insights into the developmental aspects and personal experiences that shape motivation among college students.

In conclusion, the study serves as an inspiration for policy-makers and educators to prioritize student motivation. By taking proactive steps to increase motivation, policymakers and educators can positively impact students' academic performance, personal development, and overall well-being. This can also foster the growth and development of the nation.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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