

# An Integrative Review of Students' Goal Orientation, Motivation and Achievement

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## Abstract

In recent years, numerous research studies have empirically examined students' academic motivation from the perspective of goal orientation construct. This construct has emerged as a useful framework for understanding students' motivation for, and engagement in schoolwork. However the conceptual framework is not uniform evolving from unidimensional towards multidimensional ones. This paper has reviewed the classic and reformulated versions of this construct. Goal Orientation construct and its influence on students' achievement, looking at assumptions, empirical evidences, inconsistencies and development of research in these years. Finally it evaluates implications in carrying some of these insufficiently verified principles into educational practices.

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Motivation has been a highly important variable as reflected in the fact that every learning modal either explicitly or implicitly incorporates a theory of motivation (Moerh& Mayer, 1997; Alonso, 1997; Walberg, 1981). From an academic or school perspective, recent motivational models consider motivation as a hypothetical construct that explain the start, purpose, direction and perseverance of behavior aimed at academic goal as learning, demonstration of abilities, social values or avoidance of work. Historically, there has been ample proliferation of diverse terms and theories related to the psychological construct of motivation. The cause is probably found in the difficulty of defining, conceptualizing and operationalizing this psychological construct with certain consensus which today exist only partially, Murphy and Alexander (2000) had reviewed papers in the last five years with regard to terminology used in research on relationship between motivation and academic achievement and found a corpus of motivational term as self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000) intrinsic-extrinsic motivation, expectancy-value (Ryan& Dec; 2000), attribution (Miller, Ferguson & Prynne 2000). Finally, they confirm

the current predominance and importance of contribution from Goal Orientation theory in the study of motivation.

## Classic Goal Orientation Theory: Conceptual Basis

The Cognitive view of motivation has come progressively nearer the study of students representations of situations, and especially the representation of goals as motives that each student construct (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986; Urdan, 1997). The role of Goal Orientation is a very contemporary line of research with relevant contribution in the field of achievement motivation and self-regulated learning (Pintrich 2000a; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

The goal orientation construct emerged from research in educational psychology examining individual differences in achievement related behavior. Diener and Dweck (1980) were particularly interested in why certain children engaged in adaptive behavior patterns while other children reflect maladaptive (i.e. helplessness) behavior patterns when working on tasks. They defined adaptive behaviours as those that promote the establishment, maintenance and attainment of personally challenging and personally valued goals.

In contrast maladaptive behaviours were associated with a failure to establish reasonable, valued goals as to maintain effective striving towards those goals that are potentially within one’s reach. The maladaptive behavior is characterized by challenge avoidance, low persistence in the face of difficulty, displaying negative effect (i.e. anxiety) and negative self-cognitions when confronting obstacles (e.g. Ames and Archer, 1988). Conceptually, the adaptive and maladaptive behaviours have evolved to reflect individual difference that are characterized as learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation by Dweck and Leggett(1988). They presented one of the first conceptual framework for learning goal and performance goal presented in Table 1 below.

Researches were carried on the above two dimensions of Goal Orientation and Pintrich (2000) gave more characteristics for

**Table 1:** Dweck and Leggett’s (1988) Goal Orientation Framework

Theory of Ability	Goal Orientation	Outcomes
Incremental	Learning Goal	Mastery oriented behaviours (Effective task strategy use, high initiation and persistence of effort, challenge-seeking)
Ability is Malleable Entity (Ability is fixed)	Orientation (LGO) Performance Goal Orientation (PGO)	Helplessness behaviours, Less Effective task strategy use, low initiation and s persistence of effort, challenge and risk avoidance)

students adopting learning goal as- satisfaction upon mastery to satisfy intellectual curiosity, greater level of efficacy, task value, interest, positive emotion, and good conduct. When individuals with mastery goal orientation experience failure they attribute failure to the lack of effort or ineffective strategy use. (Dweck,2000).

Dweck and Leggett’s (1988) framework of goal orientation suggested goal orientation as that result in stable and predictable pattern of behavior. Contemporary researches had raised issues concerning the conceptualization and operationalization of goal orientation construct. Dweck and Leggett (1988) operationalized goal orientation asunidimensional construct, with learning goal and performance goal representing opposite ends of a single continuum (e.g. Butler 1987; Elliot and Dweck ,1988; Muller and Dweck, 1998).In these studies it was assumed that learning goal and performance goal orientation constructs were mutually exclusive. Thus individuals were focused on either the learning goal and performance goal “but not both. Researchers have begun

to question whether learning goal and performance goal orientation are truly mutually exclusive and have proposed alternative models of the construct ( e.g. Button *et.al.*, 1996; Vande Walle,1997). The issue related to dimensionality concern was due to the fact that early researches on goal orientation involved experimental manipulations where treatment group members were assumed to reflect one’s goal orientation. In addition, early measures of goal orientation were often forced choice questionnaire that resulted in a single item assessment of the construct (e.g. Elliot and Dweck,1988; Muller and Dweck ,1998).

**Alternative Model of Goal Orientation**

Recent conceptualization of the goal orientation construct has attempted to address some of the ambiguities concerning the nature, dimensionality and measurement of the construct (e.g. Button *et al.*, 1996; VandeWalle, 1997). This model departs from

Dweck and Leggett’s (1988) framework in a way that it explicitly conceptualized goal orientation as a stable disposition (i.e. trait characteristic). As a stable disposition goal orientation is considered to be a motivational trait reflecting relatively stable pattern of behaviour.

A second distinction of recent model of goal orientation conceptualizes goal orientation as multidimensional construct which are not mutually exclusive but distinct and unrelated construct which are not mutually exclusive but distinct and unrelated construct. (Vande Walle, 1997; Button *et.al.*, 1996). Thus individuals can have varying levels of both learning and performance goal orientations.

Vande Walle (1997) suggested that the performance goal orientation construct be dichotomized to “desire to demonstrate competence”. Recent researches have reported relationship among the dimensions of goal orientation. (Dobbins, Bill & Kozlowski, 2002). These

**Table 2:** Alternative Model of Goal Orientation

Conceptualization	Dimension
Two Factor Model(Button, Mathieu and Zojac 1996)	Learning Goal Orientation(LGO <sub>b</sub> )Performance Goal Orientation (PGO <sub>b</sub> )
Three Factor Model (Vande Walle,1997)	Learning Goal Orientation (LGO <sub>v</sub> )Performance Prove Goal PPGO <sub>v</sub> Performance Avoid Goal PAGO <sub>v</sub>

findings reveal a positive relationship between Button *et.al.*, (1996) learning goal and performance goal orientation of  $r=.17$ . The relationship among Vande Walle's (1997) three dimensions are somewhat stronger particularly for the two performance goal dimensions, with correlation ranging from  $r=.10$  to  $r=.37$ .

Covington (2000) added to the knowledge with an important finding that academic goals function as a mechanism that activates certain type of information processing. Thus learning goal leads to strategic deep level of processing, guaranteeing academic success, while performance goals provoke a repetitive, superficial processing, influencing negatively.

## Empirical Contributions

### *Academic Goals and Learning Strategies*

Nuñez (1995) found that learning and social recognition goals were positively associated with learning strategies and negatively with difficulties in study.

In a correlation study, Middleton and Midgley (1997) report relationships among learning goal, performance goal and avoidance goals, finding that learning goal correlate positively self-regulation strategies and expectations of self efficacy, and negatively with avoidance of help seeking. Performance – approach goals correlate positively with test- anxiety, and with avoidance of help seeking and negatively with poor performance. Performance –avoidance goals correlate, positively with test anxiety, help seeking and negatively with self – regulation of self – efficacy.

### *Academic Goals and Learning disabilities*

González- Pienda and Colls (2000) have compared goals among students and students with learning disabilities and reported the significance difference between the two. Students with LD have significantly more learning and ego related goals, while there is no significant difference between both groups with regard to performance goals.

### *Goal Orientation and Self- regulation Strategies of motivation*

There still exists a limited amount of educational research which outlines how students regulate their level of motivation and whether strategies that allow them to maintain or increase their effort toward finishing tasks are an important component of self-regulated learning. Different studies have shown how students are involved in controlling their continued effort.( Kulh,1984,1985,1992) has revealed that students work to reach a certain goal, after it is chosen, by means of a variety of voluntary control strategies. Zimmerman and Martinez – Pons (1986 and 1990) provided evidence as to the use of strategies for maintaining persistence in academic tasks when facing distracting and interesting alternatives. Volet (1997) found that two dimensions of

academic goals (directions and effort) are needed jointly in order to obtain an academic record. Effort is a motivational regulation strategy. Students with goal oriented towards learning use more intrinsic effort strategies and those with oriented to achievement display more extrinsic motivational strategies.

### *Academic, Learning and Goal Orientation*

Direct relationships between goals and academic results have appeared in casual studies. (Roney, Higgins and Shah, 1995; Schunk,1996). Numerous studies have also shown relationships between quality of cognitive processing and academic results, showing that a deep level of processing is associated with achievement. (Covington, 1992).

Various multiple regression studies have confirmed the association between avoidance goal with superficial processing and disorganization in study planning, factors associated in turn with poorer academic performance, while learning goals appeared to be associated with deep processing, tenacity, high effort, and finally high achievement (Elliot, Mc. Gregor and Gable 1999).

### *Goal Orientation and personal determining factors*

#### *Students Conceptions and Goal Orientations*

There are many factors that influence students' construction of given goals ,one of which is the students' conceptions of intelligence. According to Nicollas (1984) and Dweck (1986), subjects conceptions about intelligence as something fixed, stable and differentiated from effort ( stable trait) are more likely to assume performance goals, while those that consider it to be changing trait and modifiable as a function of effort ( increasing trait), will take on learning goal.

One of the indicators of the conception is attributions made by students, when faced with success or failure in their academic tasks while students with more externalist attributions take on achievement goals. ( Valle,Rodríguez.and Piñeiro, 1998).

### *Personality and Goal Orientation*

Few researchers have suggested that goals can have different motivating effort on students depending on personality variables, since there are students that like to be involved in competitive tasks, while other avoid them (Harackiewicz *et.al.*,1997; Harackiewicz, Barron,Tower,Carter and Elliot,2000).Covington (1992,1998,2000) in his self-assessment theory have postulated the importance of students need to maintain personal worth. In line with this theory, Thompson (1994) establishes three types of self protecting strategies.

- **Self-worth protecting strategies:** consist of not making an effort when future is anticipated ( Thompson, Davison and Barber,1995; Covinton,1998).

- **Self-handicapping strategies:** Tactically create some cause (real or invented) which impedes carrying out the task. Convington 1992, Martin, Marsh and Debus 2001). Midgley *et.al.*, (1998) find that students with low performance use more self -handicapping strategies than those with high performance in order not to expose their lack of ability.
- **Defensive pessimism strategies:** keeping excessively low expectations in order to minimize effort guarantee success and minimize anxiety produced by not being successful with consequences of burnout. (Urda *et.al.*,1998).

### **Gender and Academic Goals**

In general terms, results confirm the idea that learning and social goals are associated to a greater extent with the feminine gender, while achievement goals are more associated with the masculine gender (Wentzel, 1993). Thorkildsen and Nicholls (1998) report more learning goals in female students, and more ego centered goals, achievement goals and avoidance goals in male students. Similarly females show more interest and effort attributions, while male gives more extrinsic explanation of performance related goals.

### **Context goals and self-evaluating strategies**

The classroom dynamic can moderate goal effects in students. Classroom with *competitive ability goals* as failure avoidance goal encourage students not to pay attention to nor value the importance of learning or mastery in order to focus attention and effort on doing better than others, while classroom with learning goals promote any number of gratifications, getting students involved in their learning from mistake or clarifying goals (Harackiewicz, Barron, Carter, Letho and Elliot, 1997). Salvin (1983) established some defining elements of learning situations that promote learning goals; possibility of task choice, choice of individual goals and autonomy in school action.

### **Social goals and academic performance**

Friend –seeking is a goal found in children of all ages, frequently given more emphasis than academic goals (Wentzel, 1992). Cooperative, docile and willing-to-share social behaviour is positively associated with academic performance (Wentzel 1991, 1993).

The reformulated theory of Goal Orientation: a theory of multiple goals

### **Conceptual Underpinnings-**

This version of goal theory incorporates some new approach, backed by empirical evidence (Harackiewicz, Barron and Elliot, 1998; Pintrich, 2000b).

1. Performance goals are not necessarily maladaptive. They may be associated with good performance if they occur

together with learning goal (Elliot and Church, 1997; Harackiewicz, *et.al.*, 1997).

2. Goals that students adopt may be multiple and flexible in real classroom situations, unlike single models, generally used in single experimental studies (Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000). In some classroom studies learning and performance goal have shown positive relationship (Pintrich, 2000a). Therefore, it is possible that a combined, interactive use of both types of goals has a positive multiple effects on performance, with a high joint presence of learning and performance goal being most adaptive for students. It is even possible that the level of learning goal taken on depends to some extent on performance goals (Harackiewicz Baron Elliot, 1998).

Pintrich (2000b) has synthesized the possibility that students adopt different goals at different moments, reaching goal attainment by means of the “journey metaphor”.

- Students with learning goal may use various motivational, effective and learning strategies over time; when they have resulted in good attainment it leads them to adopt performance goal in the end.
  - Students with achievement goals may attain good performance if in addition to these goals they take on learning goals. Therefore, more important than the type of goal adopted is that it promote affective and cognitive involvement in the activity. (Harackiewicz, Barron and Elliot, 1998).
3. A recent line of study, historically less developed recalls the importance of social goals in learning and academic performance. (Wentzel 1998, 1999, and 2000) postulate the complementary role of social goals with respect to learning and achievement goals. This type of goal has been conceived as cognitive representations referring to the attainment of social objectives (establishing and maintaining social relationships) and is related to the subject attainment value. Value provide individual with specific reason for pursuing a given goal. Wintzel (1999) establishes a taxonomy of this type goal:
    - **Self-assertive, social relationship goals-** refer to the attainment of individuality, self-determination, superiority and acquisition of social resources.
    - **Integrating relationship goals:** Refer to attainment of common relationships, responsibility and social commitments, equity or justice, provision of social resources.

### **Conclusions, Inconsistencies and Educational Implications**

Goal theory incorporates a new variable into the study of motivation

of academic accomplishment which is essential for understanding, teaching learning process, this becomes revolutionary in this area of study. Together with other more classical theories and models of motivation, they form an encouraging panorama. However, there continue to be inconsistencies in this theory, worth taking into consideration in near future.

- The study of students, goal has been biased towards the study of academic type goals to the detriment of social goals. The latter are being found to have great importance, especially in students from more disadvantaged educational contexts.
- The recent conceptualization of goals as a multidimensional phenomenon has led to consideration of refocusing the field from the predominantly individual point of view to an interactionist view, where research joins the study of goals as an individual variable, as a variable influenced by context, and as an interactive variable together with personal factor (stable and modifiable) and contextual factors. The study is currently being adopted with other learning and performance phenomenon. (Renzulli and Yun 2001).

Therefore, any educational intervention directed toward improvement of students' motivation should adopt a multidimensional focus.

1. Include goals integrated with other motivational variable and learning strategies teaching students to self-regulate themselves in a coordinated way. (Dumb, 2000).
2. Establish measure for improvement of motivational and learning processes both in the classroom context and in students.
3. Evaluate possible interactive effects between different type of goals which the teaching process suggest to students goals which the students construct in the situation depending on their personal variables and the interaction between both in order to explain learning and performance.

Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) refer to this problematic situation with considerable precision:

“Over the last two decade, there has been a strong concern with reducing external motivation influence and trying to energize intrinsic sources. The latter is a worthy goal as we endorse but energizing intrinsic source of motivation does not necessarily mean that all extrinsic sources are suspect, The negative evaluation of extrinsic motivation( reward, reinforcement) performance goals, and situational interest might all be seen as natural outcome of concerns.

Time has come to reevaluate the situation. The original concern over the power of external influences was a relation to behaviourism.

One consequence of this reaction is that we have now ended up denying the importance of external influences including those that that may be necessary to give all students a decent, if not equal, chance to achieve. Furthermore, we consider students who want to excel by trying to be among the best to have maladaptive or particularly incorrect goal. Is this not absurdity?”

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