A Qualitative Analysis on Students' Perception on The Concept of Academic Achievement and The Barriers[1]

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Abstract

Adolescents' views on success serve as a cornerstone in structuring their future. Hence, this study aims to determine the students' perception on the concept of academic achievement, how they perceive themselves in terms of academic achievement, the barriers to academic achievement, and what they need to eliminate them. The study group, which consists of 29 science high school students studying the 10th grade in the academic year of 2018-19. According to the content analysis, students do not measure academic achievement with grades alone the high school education system relying heavily on grades to measure achievement and being highly competitive, the students address 'social', 'psychological', 'cognitive' and 'professional' aspects, as well. It has been identified that 75,9% of the students do not find themselves academically successful, whose reason is based on academic self-evaluations and behavioral manifestation of these academic self-evaluations. Examining students' perceptions on the barriers to their academic achievements, it has been seen that they fight fierce battles not only with external factors but also with internal factors. When asked about their needs to eliminate such barriers, the students noted the need for individual strategies, sources of motivation and social, psychological, instrumental support to promote academic achievement.

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[1] Since the data used in this study were collected before 2020, ethics committee approval is not required.

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INTRODUCTION

While educating successful students is a priority for governments, administrators, educators and parents around the world, there is no consensus on what exactly success means. The uncertainty around the definition of this concept stems from the fact that success is associated with beliefs about the purposes of education (Cuban, 2003) and these are shaped according to the norms and needs of societies (Noddings, 2005; Krull & Pierce, 1995). Examining the lexical meaning of the success concept, it is seen that even if it is defined as achievement of good outcomes, it has transformed into a concept associated with wealth and prestige within time (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971).

It is seen that the concept of success is at the centre of attention of many theories in education and psychology literature (Glasser, 1996; Lindren, 1969; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Astin, 1991). Some of these theories define the success as a process while others as an outcome (Hamilton & Ghatala, 1994). To illustrate, from the perspective of behavioural theory, success corresponds to actions producing pleasing outcomes in the individual's environment, whereas the cognitive approach explains it with more internal processes. In other words, learning is achieved by trial and error according to behavioural theory and if the resulting action is punished, then it is defined as failure, while it is defined as success if rewarded. As far as the cognitive approach is concerned, it is a success indicator, not that the individual is rewarded or punished, but that a person achieves a set goal provided that s/he is ready for his/her potential (Hamilton & Ghatala, 1994). In other words, success can be defined as the realization of a person's abilities or capacity, as it can also be defined with more external factors (such as being rewarded, exam results, financial gain) (Sturges, 1999).

As a result of a comprehensive literature review made on the conceptualizations in relation to the students' academic achievement in educational settings, Kuhn, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges and Hayek (2006) identified that success is defined based on the context of different educational outcomes and skills such as academic performance, lesson experience, students' perceptions on the learning environment (Age, 2007), course grades (Bruce & Hutchinson, 1993), grade point average (Choi, 2005), perseverance, (Finn & Rock, 1997), placement in a satisfying job (Heckert & Wallis, 1998), participation in university-related goals, (Pace, 1984), academic and intellectual development (Pascarelle & Terrenzini, 1980), critical thinking (Watson & Glasser, 1980) and problem-solving skills (Heppner & Peterson, 1982) (as cited in Kuhn et al., 2006). It is noteworthy that the conceptualisation studies on success have been mostly made based on the perspective of educators.

Adolescents' views on success serve as a cornerstone in structuring their future. Their perception of success plays a role in their psychological well-being as a whole from setting themselves goals to achieve to structuring their self-esteem. Adolescents' perception of success, too, paves the way for them to create their life plans and set goals as much as the tangible success outcomes (Karabanova & Bukhalenkova, 2016). As a matter of fact, the research studies conducted demonstrate a clear connection between the students' perception and their academic achievements (Silverthorn, DuBois & Crombie, 2005; Mulford, Kendall & Kendall, 2004).

Even though students' views and perceptions are considered to be important in the design of education, they are not represented well enough. The studies examining the definition of success, barriers to their success and necessary elements for being successful through the perspective of the students are limited in the literature (Forsyth, Story, Kelley & McMillan, 2009; Elig & Frieze, 1979; Bornholt & Möller, 2003; Hui, 2001; Enke & Ropers-Huilman, 2010; Cachia, Lynam & Stock, 2018; Demirtaş & Çınar, 2004; Ekici, 2014; Schonwetter, Perry & Struthers, 1993). On the other hand, definitions of success produced by those who are not students such as educators and administrators are abundant (Shiber & Bogale, 1996; Alcine, 2019; Olson, 2006; Pollock, 2015; Gopalsingh, 2010; Dean, 1998). It is seen that these definitions often include a list of characteristics representing a successful student profile (Blocher, Sujo-Montes, Moore & Tucker, 2002; Oreški, Konecki & Milic, 2017; Hearn, 2006). However, students may define success differently than educators and administrators. It is certain that any definition of success made as well as its criteria determined without conducting an in-depth analysis of students' perception is empty. As a matter of fact, the definitions of success made by students, administrators, teachers, advisors, or parents do all differ from one

another (Dean, 1998). The education goals that will be identified without comparing the definitions made by the educators with the students' definitions of success and their opinions on barriers to academic achievement will bear the risks of being different. Therefore, it is required to make a comparison between the students' perception of academic achievement and barriers to achievement of academic goals and the factors in the literature determined by education specialists. Within this context, this study aims to determine the opinions of high school students about the concept of academic achievement, how they perceive themselves in terms of academic achievement, the barriers to academic achievement, and what they need to eliminate them. Research questions for which answers are sought within this context are presented below:

1. How do the students define academic achievement?

2. How do the students perceive themselves in terms of academic achievement?

3. How do the students define:

    a. the barriers to academic achievement goals?

    b. their needs to eliminate the barriers to their academic achievement goals?

Definition of success has the power of shaping the academic life by affecting the way of performance and use of existing background. It is believed that this study will contribute to the literature in terms of laying the grounds for creating a tailor-made educational environment that addresses the needs of the students by examining the concept of academic achievement through perspective of the students.

METHOD

Research Model

Since this study aims to determine the opinions of high school students about the concept of academic achievement, how they perceive themselves in terms of academic achievement, the barriers to academic achievement, and what they need to eliminate them, the *phenomenological model* was used. Phenomenological method is a suitable research model for the studies that aim to evaluate the perceptions, experiences, and views of the individuals profoundly (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2018). In this model, where the results are provided in a descriptive narrative method with direct speech reporting, the information obtained are interpreted within the framework of themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

Study Group

In a phenomenological research, it is recommended to collect information through in-depth interviews related to a specific concept or a phenomenon with the participation of about 30 people (Nastasi 2015, as cited in Başkale, 2016). In line with the purposes of this study, referring to the opinions of the students of a science high school, which admits students with the highest scores in the high school entrance exams, on the concept of academic achievement and barriers to their academic achievement was considered to be of importance. Therefore, it was aimed to focus on the subject by selecting the science high school students with similar academic achievement rank in the study group of this research study with the employment of the *homogeneous sampling method* (Neuman, 2014 as cited in Baltacı, 2018). 29 students included in the study group were determined objectively, and in this way, it was aimed to meet the naturalness element of qualitative research (Yıldırım, 2010). 29 students studying in the 10th grade of an Afyonkarahisar high school in the academic year of 2018-19 constitute the study group of this research. Only the gender of the participant was asked as demographic information. Specific coding of each participant (i.e., P01, P02) was shown with the exemplary participant statements when presenting the findings (i.e., P01). 12 of the participants are female (41%) and 17 are male (59%) in the study group.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected in this study through a *semi-structured interview form* in order to reveal the views of the students directly and in detail. Expert opinions (n=6) were received on the draft form including 7 questions, prepared in line with the purposes of this research based on the literature review. In line with the opinions, necessary revisions were made, and a question was removed from the form. Then, the interview form was shared with a small group (n=4) representing the relative sample and their opinions on the clarity of the expressions were received. Thereafter, the form was finalized. The form was shared in the school environment after the explanation of the research purposes with the volunteering students in the study group and their answers were collected.

Individual codes were assigned to each participant before the data analysis (e.g., P01, P02 etc.) Then, the views of the students were subjected to a *content analysis* individually by the researchers. It is possible, with the content analysis, to identify the necessary concepts in data and the association among them (Baltacı, 2019). The data obtained as a result of the research were analysed based on the following stages as was recommended by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011): (i) *coding data*, (ii) *finding themes*, (iii) *organizing codes and themes*, (iv) *defining and interpreting findings*.

The answers given in the first stage of the data analysis were read many times and efforts were made to gain a point of view through the perspective of the students. Thereafter, important points or sentences in the statements were determined and detailed codes were identified. By means of common aspects of the codes identified in the second stage, groupings were carried out and the themes were established. It was paid attention to ensuring internal and external consistency (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011) as to whether the themes identified formed a meaningful whole within themselves and among each other. In the third stage, identified codes and themes were organized. In the fourth stage, the data were defined as findings and interpreted based on the findings in the literature. In the presentation of the data, participants' statements were directly quoted. Data analysis were conducted on Microsoft Excel 2010 programme and the findings were transferred to a Microsoft Word document in tables together with the sample statements of the participants.

Credibility and Transferability

Credibility and transferability are discussed in qualitative research studies rather than validity / reliability terms (Eisner, 1991 as cited in Creswell, 2013; Corbin and Strauss, 2007). Necessary sampling scale was achieved with a view to ensuring internal validity (credibility) of the research. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Nastasi, 2015 as cited in Başkale, 2016), and the participants were asked the questions within the scope of the conceptual framework established based on the relative literature review. The purpose of the research study was explained for the participants and their voluntary consent was obtained, then they were requested to express their views freely without revealing their identity information. As for the external validity (transferability) of the research study, efforts were made to identify the processes of interview form preparation, data collection and data analysis with all their stages in detail (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The data were read and analysed by the author and two different researchers individually and compliance rate (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was estimated through the comparison of the coding. Average reliability percentage of the themes was identified as 81% in this study.

FINDINGS

The findings have been presented under four sub-headings with themes, sub-themes, codes obtained as a result of content analysis and their frequencies. The most striking examples selected from participant views have been presented with direct quotations for each code.

Findings Related to Academic Achievement

With a view to identifying the views of the students on the definitions of academic achievement, the participants were asked *"What does academic achievement mean to you?"* and the findings have been provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Definitions of Academic Achievement

Theme	Sub-theme	Code (Participants)	*f*
Social	Social approval	Meeting others' expectations (P01, P12, P16)	3
		Being appreciated (P06, P07, P12)	3
	Social status	Being different from others (P02, P03, P05, P17, P19, P22, P27, P28)	8
		Having a good future (P09, P20, P21, P27)	4
Psychological	Emotional state	Being happy (P01, P06, P07, P11, P12, P25)	6
		Being at peace (P02, P07, P22)	3
Cognitive	Cognitive competence	Achieving goals (P04, P13, P14, P15, P18, P23, P25, P29)	8
		Understanding (P08, P10)	2
Professional	Professional qualification	Doing your job well (P05, P11, P17, P24, P27, P28)	6

Table 1 comprises the definitions of academic achievement made by the students. Students define the academic achievement under 4 themes, 5 sub-themes and 9 codes. According to Table 1, students evaluate academic achievement based on *social, psychological, cognitive,* and *professional* aspects.

Student views under the theme of *"Social"* show that academic achievement is associated with social approval and social status. Accordingly, under the sub-theme of social approval, it is seen that academic achievement is defined as 'fulfilling others' expectations' and 'being appreciated'. P16, who was one of the participants defining academic achievement as 'fulfilling others' expectations', expressed his/her view as follows: *"Achieving the goal set by my family means achieving the top score in their eyes."* P12, who was one of the participants defining academic achievement as 'being appreciated', expressed his/her view as follows: *"it is being appreciated, respected by others, people around me making me feel more important and making my family happy"*.

Under the same theme, it has been understood that participants evaluate academic achievement within the context of their social status based on their expressions involving 'being different from others' and 'having a good future'. Accordingly, P22, *who was one of the participants defining academic achievement as 'being different from others', expressed his/her view as follows: "To me, it is being at a point different from everybody and achieve peace. Finally, being in a peaceful environment differently from others is achievement to me."* P21, on the other hand, stated that academic achievement meant 'having a good future', to him/her, and explained as follows: *"It is having a good future. It is gaining prestige in the society and leading a comfortable life."*

It is observed based on the views under the theme of *"Psychological"* that students focus on how they feel. P06, who defined academic achievement as 'feeling happy' under the sub-theme of emotional state expressed his/her view as follow: *"it is happiness, being appreciated"*. P07, who associated achievement with 'being at peace' expressed the following: *"It means feeling at peace. It is the feeling that my circle gives more importance to me and it is making my family happy."*

It is seen based on the views under the theme of *'Cognitive'* that students define academic achievement based on their cognitive competences. Accordingly, P18 defined academic achievement as 'achieving goals' and stated the following: *"It is the ability to achieve the goal you set or striving to achieve."* Additionally, P08, who defined academic achievement as 'understanding', expressed his/her view as follows: *"It is understanding and putting what I understood in use correctly."*

P24, *who is one the participants defining academic achievement as 'doing your job well' under the theme of "Professional"* expressed his/her view as follows: *"Whatever you do, which may be a job or course, I think it is being good at it because we make efforts for some things. Getting positive outcomes makes happy."*

Participants' Self-Evaluations on Academic Achievement

With a view to identifying the views of the participants as to whether they found themselves successful as far as the academic achievement was concerned, the participants were asked *"Do you find yourself academically successful?"*. 7 of the students (24.1%) answering the interview question as to whether they found themselves

academically successful responded as *'Yes, I do'*, while 22 responded (75,9%) as *'No, I don't'*. These finding shows that most of the students do not find themselves academically successful.

7 students, who expressed that they found themselves academically successful, were asked the question *"What is your reason for finding yourself academically successful?"* and the findings obtained have been presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reasons Why Participants Find Themselves Academically Successful

Theme	Sub-theme	Code (Participants)	ƒ
Others' evaluations on the individual	Academic grading	Getting high scores from exams (P05, P18)	2
	Social approval	Being appreciated by others (P04, P18)	2
Self-evaluations	Sense of self	Seeing oneself different from others/ as the best among others (P18, P19, P21)	3
		Believing that s/he is successful at many subjects (P19)	1
	Personality traits	Being curious and investigative (P20)	1
	Sense of accomplishment	Having achieved one's goals (P23)	1

According to Table 2, the views of the students finding themselves successful have been categorized under 2 themes, 5 sub-themes and 6 codes.

It is seen under the theme of *"Others' evaluations on the individual"* that academic grading and others' appreciation are determining factors in students' finding themselves academically successful. In other words, an external evaluation system and being socially approved are decisive in students' finding themselves academically successful. Accordingly, P05, who interpreted 'getting high scores from exams' as being successful expressed his/her view as follows: *"I find myself successful because my school and extracurricular course results are quite sufficient"*. Under the code of 'being appreciated by others' P04 stated the following: *"I find myself successful because I am appreciated, which means, in my opinion, that I am successful."*

Under the theme of *"Self-Evaluations"*, it has been identified that students' senses of self are decisive in their finding themselves academically successful. Accordingly, students' senses of self, personality traits and senses of accomplishment play an important role in students' finding themselves academically successful. Sample student statements under this theme are as below:

P21: *"I am successful because I know what no one knows, and I do what no one does."* (Seeing oneself different from others/ as the best among others)

P19: *"I do because I always try to do the best in everything. I do social activities, as well. I am good at both lessons and life."* (Believing that s/he is successful at many subjects)

P20: *"I do because I am a curious person."* (Being curious and investigative)

P23: *"I find myself successful because I mostly achieve the goals I set."* (Having achieved one's goals)

22 students in the study group, who expressed that they found themselves academically unsuccessful, were asked the question *"What is your reason for not finding yourself academically successful?"* and findings obtained from their answers have been presented in Table 3 with themes, sub-themes and codes.

Table 3. Reasons Why Participants Do Not Find Themselves Academically Successful

Theme	Sub-theme	Code (Participants)	ƒ
Academic self-evaluations	Academic self-efficacy	Believing that they are not trying hard enough (P01, P02, P03, P06, P07, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P22, P26, P27, P28)	17
		Finding oneself academically incompetent (P08, P17, P22, P25)	4
	Achievement goals	Not having an academic goal (P09, P29)	2
		Failure to achieve academic goals (P06, P24)	2
Behavioral manifestation of academic self-evaluations	Academic procrastination	Procrastination of academic tasks (P03, P07, P13, P22)	4

According to Table 3, the reasons why students do not find themselves academically successful have been categorized under 2 themes, 3 sub-themes and 5 codes. The findings demonstrate that students' academic self-evaluations and behavioral manifestation of these self-evaluations play a determining role in their finding themselves academically unsuccessful.

Under the theme of *"Academic self-evaluations"*, it has been seen that students expressed their views in relation to their academic self-evaluation on academic self-efficacy and achievement goals. Accordingly, under the code of 'believing that they are not trying hard enough', P03 stated the following: *"I don't find myself successful because even though I can do better, I always hide behind something and evade. I always postpone the things thinking that I will do them later. Then, they pile up and I cannot pull them off."* Under the code of 'finding oneself academically incompetent' 'P25 expressed his/her view as follows: *"I don't think that I am successful. For example, even if I study for a lesson, I do not think that I am competent, which discomforts me."* 'Not having an academic goal' is also a reason why students do not find themselves academically successful and P29 expressed his/her view within this context as follows: *"I don't because I don't have any specific goals set, which affects my studying potential."* As for the code of 'failure to achieve academic goals', P24 expressed his/her view in this regard as follows: *"To be honest, I don't find myself so successful because though I may be successful at school, I have yet to achieve my goal."*

Students also explained that behavioral manifestations of academic self-evaluations were also a reason why they did not find themselves academically successful. Accordingly, within the scope of the code 'procrastination of academic tasks' under the theme of *"Behavioral manifestation of academic self-evaluations"*, P22 expressed his/her view by stating the following: *"I always feel incomplete because I am constantly postponing, putting off my tasks."*

Findings related to Barriers to Achievement of Academic Goals

Participants were asked about the internal factors posing a barrier to their achievement of achievement goals *(What do you think are the barriers to your academic achievement goals stemming from yourself?)* and the findings have been provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Participants' Views on the Barriers to Their Achievement of Academic Goals Stemming from Themselves

Theme	Sub-theme	Code (Participants)	f
Academic self-evaluations	Academic motivation	Being unable to concentrate/Reluctance (P03, P06, P12, P13, P15, P17, P21, P24, P25, P27, P29)	11
		Being a perfectionist in academic tasks (P04, P07, P08, P09, P20, P22)	6
	Academic self-efficacy	Feeling of incompetency (P04, P11, P12, P13, P14, P16)	6
		Fear of failure (P05, P14, P19, P21, P26)	5
	Achievement goal	Being unable to set a goal (P28, P29)	2
Behavioral manifestation of academic self-evaluations	Self-regulation skill	Failure to cope with stress and anxiety	4
		Failure to manage time effectively (P24)	1
	Academic procrastination	Procrastination of academic tasks (P01, P02, P03, P04, P05, P06, P09, P15, P17, P18, P23, P24, P27, P28, P29)	15

According to Table 4, student views on barrier to achievement of academic goals stemming from themselves have been categorized under 2 themes, 5 sub-themes and 8 codes.

The findings demonstrate that students think that their motivational problems and perfectionist behaviours in academic tasks prevent them from achieving their academic goals. Accordingly, within the scope of the code 'being unable to concentrate/reluctance' under the theme of *"Academic self-evaluations"*, P12 expressed his/her view in relation to *"...being unable to concentrate"* while P08 stated the following under the code 'being a perfectionist in academic tasks': *"Striving for being perfect impacts me negatively, while wishing for more, I am getting tensed."* Furthermore,

students' self-perceptions on self-efficacy and achievement goals are also among the determining factors. Within this context, 'Feeling of incompetency' was also indicated as a barrier to their academic goals by the students and P16 stated his/her view in this regard as follows: *"feeling incompetent. I cannot obtain the result I want because of this."* 'Fear of failure' was also indicated by the students as a barrier. Within this context, P26 expressed the following: *"There is a continuous fear of failure in my mind"* Under the code 'being unable to set a goal', P28 expressed the following: *"I don't have a goal, which poses another barrier"*

Behavioral manifestation of academic self-evaluations on academic tasks is also considered by the students as a barrier to achievement of academic tasks. Accordingly, under the theme of *"Behavioral manifestation of academic self-evaluations"*, it has been seen that students addressed lack of self-regulation skills and academic procrastination. Within this scope, under the code 'coping with stress and anxiety', P04 expressed his/her view as below: *"Overestimating the work that I will do, my anxiety and stress problems"* In other respects, P24 expressed his/her view in relation to the code 'failure to manage time effectively' as follows: *"My laziness, failure to manage time properly"* As for the code 'procrastination of academic tasks, P06 stated the following: *"I put off things very often. I waste time on unnecessary things. I think studying is boring, and I move away from the lesson."*

Participants were also asked about the external factors posing a barrier to their achievement of academic goals *(What do you think are the barriers to your academic achievement goals, which do not stem from yourself?)* and the findings have been provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Participants' Views on the Barriers to Their Achievement of Academic Goals, Which Do Not Stem from Themselves

Theme	Sub-theme	Code (Participants)	*f*
Social	Social approval	Pressure created by family expectations (P03, P04, P05, P06, P09, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20, P23, P24, P26, P27)	20
		Peer pressure (P07, P09, P11, P12, P13, P21, P24, P27)	8
Environmental	Nature of studying conditions	Poor studying environment (P02, P07, P12, P19, P22, P25, P28, P29)	8
		Lack of resources (P08)	1
Academic	Nature of studying subjects	Boring studying subjects (P01)	1

According to Table 5, student views on the barriers to achievement of academic goals, which do not stem from themselves have been categorized under 3 themes, 3 sub-themes and 5 codes. Students expressed the barriers to their achievement of academic goals, which do not stem from themselves under three main themes, namely *social*, *environmental* and *academic*.

Under the theme of *"Social"*, students addressed the pressure caused by family and relatives, which are important for them, as well as peer pressure, whose importance increased as a result of adolescence. The fact that peer pressure was addressed by the students as relatively important is considered to be potentially associated with the fact that students composing the study group stay in the dormitory. As a matter of fact, these students spend most of their time during their academic semester with their classmates, and roommates in the dormitory. Accordingly, under the code 'pressure created by family expectations' P26 expressed his/her views by saying the following: *"Family pressure. They make me think that if I fail, I will never have a life."* As for the code 'peer pressure' P24 stated the following: *Noise disturbs me. for example, there is this peer pressure, they say 'enough of pounding the books'."*

Under the theme *"Environmental"*, it is seen that students addressed their studying conditions. Since the students composing the study group stay in the dormitory of a science high school, it has been seen during the interviews that they frequently discussed 'lack of resources' necessary for studying as well as 'poor studying conditions' due to noise and communal living conditions. Sample participant statements within this scope are presented below:

P08: *"Lack of my resources for studying has an impact."* (Lack of resources)

P07: *"Noise and herd mentality as I stay in the dorm (when my friends don't study, I don't feel like studying, either)"*. (Poor studying environment)

Under the theme of *"Academic"*, students pointed out to the nature of studying conditions as the barrier to achievement of academic goals. Accordingly, under the code 'boring studying conditions', P01 expressed: *"…that I study unenjoyable subjects."*

Participants' Needs for Eliminating the Barriers to Their Achievement of Academic Goals

Participants were asked about what they needed to eliminate said barriers *(What do you need in order to eliminate these barriers to your academic achievement goals?)* and the findings have been provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Participants' Needs for Eliminating These Barriers

Theme	Sub-theme	Code (Participants)	*f*
Academic self-improvement	Increasing academic motivation	Increasing motivation (P03, P04, P05, P06, P13, P22, P25)	7
		Coping with perfectionism related to academic tasks (P02, P14, P15, P20, P23, P26, P29)	7
		Setting academic goals (P05, P06, P07, P15, P20)	5
	Developing the perception of self-efficacy	Believing in oneself (P01, P02, P06, P07, P10, P14, P20)	7
Controlling the behavioral manifestation of academic self-evaluations	Overcoming academic procrastination	Academic procrastination (P02, P13, P14, P15, P22)	5
	Developing self-regulation skill	Learning time management (P18, P20, P21, P23, P29)	5
		Coping with stress and anxiety (P18, P25, P26)	3
External support	Social support	Family / friends' support (P01, P08, P10, P12, P13, P16, P24, P28, P29)	9
	Psychological support	Psychological support / assistance (P08, P10, P20, P27, P28)	5
	Instrumental support	Educational guidance support (P03, P05, P13, P15, P19, P25, P27)	7
		Improvement of studying opportunities (P04, P11, P12, P19, P21)	5

According to Table 6, student views on their needs for eliminating the barriers to their achievement of academic goals have been categorised into 3 themes, 7 sub-themes and 11 codes.

Under the theme of *"Academic self-improvement"*, students pointed out to the factors related to their academic self-improvement such as increasing academic motivation and developing the perception of self-efficacy. Accordingly, sample participant statements are as follows:

P25: *"It would be nice if there was someone to check the lessons, I do every day. It would also be good to learn to tolerate, overcome stress and fuel my desire to learn."* (Increasing motivation)

P26: *"understanding that being perfect does not only define me, getting rid of test stress and anxiety."* (Coping with perfectionism related to academic tasks)

P20: *"Believing in myself and not fearing. learning time management, learning that perfectionism means being independent of others, expressing myself, counselling that will assist in setting goals."* (Setting academic goals)

P07: *"I need to believe in myself and know what I need."* (Believing in oneself)

Under the theme of *"Controlling the behavioral manifestation of academic self-evaluations"*, students specified their need for 'overcoming academic procrastination' and 'developing self-regulation skill'. Within this context, P22 stated the following under the code 'Overcoming academic procrastination': *"I need perseverance, ambition, patience as well as getting rid of my habit of academic procrastination."* P23, on the other hand, expressed his/her view in relation to the code 'Learning to manage time' as follows: *"to understand that I don't have to be perfect and to learn time management."*

Under the code 'Coping with stress and anxiety', P18 expressed his/her view as follows: *"Patience and controlling my emotions and managing my stress and time. I need counselling from someone who has already left behind what I am dealing with, who is realistic and can understand me."*

Under the theme of *"External support"*, students pointed out to their needs for social, psychological, and instrumental support that they can receive from their environments. Accordingly, under the code 'Family / friends' support', P16 expressed his/her view as follows: *"My family's support even if there is a failure in the end and their understanding of my psychology and anxiety."* Under the code 'Psychological support/assistance', P08 stated the following: *"An environment free from pressure and expectations. I need psychological support of my close circle and school."* As for the code 'Educational guidance support', P05 expressed the following: *"I need a counselor to act as a coach and supervise me. I need a goal. I need perseverance."* Under the code 'Improvement of studying opportunities', P11 expressed his/her view as follows: *"A quiet studying environment, which is not crowded, would be helpful for concentration."*

DISCUSSION

In this study, which analyses the views of the high school students on the concept of academic achievement their self-perceptions on academic achievement, barriers to their academic achievement goals and what they need to eliminate these barriers, students provided well-rounded definitions of the aforementioned concepts. The findings have been discussed in the light of literature under four main headings.

Definition of Academic Achievement

It has been observed in this study that students do not measure academic achievement with grades alone despite the fact that the education system they are a part of relies heavily on grades to measure achievement and is highly competitive, and that they address it considering social, psychological, cognitive and professional aspect, as well.

The findings have revealed that students associate meeting others' expectations and being appreciated with academic achievement, and that being different from others and having a good future are also defined as academic achievement by the students. The definition of academic achievement by students as *"being different from others"* can be explained by Social Comparison Theory of Festinger (1954). In order to gain more accurate academic concept of sense of self, students may tend towards comparing themselves with their peers. This invisible social hierarchy caused by academic achievement in highly competitive settings may have shaped students' perception on academic achievement.

The definitions of academic achievement as *"meeting others' expectations"*, *"being appreciated"* and *"having a good future"* all but proves that students in competitive educational environments strive for existing, as stated by Büyüköztürk (2016). As the level of academic success rises, students are preferred by their peers more for both studying and leisure activities (Nepi, Fioravanti, Nannini & Peru, 2015), and this social acceptance shapes their academic self-esteem (Lopez & DuBois, 2015). This striving for existence is not limited to peer acceptance, it may also be a reflection of the need for social approval, which is a common construct in Turkish culture. There are studies proving the relationship between the need for social approval, which is defined by Karaşar and Öğülmüş (2016) as the need to gain the approval and appreciation of others as well as praise, with academic motivation (Karaşar & Öğülmüş, 2017) and academic performance (Rothbart, Dalfen & Barrett, 1971).

The findings obtained from this study appear to be consistent with the literature. In another study conducted within the scope of TÜBİTAK High School Students Research Projects Competition with 720 students from 9 leading Anatolian High Schools in İstanbul, which admit students based on success ranking in the high school placement exam, it was determined that 71% of the students defined success as 'having education in a school of their choice for a job of their choice', 61% as 'having high grades', 56.3% as 'passing national placement exams' and 50.4% as 'completing an education for a profession and having a job' (Koca, 2017). In the same study, it was observed that only

43% defined achievement as 'making new innovations in the academic and technological fields', 36% as 'having an art education that displays abilities on artistic fields and sports' and 5.9% as 'completing education in the schools to the parents' willing' (Koca, 2017). These findings demonstrate that students are mostly exam-oriented, have concerns for the future and give less importance to producing and addressing sportive/artistic abilities. This may be due to the fact that education is accepted as an important way of moving up in social classes in developing countries because although academic achievement does not provide guarantees for employment all by itself, it becomes a priority issue for both young people and their families as it increases the probability of high welfare in the future (Nsiah, 2017).

The findings have revealed that students also define academic achievement based on how they feel; accordingly, they associate academic achievement with feeling *"happy"* and *"at peace"*. Additionally, some students define academic achievement as *"understanding"*, *achieving goals"* and *"doing your job well"*. These findings focusing on psychological, professional and cognitive aspects of academic achievement are in parallel with the literature. In a study conducted in Moscow with 399 high school students, it was determined that most adolescents associated success with being popular in the society, being social recognition and achieving goals (Karabanova & Bukhalenkova, 2016). In the study of Enke and Ropers-Hullman (2010), it was observed that success was defined by students a way subjectively, with more internal factors such as happiness, which were not limited with stereotypes (success cannot be limited to certain categories such as being a doctor or engineer). In the study, they defined success as achieving personal goals, restoring balance, being target-oriented and contributing to the world one lives in. In another study, it was observed that students defined academic achievement as finding oneself, ability to think critically, and ability to apply information learned at school in the real life situations as well as happiness and creating life balance (Dean, 1998: 54). Students do not limit the academic achievement to the grades only but address it considering different aspects.

Students' Self-Evaluations on Academic Achievement

In this study, students' self-perceptions on academic achievement have been analysed, and it has been identified that 75.9% of the students do not find themselves academically successful. The perception of self-efficacy is affected by demographic variables as much as external factors, and it takes shape based on the context (Bandura, 1997). Even relatively successful students who are members to a group with a high level of success can feel themselves less successful, skillful or competent because of the competition inducing structure of the education system that they are a part of. As a matter of fact, considering that the study group of this research consists of students who are already above a certain success ranking in the national high school entrance exam, it can be stated that this competitive environment is a factor affecting students' perception of achievement.

Examining the reasons why they find themselves academically successful, it has been identified that *"grades obtained in certain courses or tests"* are one of the reasons presented by the students. Considering that selection and placement for schools and jobs are carried out based on the grades obtained as a result of the courses an examinations, the reason for the tendency to overestimate grades is understood (Zeidner, 1998). Having good grades seems to be an enough reason for the students to find themselves academically successful.

Findings have demonstrated that another one of the reasons why students find themselves successful is *"being appreciated by others"*. Thus, it is considered that the theme of *"being appreciated"*, which seems to be decisive in both students' definition of the academic achievement concept and their self-perception on academic achievement, is associated with the need for approval, which is a common behaviour in our culture, as suggested by Karaşar & Öğülmüş (2016).

Although academic achievement is an important part of educational goals, students are not one directional to be evaluated only in terms of grades, but they also differ in the context of a number of variables such as personality traits, family background, attitudes and value judgments, interests, and tendency to sportive / artistic activities. The variables of academic achievement are mainly addressed with cognitive factors such as intelligence and mental abilities, and these differences that students bring to the classroom setting are ignored. However, there are studies

in the literature that demonstrate the relations between personal traits and academic achievement (Wolfe & Johnson, 1995). Therefore, although curricula focusing on memory and mental skills are predominant today, the existence of arts, sports and social activities that will support social and emotional development will improve education (Talebzadeh & Jafari, 2012). As a matter of fact, the findings obtained from this study have revealed that *"being successful at different fields"* and *"being curious and investigative"* are among the reasons why students perceive themselves academically successful, even though their expression frequency is relatively low.

According to Hargrove (1990), success is often attributed to ability and efforts while failure is attributed to inadequate efforts. This view is also supported empirically. In other studies, it has been observed that students often attribute their success or failure to ability, effort (Asmus, 1986; Hargrove, 1990), luck, the difficulty of the task (Heider, 1958), friendship and family relations, state of wellness (Hui, 2001), biased assessment, low intelligence, not studying enough, being unable to concentrate, being unable to manage time, being unlucky (Lunt, 1988), fear of making mistakes, peer pressure, overexcitement (Yurtseven & Akpur, 2018). The findings from this study have also shown that students who found themselves unsuccessful *"found their efforts insufficient"* and *"felt inadequate."* These findings show parallelism with the literature in terms of the meanings attributed to success and failure. That being said, it is considered that these finding may stem from the characteristics of the studying group. Indeed, another study conducted with the students of a science high school revealed that students found themselves unsuccessful after starting the science high school (Yavuz, Gülmez & Özkaral, 2016). This situation can be explained by the formation of self-efficacy perception according to the context, as was emphasised by Bandura (1977). Due to the competitive structure of the educational ecosystem, students may experience lack of self-efficacy and find their efforts insufficient.

Barriers to Achievement of Academic Goals

Analysing student views on the barriers to achievement of academic goals, it has been observed that almost all the participants admit that they have had some difficulties in their academic journey. It has been found out that some of these difficulties are caused by the individuals themselves and others are associated with external factors.

There are studies in the literature that emphasise the fact that one of the personal barriers to academic achievement is having no self-discipline and that students have problems managing and focusing on a situation they want to dedicate themselves to (Dean, 1998). In this study, it has been seen that students expressed barriers to their achievement of academic goals stemming from themselves as low academic motivation in particular *"being unable to concentrate/reluctance"* as well as *"feeling of incompetency"* and *"fear of failure"*. It has been observed that feeling of incompetency and fear of failure play a decisive role in students' self-perceptions on their academic achievements in this study. In cultures where academic failure is regarded as an important issue, students associate self-worth with their academic achievement and may suffer fear of failure due to the anxiety of losing their values in the eyes of others (Steinberg, Dombushch & Brown, 1992). Because of the fear of failure, students doubt themselves and cannot be sure of their ability to succeed (Covington & Omelich, 1991). Indeed, the empirical evidence in the literature demonstrates that students' perception on academic self-efficacy impact their academic wills, efforts and studies (Bandura, 1995) and that the fear of failure is a determining factor in students' behaviours and performance (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Sheldon, 1997).

In this study, it has been observed that students also pointed out to *"perfectionism"* and *"procrastination of academic tasks"* as the barriers to achievement of academic goals stemming from themselves. Perfectionism, which is an important predictor of academic achievement (Yurtseven & Akpur, 2018), may affect the performance adversely, which causes procrastination (Onwuegbuzie, 2000). Unrealistic beliefs such as having unrealistic beliefs, fear of failure (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein and Koledin, 1991) and believing that success must be perpetual (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein and Koledin, 1992), which perfectionists and procrastinators have as characteristics in common, create a vicious circle and stand in the ways of the individuals achieving their goals by causing them to be stuck in this vicious circle. As a matter of fact, procrastination of academic tasks was addressed by the students in this study as one of the barriers to academic achievement.

Students pointed, in this study, also to *"inability to set a goal"* as a barrier to achievement of academic goals. Reviewing the literature, it is seen that goals play an important role in motivation (Murayama, Elliot & Friedman, 2012) and are decisive in the participation of students in academic tasks, and in success (Van Yperen, Elliot & Anseel, 2009). Lack of an achievement goal may pose a barrier to students' academic achievement by causing difficulty in getting motivated.

Self-regulation involves acquired, intentional, and complex skills that include controlling, managing, and planning one's emotions, behaviors, and cognitions (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). Emotional regulation skill, which is part of self-regulation, allows students to manage their behaviours related to the task (Calkins, 2007) and play a determining role in students' directing their attentions (Rothbart, Posner, & Kieras, 2006). It has been observed in this study that students expressed their inability to *"cope with stress and anxiety"* and *"manage time effectively"*, which posed a barrier to achievement of academic goals. Time management is also theoretically associated with self-regulation (Zimmerman, Greenberg & Weinstein, 1994). In this regard, lack of self-regulation skills or incompetency therein may cause problems in students' planning, prioritising and organising their studies on both emotional and strategical terms.

The findings from this study have revealed that barriers to students' achievement of academic goals that do not stem from themselves vary in a wide range in particular from "*"others' expectations"*, *"peer pressure"*, *"poor studying conditions"*, to *"lack of resources"* and *"boring studying subjects"*. Considering the fact that students who were in the study group stayed in the dormitory of a science high school, where this study was conducted, it becomes understandable why views were expressed on poor studying environment and lack of resources. It seems that communal living conditions have an impact on students' achievement of academic goals. Indeed, there is other empirical evidence in the literature, which sets forth the problems suffered by the boarding school students in this regard. Furthermore, students stated that studying subjects were boring and addressed commonly the pressure created by family expectations and their peers. These findings appear to be consistent with the literature. It is known that family's attitude (Çelenk, 2003; İpek, 2011), students' studying on a subject they are interested in (Halawah, 2011; Senemoğlu, 2007), difficulty level of the task (Pintrich and Zusho, 2007), their belief that the information they are learning is meaningful (Senemoğlu, 2007), abundance of resources (Uysal, 2009), consistency of the family's goal with that of the child (Christenson, Rounds and Gorney, 1992; Yavuz, Gülmez and Özkaral, 2016) are vital to academic achievement.

Participants' Needs for Eliminating the Barriers to Their Achievement of Academic Goals

One of the most common problems adolescents face is lack of motivation (Legault, Green-Demers and Pelletter, 2009). It is known that barriers to academic achievement such as lack of motivation and reluctance can be eliminated through social support (Wentzel, 1998). Within this scope, support provided by different sources such as family participation (Marchant, Paulson and Rothlisberg, 2001), parents' support (Yıldırım, 2006), teachers' and friends' support (Wentzel, 1998) is important predictors of academic achievement. As a matter of fact, most of the students in this study stated that they would like to receive social support from various sources such as *"Family / friends' support"*, *"psychological"*, *"educational guidance"* support with a view to eliminating the barriers to their achievement of academic goals. In this regard, as presented through findings, the expression of P16 stating *"My family's support even if there is a failure in the end and their understanding of my psychology and anxiety."* reveals students' needs for their families. When the children are provided with necessary studying environment, supported in favour of their achievements and encouraged in the cases of failure, their levels of academic achievement become higher (Satır, 1996). In this regard, there are also studies demonstrating that students studying at science high schools use family support as a source of external motivation at high rates (Aktaş, 2016).

The research findings related to students' needs for social support may be associated with the fact that students composing the study group stay in the dormitory of the high school. As a matter of fact, it is known that being a boarding school student increases the feeling of loneliness (Kırımoğlu, Filazoğlu-Çokluk & Yıldırım, 2010). Accordingly, students' need for social support may have become explicit.

The findings have revealed that students also need educational guidance support. Similarly, it was identified in the study of Dean (1998) that when students were asked for their suggestions to increase their academic achievement, they wanted a seminar, which could ensure their learning the process rather than the outcome, such as support and time management in order to get prepared for the academic life (Dean, 1998).

Students' academic achievements are associated with many components of learning (Lizzio, Wilson & Simons, 2002). In this context, the physical quality of learning settings can also be decisive for academic achievement (Bosque & Dore, 1998). Indeed, this study has also shown that students expressed their need for a good studying environment. These finding is considered to be due to the problems caused by the communal living conditions since the students being members of the study group stay in the dormitories of the high school for 8 months during the whole academic year. It is known that students staying the dormitory try to cope with a variety of problems ranging from human relations to nutrition (İmamoğlu & Yasak, 1993).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the critical importance of academic achievement in an individual's life within the conditions of our country from having a good job to living a good life has been presented in this study through the perspective of students. One of the most important developmental tasks of adolescence is planning for the future. Within this scope, adolescents' views on achievement play a determining role in shaping their future planning. The image of positive achievement associated with personal development and realisation is decisive for the happiness and satisfaction with life of an adolescent (Karabanova & Bukhalenkova, 2016). Considering the importance of psychological well-being of the adolescent, it is believed that it is necessary to conduct more detailed studies on their self-perceptions of success and failure. A holistic evaluation from an ecological perspective can be conducted in future studies by asking students about their perception of failure and the reactions of their family members in cases of success and failure.

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