

GCE PHYSICAL EDUCATION

PE2 UNIT GUIDE

Content Title: Achievement Motivation

Key points

- Theory of achievement motivation
- Need to Achieve (NACH)
- Need to Avoid Failure (NAF)
- Sporting examples of NACH and NAF

DEFINITION – An individual’s drive to achieve success for its own sake.

- Some psychologists see the drive to succeed as innate whereas others see it as acquired by experience.
- Some believe that the most important factor is to achieve success, whereas others emphasise the motive of avoiding failure.
- Our individual decision to participate in sport is determined by the relative strength of our desire to succeed and desire to avoid failure. This can be shown in the equation below:

ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION = DESIRE TO SUCCEED – FEAR OF FAILURE

- McClelland and Atkinson see achievement motivation as a **personality trait**.
- Atkinson suggests that there are two personality factors that contribute to achievement motivation:
 - The need to achieve (**Nach**)
 - The need to avoid failure (**Naf**)
- Everybody will display aspects of both characteristics.
- The personality trait is not the only factor that affects motivation. The situation is also important, specifically the **PROBABILITY OF SUCCESS**, and the **INCENTIVE FOR SUCCESS**.
- High achievers tend to seek out difficult tasks, while low achievers prefer easier tasks.
- **HOWEVER**, the theory does not reliably predict sporting performance. Its value is that it helps predict long-term patterns of behaviour.

- Achievement motivation is linked to **ATTRIBUTION THEORY** i.e. the reasons people give for a particular outcome, and **SELF-ESTEEM**. Attributions can be internal i.e. place the responsibility for behaviour or performance with the individual e.g. effort and ability, or external, placing the reasons on the situation e.g. luck and task difficulty. Performers should attribute success to internal and stable factors to maximise confidence and satisfaction and thereby improve self-esteem. Research has shown that the main predictor of self-esteem in losers is the perception of why they lost.

Practical Application/Explanation

In sporting situations achievement motivation theory helps to explain performers' behaviour. Why some people will take chances in the bid to succeed, while others will 'play safe' to avoid failure.

SPORTING EXAMPLES

Naf behaviour – a goal shooter who only attempts shots that are close to the post in netball.

Nach behaviour – a tennis player who attempts to serve an 'ace' on their second serve when they are a break point down.

A coach wants an athlete with high Nach and low Naf. They can increase Nach behaviour by:

- Using positive reinforcement to increase feelings of pride and satisfaction.
- Setting tasks that have a choice of difficulty so that everyone can achieve.
- Trying not to put low achievers into situations where defeat is inevitable.
- Choosing tasks that everyone can achieve, but that are still sufficiently challenging.
- Focusing any negative feedback on effort rather than ability.
- Gradually increasing task difficulty as self-esteem improves.

Top Tips:

It is important that the characteristics of both NACH and NAF individuals are understood and that sporting examples of such characteristics can be provided e.g. characteristics that are common to a NACH sportsperson are:

- Seek challenging situations - a badminton player wanting to play against players seeded higher than them.
- Highly intrinsically motivated - a gymnast spending hours perfecting their floor routine.
- Can be assertive - a player with a NACH personality will often drive and try to motivate others within the team and will often disagree with fellow players or coaches if they think something is not right.

Characteristics that are common to a NAF sportsperson are often opposite to those of NACH:

- Avoids challenging situations – a climber will choose the least challenging route up a rock face to avoid failing to reach the top of the climb.
- Will not take risks – a cyclist would stay in a group of riders rather than risk breaking away alone and trying to gain an advantage.



Exam Style Questions

1. Describe the characteristics of a sportsperson with a need to avoid failure. [3]
2. Providing examples from a competitive or training situation, explain the characteristics of an individual with a motive to achieve success. [3]

Answers