



STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO SOME VARIABLES AMONG STUDENTS OF THE COLLEGE OF BASIC EDUCATION

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Abstract. This study aimed to determine the level of striving for excellence among students of the College of Basic Education and to identify statistically significant differences at the (0.05) level in light of several variables including gender, specialization, and socioeconomic status. The research sample consisted of 300 students selected through simple random sampling. The researcher constructed a scale comprising 23 items and extracted its psychometric properties in terms of validity and reliability. The researcher reached the following conclusions: students demonstrate the ability to face difficulties, thus they strive for excellence despite obstacles; males show higher indicators of striving than females, with statistically significant differences in facing challenges; students in both scientific and humanities specializations face similar pressures and consequently challenge them through the motivation to strive; married students, due to their responsibilities and fear of failure, exhibit higher levels of striving than unmarried students; and no difference exists in the level of striving among students with different economic income levels.

Key words: Striving, married students, failure, Successes.

1. Introduction to the Research

Importance of the Research and Need for It

Normal individuals engage in striving to overcome feelings of inferiority through their social relationships, which relate to their positive view toward others as they view themselves. They develop positive feelings through their self-confidence and confidence in others, representing positive responses. However, negative responses to feelings of inferiority may manifest as either inferiority complexes or superiority complexes. These reflected feelings from inferiority are merely two sides of the same coin for those who feel inferior, as well as for those who feel superior but, by denying these feelings, attempt to dominate others and achieve their interests at the expense of social interest (Isaac, 2010: 30).

An abnormal person strives for self-esteem, power, and greatness, seeking to control people and things. This goal may introduce aggressive tendencies into our

lives, while a normal person strives for goals with inherently social character (Hall & Lindsey, 1978: 73).

This means that striving for excellence may be positive and beneficial or negative and harmful. If an individual focuses solely on personal superiority, ignoring others' needs and societal needs, they develop superiority complexes (grandiosity complexes). Individuals with such complexes tend toward arrogance, devaluing others, and conceit, lacking aspects of social interest and becoming undesirable (Al-Azza & Abdul Hadi, 1999: 29).

Some individuals pursue their ambitions in uncalculated or unorganized ways, causing direct conflict with society. These ambitions may initially appear quite natural, but upon closer examination, their resulting activities and achievements contribute nothing to society and do not enhance social welfare and prosperity. This occurs because all their ambitions are non-social, representing obstacles in others' paths. Gradually, other distinctive characteristics begin to emerge, and careful examination of their human relationships reveals an increasingly hostile stance toward society (Bushra, 2005: 86).

Striving for perfection relates to natural disability at the beginning of an individual's life, supported by other factors such as illness, injuries, and inability to face death—the fundamental drive for striving toward perfection. This drive is considered normal for overcoming feelings of inferiority and disability, then for distinction. From Adler's perspective, if an individual maintains social goals, they remain healthy; however, they may become ill if they lose their social objectives (Abu Asaad, Arabiyat 2009: 39). The feeling of inferiority and striving for true excellence represents the fundamental reality of life (Adler, 1964: 73).

An individual is guided by a future goal they construct for themselves and move to achieve. This future goal is an imaginary goal invented by humans to make their lives more meaningful than they are. Normal individuals change these imaginary goals when circumstances refute them; in other words, they use their imaginary or ideal goals as tools for dealing with life. Life cannot be endured without meaning, and their thoughts, goals, and plans serve as means for more effective living (Adler, 1969: 69).

The ultimate goal of human activity and striving is achieving excellence, which comes in two forms: first, taking the shape of desire for power and control over others—an erroneous goal practiced by neurotic individuals; second, taking the form of striving for excellence toward perfection and a path to achieving quality of life and happiness—a correct goal practiced by healthy individuals (Saleh, 1998: 95).

2. Research Objectives

This research aims to identify:

1. The level of striving for excellence among students of the College of Basic Education
2. Striving for excellence among College of Basic Education students according to gender variable (males, females)
3. Striving for excellence among College of Basic Education students according to specialization variable (scientific, humanities)
4. Striving for excellence among College of Basic Education students according to marital status variable (married, unmarried)

5. Striving for excellence among College of Basic Education students according to economic level variable (good, average, below average)
6. Striving for excellence among College of Basic Education students according to responsibility variable (supporting family, self-supporting, family responsible for expenses)

3. Research Limitations

This research is limited to students at the University of Tikrit - College of Basic Education - Sharqat for morning studies during the academic year (2024-2025).

4. Definition of Terms

First: Striving for Excellence, defined by:

1. Adler (1973): An internal drive that propels an individual through developmental stages, resembling self-actualization for achieving perfect completion (Abu Zaizaa, 2011: 43)
2. Adas (1998): The extent of an individual's readiness and inclination to strive toward achieving a goal and successfully accomplishing and mastering that goal, characterized by specific features, traits, and criteria (Adas, 1998: 51)
3. Al-Farmawi (2004): An internal force that drives a living being toward activity to satisfy a specific need they feel lacking due to biological imbalance or self-regulation disruption (Al-Farmawi 2004: 106)
4. Al-Yousifi (2006): An individual's desire to maintain a high position in activities they practice compared to peers, striving to achieve goals and feeling pride and honor when fulfilling desires (Al-Yousifi, 2006: 103)
5. Al-Ghamdi (2009): Striving to achieve excellence and approach success, desiring good performance, perseverance, overcoming difficulties, and achieving specific goals in situations involving levels of distinction (Al-Ghamdi, 2009: 73)
6. Murray (2009): Overcoming obstacles, achieving difficult goals, and increasing self-esteem through successful practice of abilities (Abu Asaad, Arabiyat 2009: 107)

Operational Definition: The total score a student obtains when responding to scale items constructed for this research.

2. Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

The psyche has its primary purpose represented in excellence or superiority. This absolute imaginary teleology that all humans strive for gives personality unity and coherence (Engler, 1991: 106).

A normal individual strives for excellence through relationships with society, possessing a concept of excellence that includes a positive view of others as they view themselves. Their pursuit of fulfilling desires equals others' desires, remaining distant from excitement and selfishness. The life of an abnormal individual manifests in living in constant fear of loss, expressing themselves through the need for control with aggressive personality due to antisocial behavior (Durbin, 1996: p28).

Theories Explaining Striving for Excellence

Adler's Theory: Adler believes excellence is the powerful drive for self-actualization and the ultimate goal all humans strive to reach, giving personality stability and unity. He sees self-actualization as an innate drive and part of life, asserting it is life itself. From birth to death, individuals carry the struggle for human excellence through all different developmental stages—an effective dynamic principle with no separate motives, as every motive derives its strength from striving for perfection and excellence. Each person has their different style of striving for excellence. An abnormal person strives for self-esteem and greatness or narcissistic and selfish goals, while a normal person strives for goals with social character (Botros, 2010: 46).

Adler views every human as seeking excellence and striving diligently to achieve it, but human methods for achieving this goal differ from person to person. The reasons for this difference lie in human heredity and educational background. Some people grow up spoiled by indulgence, thinking the entire world should respond to their whims. Others grow up experiencing deprivation, then seek revenge as compensation when they gain strength. Still others grow up as products of cruelty and violence, then return cruelty and violence to their source or its symbol—society—representing parental authority (Shakshak, 2012: 78).

Therefore, Adler classified the concept of excellence into two types: individual excellence, which he considers harmful because it involves attempts to satisfy individual needs at others' expense, and excellence meaning perfection, which is healthy excellence because it involves achieving individual status through helping and empathizing with others, away from selfishness. There is a connection between these two types of excellence and the degree of social inclination, which determines whether an individual will use their feeling of inferiority to gain personal superiority or to help another human being. An individual with a very low level of social inclination will fail to care about others, making their striving for excellence personal and selfish, thus developing superiority complexes. When striving for excellence merges with social inclination, overcoming feelings of inferiority will benefit social life and humanity (William & Arndt, 1987: 1781).

Fromm's Theory: Fromm addressed the concept of striving for excellence through analyzing human needs arising from existential conditions. He indicated four necessary needs individuals seek to fulfill to feel adjusted: the need for social belonging, the need for excellence and transcendence, the need for identity, and the need for social discipline. Any change in satisfying these needs leads to character disturbance when old character formation becomes unsuitable for new social development, increasing human social alienation and isolation while creating different orientations toward self and the surrounding world through thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Hall, Lindsey, 1971: 73).

Fromm clarified these lifestyles within the concept of having and being, indicating two basic styles for two different types of human orientation toward self and world. In the having lifestyle, an individual's relationship with the world is one of ownership and possession, wanting everything to belong to them, including themselves. The being style is the opposite of having, meaning vitality and connection through real, authentic bonds with the world. The other form of being is the opposite of appearance, meaning the true, genuine essence of a person or thing as opposed to deceptive appearance (Fromm, 1989: 43).

Karen Horney (1945): Horney focused her personality theory on the pursuit of power, status, possession, and excellence as advanced methods in our society for

obtaining security and comfort against anxiety and weakness. She coined the term "neurotic striving," which she saw as prevalent in societies based on social power and circumstances individuals face (Schultz, 1983: 107).

Gaining and winning through influencing others means obtaining material and moral security, while striving for power, status, and possession means obtaining satisfaction through losing contact with others and strengthening individual personal position. The disturbed individual's self-image is very far from reality yet remains real, realistic, and correct to them, allowing others to easily see this false image. The disturbed individual's ideal self-image represents what they feel they are but cannot see as such, or what they could be or should be. The real, realistic self-image is flexible and dynamic, changing according to individual change, reflecting new forces, growth, new awareness, and new goals. The realistic image is always partial, completed by motivation and goals (something we strive for) to give our lives prosperity. It reflects and guides the individual simultaneously because the realistic self is dynamic, and goals are dynamic, leading the individual toward achieving these stage goals during life phases (Horney, 1945: 162).

3. Research Procedures

This chapter describes the research population, sample, instrument in terms of use and construction, finding their validity and reliability, application, and statistical methods that processed this research data.

Research Methodology

This research is descriptive, adopting the descriptive approach as a research method—research concerned with studies that collect and summarize facts related to groups of people.

Research Sample: The sample was selected using simple random sampling, consisting of 100 male and female students from various departments of the College of Basic Education, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Research Sample Distributed by Specialization and Gender

Specialization	Males	Females	Total
Sciences	55	55	110
Mathematics	40	40	80
English Language	55	55	110
Total	150	150	300

Research Instrument

To obtain appropriate items for the instrument, the researcher constructed a striving for excellence scale and verified its validity and reliability. The scale consisted of 23 items. To complete measurement procedures for the preliminary scale, the researcher developed interpretive instructions, noting that this data is used solely for scientific research purposes.

Validity: The researcher used two types of validity: face validity, with expert agreement on scale items exceeding (0.80), and scale self-validity reaching (0.94).

Scale Scoring: After distributing the questionnaire to students with explanation of response methods, response alternatives consisted of (applies to me completely, sometimes applies to me, does not apply to me) with weights (3, 2, 1).

Scale Reliability: Reliability represents the degree of consistency or agreement between two measurements of the same thing. The reliability sample consisted of 20

randomly selected students. To measure the scale's reliability coefficient, the researcher used test-retest method (external consistency of items), calculating Pearson correlation coefficient between first and second application scores. The Pearson correlation coefficient was (0.90), indicating good stability of student responses to the scale, suggesting high reliability.

4. Results

After collecting and analyzing data, the researcher reached the following results:

1) Measuring the Level of Striving for Excellence Among College of Basic Education Students

To achieve this objective, data were statistically processed for sample members' scores. The sample mean was (68.12) with standard deviation (3.56), while the hypothetical mean was (46). Using the t-test for one sample, the calculated value was (106.721) versus tabular value (1.98), statistically significant at (0.05) level with 299 degrees of freedom. This indicates clear differences between the arithmetic and hypothetical means, as shown in the following table.

Table 2. Level of Striving for Excellence

Sample	Sample Size	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Hypothetical Mean	Degrees of Freedom	t-value		Significance Level
						Calculated	Tabular	
	300	68.12	3.596	46	299	106.721	1.96	Statistically Significant 0.05

Results show differences favoring the arithmetic mean. The researcher attributes this result to students having a level of striving for excellence, as the Iraqi environment is filled with difficulties, making Iraqi students accustomed to them and driving them to resist obstacles preventing goal achievement.

2) Identifying Differences in Striving for Excellence According to Gender Variable (Males-Females)

To achieve this objective, the researcher used the t-test for two independent samples. Results showed the arithmetic mean for males was (70.18) with standard deviation (3.08), while females' arithmetic mean was (66.06) with standard deviation (3.43). The calculated t-value was (15.453) versus tabular value (1.98) at (0.05) level with 298 degrees of freedom, as shown in the following table.

Table 3. Significance of Differences Between Males-Females

Gender	Sample	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value		Significance Level
				Calculated	Tabular	
Males	150	70.18	3.08	15.453	1.96	0.05
Females	150	66.06	3.43			

Results indicate the calculated t-value exceeds the tabular value, showing statistically significant differences. The researcher attributes this to males having higher human struggle than females due to greater societal responsibility and pressure.

3) Identifying Striving for Excellence According to Specialization Variable (Scientific, Humanities)

Using the t-test for two independent samples, results showed the scientific specialization arithmetic mean was (66.21) with standard deviation (4.01), while humanities specialization mean was (66.03) with standard deviation (4.11). The calculated t-value was (0.369) versus tabular value (1.98) at (0.05) level with 298 degrees of freedom.

Table 4. Difference Level According to Specialization Variable

Specialization	Sample	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value		Significance Level
				Calculated	Tabular	
Scientific	190	66.21	4.01	0.369	1.98	0.05
Humanities	110	66.03	4.11			

Results show the calculated t-value is less than tabular value, indicating no statistically significant differences. The researcher attributes this to university students in any specialization facing similar obstacles and difficulties requiring confrontation, making striving present in all specializations for achieving goals.

4) Identifying Striving for Excellence According to Marital Status Variable (Married, Unmarried)

Using the t-test for two independent samples, results showed married students' arithmetic mean was (71.08) with standard deviation (5.23), while unmarried students' mean was (61.16) with standard deviation (4.98). The calculated t-value was (11.335) versus tabular value (1.96) at (0.05) level with 298 degrees of freedom.

Table 5. Difference Level According to Marital Status Variable

Status	Sample	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value		Significance Level
				Calculated	Tabular	
Married	43	71.08	5.23	11.335	1.96	0.05
Unmarried	257	61.16	4.98			

Results show the calculated t-value exceeds tabular value, indicating statistically significant differences favoring the higher arithmetic mean (married). This indicates

striving reaches highest levels as individual responsibilities increase, such as marital status, because goals become shared with others requiring higher striving.

5) Identifying Striving for Excellence According to Economic Level Variable (Good, Average, Below Average)

Using one-way ANOVA, results showed no statistically significant differences between group means in responsibility level. The calculated F-value was (1.786), less than tabular value (3.07) at (0.05) significance level with degrees of freedom (2-299), as shown in Table (6).

Table 6. One-way ANOVA Results for Economic Level Differences

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F-value		Significance Level
				Calculated	Tabular	
Between Groups	22.464	2	11.232	1.786	3.07	Not Significant
Within Groups	5959.326	297	20.065			
Total	5981.790	299				

Results show no differences among the three groups because the calculated F-value is less than tabular. The researcher attributes this to all individuals at their economic levels striving for excellence because their goals and aspirations match their economic level and aspiration for better.

6) Identifying Striving for Excellence According to Responsibility Variable (Self-supporting, Supporting Family, Family Responsible for Expenses)

Using one-way ANOVA, results showed statistically significant differences between group means in responsibility level. The calculated F-value was (14.57), greater than tabular value (3.07) at (0.05) significance level with degrees of freedom (2-299), as shown in Table (7).

Table 7. One-way ANOVA Results for Striving for Excellence Differences

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F-value		Significance Level
				Calculated	Tabular	
Between Groups	548.387	2	274.194	14.57	3.07	Significant
Within Groups	5588.773	297	18.82			
Total	6137.160	299				

Since ANOVA doesn't indicate difference locations but only reveals significance, the researcher used Scheffe's test for pairwise comparisons between means, as shown in Table (8).

Table 8. Scheffe Test Results for Pairwise Comparisons Between Group Means

Group	Number	Mean Score	Mean Difference	Significance Level
Self-supporting	108	71.0625	4.22466*	Significant
Family Responsible	144	66.8378		
Supporting Family	48	72.9333	6.09550*	Significant
Family Responsible	144	66.8378		
Self-supporting	108	71.0625	1.87083	Not Significant
Supporting Family	48	72.9333		

Results show:

1. Statistically significant difference at (0.05) level between self-supporting individuals' mean (71.0625) and family-responsible individuals' mean (66.8378), favoring self-supporting individuals, indicating higher striving levels due to facing multiple difficulties while seeking to achieve aspirations through self-responsibility.
2. Statistically significant difference at (0.05) level between family-supporting individuals' mean (72.9333) and family-responsible individuals' mean (66.8378), favoring family-supporting individuals, indicating their greater responsibility drives them to achieve goals for those under their responsibility, making their striving for excellence higher to achieve sustainable comfort after great effort.

Statistical Methods

The researcher used SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences):

1. Arithmetic mean: for extracting arithmetic means
2. One-sample t-test: for extracting mean differences
3. Independent samples t-test: for extracting arithmetic mean differences
4. Pearson correlation coefficient: for finding reliability
5. One-way ANOVA: for finding differences in samples with more than two groups

Conclusions

Through data analysis, the researcher concluded. Students have the ability to face difficulties, thus they strive for excellence despite obstacles. Both males and females strive, with statistically significant differences favoring males in facing challenges. Moreover, students in both scientific and humanities specializations face similar pressures and challenge them through striving motivation. Married students, due to their responsibilities and fear of failure, have higher striving than unmarried students, Therefore, no difference exists in striving levels among students with different economic incomes. Also, students who economically support their families show more striving than students dependent on family economics. The researcher recommends that, an official and unofficial institutions should work to develop student capabilities. Media should play its role in changing stereotypical views among individuals or students. Finally, university curricula should develop effective influence for establishing new concepts for dealing with this demographic.

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