



EXAMINING SELF-ESTEEM AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ACHIEVEMENT GOALS AMONG TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract:

College students often face various academic and social challenges that influence their motivation and success. Understanding the psychological and social factors that contribute to achievement is crucial in fostering student development. This study investigated the interrelationships among self-esteem, social support, and achievement goals, with a particular focus on the mediating role of self-esteem. Existing literature suggests that self-esteem significantly influences the formation of achievement goals. At the collegiate level, peer collaboration is common and often enhances students' self-esteem, which may, in turn, contribute to improved academic performance and goal orientation. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 377 students across first to third year levels in the College of Teacher Education at the University of Mindanao. Participants responded to a structured questionnaire assessing their levels of self-esteem, perceived social support, and achievement goals. The findings revealed strong correlations among all three variables. Notably, the results indicated that self-esteem plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between social support and achievement goals.

Keywords: education, self-esteem, social support, achievement goals, teacher-education students, Philippines

1. Introduction

To establish a profound and exemplary display in the academy, achievement goals are significant for students' personal and professional development (Mallillin, 2020). Achievement goals serve as incentives for students to engage in purposeful and proficient behaviors. Setting achievement goals enhances students' ability to attain

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commendable academic performance, which often results in outstanding outcomes (Lei *et al.*, 2018). These goals also help students thrive in the academic context (Peng & Kievit, 2020; Ahmed *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, achievement goals are strongly related to real-world applications, as students often align their goals with meaningful and relevant contexts (Bardach *et al.*, 2020). In academic settings, students are frequently involved in collaborative and supportive activities, including interactions with their advisers (Qureshi *et al.*, 2023). Achieving academic success early in their academic journey opens opportunities when students advance into higher education. Remarkable achievement goals also serve as strong motivational factors for pursuing college (Alhadabi & Karpinski, 2019; Li *et al.*, 2018). These factors significantly influence students' capacity to set and pursue their achievement goals. With clear achievement goals, students are empowered to reach their full potential.

To further understand how students set achievement goals, the Achievement Goal Theory was developed, along with the 2x2 achievement goal framework, which categorizes goals into mastery and performance types, each with approach and avoidance orientations (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Mastery-approach goals refer to students' desire to master tasks and improve over time, while mastery-avoidance goals reflect a fear of failing to master those tasks. Performance-approach goals represent students' intent to perform better than others, while performance-avoidance goals aim to avoid performing worse than others (Sommet & Elliot, 2020; Scherrer & Preckel, 2019). Mastery goals relate to learning tasks and standards, whereas performance goals are based on how students fare in normative or competitive academic settings (Daumiller *et al.*, 2021). These dimensions represent the internal (mastery) and external (performance) focus of achievement goals.

Studies have shown that self-esteem is positively correlated with mastery goals and negatively correlated with performance-avoidance goals (Chen *et al.*, 2018). This implies that students with high self-esteem are more inclined to engage in mastery-focused tasks, whereas students with low self-esteem may be more susceptible to performance-avoidance tendencies. Furthermore, mastery and performance-approach goals have been found to be positively predicted by students' perceived competence, which is closely linked to self-esteem (Iqbal *et al.*, 2022). This suggests a positive relationship between self-esteem and achievement goals.

Over time, theories related to social support, particularly the Stage-Environment Fit (SEF) Theory, have emphasized that students' self-esteem and motivation often decline when their environment fails to meet their developmental needs (Scherrer & Preckel, 2019; Eccles *et al.*, 1997). Peer and social support are considered essential antecedents to increasing self-esteem, which in turn positively impacts the pursuit of achievement goals (Li *et al.*, 2018). According to Harwood and Thrower (2020), motivational climates, the learning environments in which students are situated, can either enhance or hinder academic motivation. Teachers' instructional strategies, the influence of peers, and parental support contribute significantly to these climates. Students perceive academic achievement through two lenses: task involvement (aligned

with mastery goals) and ego involvement (aligned with performance goals). These orientations are both shaped by social support from their academic and personal environments.

The deliberate social support of teachers, parents, and peers significantly enhances students' motivation to pursue academic success. A supportive environment provides the optimal conditions for students to thrive academically (White & Carter, 2020). In this regard, Caballo (2025) demonstrated that parental and teacher support not only strengthens students' motivation but also nurtures a love for reading—an essential foundation for broader academic achievement. According to the Stage-Environment Fit (SEF) Theory, students flourish when their developmental needs are met through effective social support. Role models who encourage and model positive behaviors increase the likelihood that students will successfully master school tasks (Mouratidis *et al.*, 2018). In mastery-oriented environments, students are better equipped to overcome challenges, while performance-oriented environments may foster avoidance behaviors, particularly among students with low self-esteem. Hence, promoting self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support is essential for sustaining academic engagement (Zhao *et al.*, 2021). In line with this, Kelly *et al.* (2017) emphasized that positive social relationships and strong support systems enhance student performance by nurturing goal-setting behaviors that contribute to improved learning outcomes.

Apart from self-esteem, other internal variables also influence achievement goals. Temporal beliefs have been found to affect students' achievement goals, as these beliefs influence how individuals perceive time and its value in achieving success (Arens & Watermann, 2021; Sagiv *et al.*, 2017). Motivation plays a central role in setting and pursuing achievement goals. Higher motivation leads to a stronger commitment to goal-setting (Steinmayr *et al.*, 2019; Darnon *et al.*, 2018), while lower motivation may be affected by additional predictors. Self-efficacy, or belief in one's capability, is essential for motivating students to engage in behaviors that align with their achievement goals (Alhadabi & Karpinski, 2019). Similarly, self-concept—the perception of oneself as competent—can motivate students to act toward achieving their academic goals (Steinmayr *et al.*, 2019). These factors also impact how students self-regulate and practice self-control in academic contexts (Rasheed & Akhtar, 2021; Duckworth *et al.*, 2019). All of these internal belief systems contribute to the development of self-esteem, which plays a significant role in the formulation of achievement goals.

Some research studies have focused on the correlation among these variables in specific regions to better understand the interaction between social support, self-esteem, and achievement goals (Saeed *et al.*, 2023; Cvencek *et al.*, 2018). However, literature remains limited in the context of Philippine higher education. Thus, this study was conducted in Davao City, specifically at the University of Mindanao, to examine how these variables interplay and influence one another. The primary focus is to explore the mediating role of self-esteem between social support and achievement goals among college students. While several studies have individually examined the role of these

variables, few have explored how self-esteem functions as a mediating variable, especially within the context of a higher education institution in the Philippines.

In line with the 2x2 achievement goal framework, this study investigates how each dimension (mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, performance-avoidance) may be influenced by self-esteem, and how social support contributes to that dynamic. The influence of the social environment, including peers, parents, and teachers, continues to be recognized as a determinant of self-esteem and achievement goals (Scherrer & Preckel, 2019; Eccles *et al.*, 1997). Therefore, understanding how social support interacts with self-esteem and influences the formation of achievement goals is essential in improving academic outcomes for students.

Building on previous studies, this research aims to identify how self-esteem mediates the relationship between social support and achievement goals among education students at the University of Mindanao. The variables presented in this study are strongly aligned with the academic domain and have broad implications for student development. The results of this research are expected to contribute to scholarly literature and support future research, interventions, and educational practices. This study seeks to answer the following research questions: What is the level of social support among students? What is the level of achievement goals among students? What is the level of self-esteem among students? Is there a significant relationship among social support, achievement goals, and self-esteem? Does self-esteem significantly mediate the relationship between social support and achievement goals?

2. Method

2.1 Research Respondents

The respondents of the study were exclusively from the College of Teacher Education at the University of Mindanao, enrolled during the academic year 2023–2024. A total of 377 students were selected using simple random sampling, with the sample size determined through Raosoft. The participants were randomly chosen from the overall population of the College of Teacher Education. Only students from first to third year were included, as fourth-year students were excluded due to their deployment in field studies and internships.

2.2 Design and Procedure

This research adopted a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design. In this quantitative study, data were collected using standardized survey instruments as part of an approach to generate knowledge and understand the relationships among variables (Creswell, 2003). It examines if changes in one variable correspond to changes in another (Tan, 2014, as cited in Mallari *et al.*, 2024). The researchers aimed to analyze these relationships without manipulating any variable; hence, a descriptive-correlational approach was deemed appropriate for the objectives of the study. The conduct of the research followed proper protocols, including adherence to timelines, the availability of research personnel,

and observance of courtesy and respect by the student participants in accordance with the university's code of conduct. The study sought to compare and correlate the three variables: self-esteem, social support, and achievement goals. Specifically, the researchers aimed to examine whether self-esteem mediates the relationship between social support and achievement goals. To do this, the study employed mediation analysis to determine the indirect effect of social support on achievement goals through self-esteem.

3. Result and Discussion

This section contains the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the results based on the research objectives. Data obtained from the research instrument is organized and discussed in the following order: level of social support received by teaching students; level of achievement goals received by teaching students; level of self-esteem scale received by educational students; correlation between social support and achievement goals; correlation between social support and self-esteem; correlation of self-esteem and achievement goals; correlation of social support and self-esteem; and mediation analysis of the three variables.

3.1 Level of Social Support

As shown in Table 1, the teacher-education students reported a high level of social support, with an overall mean score of 3.82 (SD = 0.61). This indicates that they often receive support from peers, parents, and teachers, which they value as an important academic resource.

Among the indicators, Problem-Oriented Emotional Support ranked highest (M = 3.93, SD = 0.66), reflecting students' comfort in relying on, being guided by, and receiving encouragement from others. Daily Emotional Support was also high (M = 3.84, SD = 0.71), suggesting that students regularly receive understanding, affection, and friendliness, which boost their academic confidence. Problem-Oriented Instrumental Support scored similarly high (M = 3.88, SD = 0.81), indicating that students believe people are willing to help them address problems. Daily Instrumental Support was slightly lower (M = 3.74, SD = 0.73) but still high, reflecting assistance in tasks or resource provision. Social Companionship, while the lowest (M = 3.68, SD = 0.83), still indicated frequent interaction and emotional benefit from socializing.

Table 1: Level of Social Support Among Teacher Education Students

Indicators	Mean	SD
Daily Emotional Support	3.84	.71
Problem-oriented Emotional Support	3.93	.66
Social Companionship	3.68	.83
Daily Instrumental Support	3.74	.73
Problem-oriented Instrumental Support	3.88	.81
Overall	3.82	.61

3.2 Level of Achievement Goals

Table 2 presents the overall mean score for students' achievement goals, revealing a high level ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.55$) among College of Teacher Education students. This suggests that most students regularly allocate time and manage their learning strategies to meet desired academic outcomes.

All identified indicators—Mastery-Approach Goals, Performance-Approach Goals, Mastery-Avoidance Goals, and Performance-Avoidance Goals—were rated high. The highest score was for Mastery-Approach Goals ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 0.42$), indicating a strong desire to fully understand course content. Performance-Avoidance Goals followed ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.82$), showing that students seek to avoid producing poor-quality work. Performance-Approach Goals ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.70$) reflect students' motivation to improve their output, while Mastery-Avoidance Goals ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.82$) indicate efforts to avoid misunderstanding or failing to grasp new concepts.

Table 2: Level of Achievement Goals Among Teacher Education Students

Indicators	Mean	SD
Mastery-Approach Goals	4.69	.42
Performance-Approach Goal	4.01	.70
Mastery-Avoidance Goal	3.17	1.19
Performance-Avoidance Goal	4.06	.82
Overall	3.98	.55

3.3 Level of Self-Esteem

Table 3 shows that teacher-education students reported a high level of self-esteem, with an overall mean score of 3.74 ($SD = 0.60$). This suggests that most students value themselves and maintain a positive self-concept.

Table 3: Level of Self-Esteem Among Teacher Education Students

Mediating Variable	Mean	SD
Self-Esteem	3.74	.60

3.4 The Correlation between Social Support and Self-Esteem

Table 4.1 presents the correlation between social support and self-esteem, showing that daily emotional support, problem-oriented emotional support, social companionship, daily instrumental support, and problem-oriented instrumental support all have statistically significant positive relationships with self-esteem. With p-values below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Correlation coefficients ranged from 0.320 to 0.461, indicating that higher levels of social support are associated with higher self-esteem.

These findings are consistent with Noronha *et al.* (2018), who found that strong social support enhances self-esteem and reduces emotional exhaustion. The results underscore the importance of integrating various forms of social support, emotional, instrumental, and social companionship, into interventions aimed at improving

psychological well-being. Such a comprehensive approach can help strengthen self-esteem and promote better mental health outcomes.

Table 4.1: Correlation between Social Support and Self-Esteem

Social Support	Self-Esteem
Daily Emotional Support	.320**
Problem-oriented Emotional Support	.368**
Social Companionship	.396**
Daily Instrumental Support	.436**
Problem-oriented Instrumental Support	.405**
Overall	.461**

*p<.05, **p<.01

3.5 Correlation between Social Support and Achievement Goals

Table 4.2 shows the correlation between social support and achievement goals, revealing a statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.256, p < 0.05$). Although the correlation is low, the results indicate that higher levels of social support are associated with higher academic achievement goals among College of Teacher Education students. The mean score for social support was 3.82 (SD = 0.61), indicating that students consistently receive a high level of support, while achievement goals had a mean score of 3.98 (SD = 0.55), reflecting students' tendency to allocate time, effort, and strategies to produce better academic work. All indicators for both variables were rated high. This result is consistent with the findings of Guardario *et al.* (2025), who, although focusing on licensure examination outcomes, also found a positive but very weak correlation between social support and the LET Success Rating. Their study supports the present findings by showing that, while social support contributes to better academic performance or goal attainment, its influence may not be strong, suggesting that other factors also play a substantial role.

Table 4.2: Correlation between Social Support and Achievement Goals

Social Support	Achievement Goals				Overall
	Mastery-Approach Goals	Performance-Approach Goal	Mastery-Avoidance Goal	Performance-Avoidance Goal	
Daily Emotional Support	.154**	.223**	.089	.236**	.238**
Problem-oriented Emotional Support	.163**	.164**	.042	.212**	.186**
Social Companionship	.103*	.217**	.101*	.172**	.208**
Daily Instrumental Support	.068	.210**	.167**	.156**	.230**
Problem-oriented Instrumental Support	.109*	.189**	.099	.195**	.208**
Overall	.148**	.242**	.115*	.235**	.256**

*p<.05, **p<.01

3.6 The Correlation between Self-Esteem and Achievement Goals

Table 4.3 presents the correlation between self-esteem and achievement goals, showing a statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.314$, $p < 0.05$). Although the correlation is low, the results indicate that individuals who set and pursue achievement goals tend to have higher self-esteem.

Further analysis revealed that each goal type—mastery-approach, performance-approach, mastery-avoidance, and performance-avoidance—showed significant correlations with self-esteem. Similar findings were reported by Noorollahi (2021), Yang *et al.* (2019), and Okafor *et al.* (2018), who concluded that self-esteem plays a relevant role in shaping achievement goals. Likewise, Asakereh and Yousofi (2018) found that self-esteem had the greatest influence among several variables affecting goal setting, ultimately contributing to higher academic achievement.

Table 4.3: Correlation between Self-Esteem and Achievement Goals

Achievement Goals	Self-Esteem
Mastery-Approach Goals	.109*
Performance-Approach Goal	.331**
Mastery-Avoidance Goal	.220**
Performance-Avoidance Goal	.180**
Overall	.314**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

3.7 Mediating Effect of Self-esteem between Social Support and Achievement Goals

Table 5: Regression Analysis of Variables for Testing Mediation

Step	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Part Correlation (R)	
	B	Std. Error	Beta				
1 (Path c) Achievement Goals on Social Support	.229	.045	.256	5.135	.000	.256**	
2 (Path b) Achievement Goals on Self-Esteem	.284	.044	.314	6.401	.000	.314**	
3 (Path a) Self-Esteem on Social Support	.454	.045	.461	10.055	.000	.461**	
4 Achievement Goals on Self-Esteem & Social Support	Self-Esteem	.225	.050	.248	4.532	.000	.221**
	Social Support	.127	.049	.142	2.586	.010	.126*
R Square = .338							

* $p > .05$, ** $p > .01$

Table 5 presents the regression analysis used to test the mediation model, examining the indirect effect of achievement goals on social support through self-esteem. The model

includes four paths: Path C (achievement goals → social support), Path B (achievement goals → self-esteem), Path A (self-esteem → social support), and the combined effect of achievement goals on both self-esteem and social support. The R² value of 0.338 indicates that the model explains 33.8% of the variance in social support.

All paths and combined effects were statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$), confirming strong relationships among the variables. These results show that achievement goals influence social support both directly and indirectly through self-esteem. The positive association between self-esteem and social support further affirms the mediating role of self-esteem in this relationship.

Table 6: Sobel Test Results

Significance of Mediation	
Sobel z-value	4.110
p-value	0.000
95% Symmetrical Confidence Interval	
Lower	0.053
Upper	0.051
Unstandardized Indirect Effect	
a*b	0.102
SE	0.02
Effect Size Measures (Standardized Coefficients)	
Total	0.256
Direct	0.142
Indirect	0.102
Indirect to Total Ratio	0.398
Standardized Coefficient	

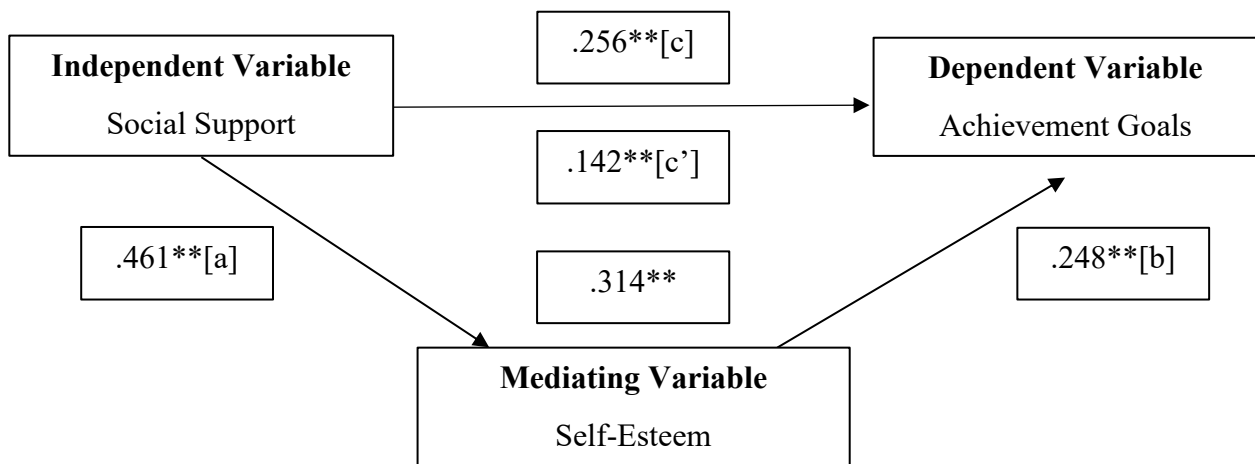


Figure 1: Medgraph

Additionally, the positive relationship between self-esteem and social support confirms its mediating role in the link between achievement goals and social support. The regression paths showed consistently significant connections, indicating that each variable is meaningfully related to the others. These results reinforce that self-esteem

functions as a solid mediator, enabling individuals to engage socially, address their needs in academic settings, and set higher achievement goals.

The Sobel test results present compelling evidence of a significant mediating effect in the study. The low p-value, narrow confidence interval, and substantial effect sizes collectively contribute to the rich engagement of the findings. Researchers and practitioners can rely on these results to better understand the complex relationships among variables. As shown in the results below, a significant mediation was made by self-esteem between social support and achievement goals. The noteworthy thing is that each variable was thoroughly analyzed, which gave a result that suggested that each variable was responding solidly to the other. It is important to keep in mind that self-esteem is such an important factor when it comes to the performance of individuals during their academic years. In our research, self-esteem has significantly acted as a mediating variable between social support and achievement goals. Therefore, it should be highly valued and considered an important aspect that people have to keep in mind when it comes to the academic context.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings indicate that teacher-education students receive substantial emotional and mental support, particularly in problem-oriented emotional support, although social companionship is relatively lower. The College of Teacher Education may address this by organizing events and peer mentoring activities to enhance opportunities for social interaction.

Achievement goals among students are notably high, with mastery-approach goals dominating, reflecting a strong desire for understanding and learning. Self-esteem levels are also high, indicating that students value themselves and possess a positive self-concept. The correlation analysis shows significant positive relationships between social support and self-esteem, suggesting that programs offering daily emotional support, such as tutoring services, study groups, and assistance with academic tasks, can further strengthen these areas.

The regression analysis confirms that achievement goals positively influence both social support and self-esteem, with self-esteem mediating the relationship. This implies that fostering high academic and personal goals can enhance students' social connections and confidence. Overall, self-esteem emerges as a key factor in students' academic success and well-being, influencing both their social engagement and motivation to pursue challenging goals.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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