Achievement Goal Orientations and Performance in English: A study of Secondary School Students

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Abstract

This paper aimed to determine achievement goal orientations of student and its effects on their performance in English at secondary level. The study used the Patterns for Adaptive Learning Scale which was developed while students' achievement was measured by a multiple choice test. The study showed that students had a multiple goal orientation. Majority of students had mastery goal orientation, followed by performance-avoid and performance-approach goal orientation. They were slightly more mastery oriented in general but in the high-low category they had high performance-avoidance goal orientation, followed by high performance-approach, and high mastery goal orientation. It was concluded that students' performance was significantly correlated with students' achievement goal orientation and students' mastery goal orientation was a strong predictor of achievement. Teachers may provide students with meaningful activities to increase their motivation and encourage them for learning. Effort may be made to reduce performance avoid orientations in students.

Key Words: English Learning, Achievement, Mastery and Performance Goals.

Introduction

Students' achievement goal orientation is an important area of study. Cognitive psychologists have remained interested in understanding students' goal orientation and its impact on their performance. Changes in educational environment, needs and motives of students, changing curricula, and modern trends in teaching have increased the importance of achievement goal orientation for students' success. Achievement goal orientation is a pattern of beliefs, attributions, and concern that produces the behavior and is represented by how students approach, engage, and respond to learning tasks (Ames, 1992). A purpose or outcome that students pursue is a goal and why students pursue it is their goal orientation, resulting in goal-directed behavior. Goal

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orientations are the reason for which students engage in achievement tasks (Was, 2006), and describes the purpose of students for achieving a goal (Cheung, 2008). Schools need to help students understand and achieve their educational goals. This research work was undertaken to help understand and plan for these needs.

Review of Literature

Student's motivation for learning can be explained to a large extent by their favored achievement orientation. Students develop goals for learning through examination, through understanding about themselves, the task, and their prospects of success. Goal orientation relates to beliefs concerning ability, achievement and effort, and is an aspect of achievement motivation that affects success in various fields (Lawson, 2005). Major types of goal orientations include mastery goal orientation, performance-approach goal orientation, and performance-avoid goal orientation. Mastery goal orientation, also called learning goals and task-oriented goals (Peer, 2007), is about developing competence, personal growth, increasing adaptive learning, and mastering the environment. Student having mastery goal orientation define success as mastering the task, learning new skills and knowledge, and progress over past performance (Ames, 1992) focusing on self-improvement and self-actualization (Kaplan & Flum, 2010). Such students are interested in learning new things, willing to expend effort, and confront challenging tasks. Such students undertake challenging tasks for the sake of learning, thus they relate positively to learning, study skills and engagement. These students view mistakes as learning opportunities and may ask others for feedback and help. They set rationally challenging goals, and react to failure properly, and assume responsibility for learning. Such students regard learning as valuable, consider learning as an ongoing process, and chart their own progress than comparing it to performance of others work hard, and try things that they don't already know how to do. Student mastery goal orientation predicts behavioral and

emotional engagement (Gonida, Voulala, and Kiosseoglou, 2009).

Performance goal orientation refers to orientation towards demonstrating competence, and impression formation. Students having performance goal orientation are concerned about how others perceive their ability. They want to create recognition about their high ability or want to show that they do not have low ability. These students focus on externally defined norms like high grades, completing responsibilities with little effort, and doing better than others. They regard learning knowledge and skills as means to demonstrate ability and to increase self-worth (Ames, 1992; Kaplan & Flum, 2010). Such students want extrinsic approval, and surpassing tangible performance goals (Canfield & Zastavker, 2010). They care more about social comparison (Cheung, 2008), considering other people working on that task as reference and try to perform their task better. A reason behind it is that such students cannot decide about their successful without making comparison with others (Dinc, 2010). Such students work hard only on tasks that can give good achievement scores and are disinclined to help others. If they do not get positive external evaluations, they might become indifferent or start putting the things off etc. Performance oriented students are focused on winning and they believe that success results from winning .Researchers have further divided performance goals into performance-approach goals and performance-avoidance goals.

Performance-avoidance goals involve orientation towards avoiding showing low ability, and are associated with academic worries. Such goals are directed at avoiding the demonstration of lack of competence (Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, and Niemivirta, 2012) focusing on avoiding performing a task worse than others (Dinc, 2010). Performance-avoid orientation approach is considered as an aversive achievement orientation as it reduces students' intrinsic motivation (Byrne, 2011). Performance-avoid oriented students want to avoid looking like being deficient in ability, or less able than their peers

(Wolters, 2004). Researchers argue that students might have several achievement goals at the same time and to varying degrees. Students differ in the report of multiple goals and might have high, medium, or low mastery goals or performance goals (Kaplan and Flum, 2010). Lau and Lee (2006) found that students with high motivation on both goal orientations were more advantageous than students who pursued either single goal.

Goal Orientation and Students' Performance

Achievement goal orientation affects student's performance. Higher proficiency is linked with mastery goal orientation pointing out that mastery goal orientation is significant in students' achievement. (Lin, Hung & Lin, 2006). Mattern (2005) found a significant difference between achievement of students having high mastery goal orientation and students having high performance goals. Lawson (2005) found that mastery, performance-avoid, and the cooperation work orientation had the highest frequency but none of these orientations related to success. Linnenbrink (2005) found that students' mastery goals were beneficial while performance-approach goals were detrimental for achievement. Abd-El-Fattah (2006) found students' performance approach and mastery goals as important predictors of students' achievement, followed by parent involvement at home and school, and performance-avoidance goals. Awan, Noureen and Naz (2011) revealed that achievement motivation was significantly related to academic achievement. Patricia, Soh, and Choo (2011) affirmed significant correlation between goal orientations and Chemistry results and found mastery-approach goal orientation as positively related to performance. Moshtaghi (2012) found that mastery-approach and performance-approach orientations were positive predictors of achievement while performance-avoidance orientation was a negative predictor for academic achievement. Merriman, Clariana and Bernardi (2012) found mastery goals as positively correlated with achievement in the absence of outcome feedback and negatively correlated with

achievement in its presence, while performance goal orientation was positively correlated with achievement irrespective of outcome feedback. Objective of the study were to

1. Find out the type of achievement goal orientations of students at secondary level
2. Determine the effects of the type of achievement goal orientation on students' performance.

Following hypotheses were developed for the study.

Hypothesis 1. Boys and girls students have different types of achievement goal orientation

Ho: Achievement goal orientation of boys and girl students is the same

Hypothesis 2: Type of achievement goal orientation has significant effect on students' performance.

Ho: Type of achievement goal orientation has no significant effect on student performance.

Research Methodology

It was a survey study. Its population consisted of boys and girls students enrolled at the secondary level at High and Higher Secondary schools in Peshawar. An equal-sized stratified sample of boy and girl students was selected from the schools. The equal-sized sample is preferable when subgroup comparisons are desired and helped avoid the effects of variables like population difference between rural and urban areas etc. from the collected data.

Research Instrument

The study used items from the Patterns for Adaptive Learning Scale (PALS). It is based on achievement goal theory and applies the multiple-goal perspective in determining perceptions of students. Items on the scale were translated in Urdu to suit the learning context. Students' achievement was measured by using an objective type multiple-choice test based on textbook of

English for grade IX-X. The items helped test students' knowledge, comprehension, use of grammar, and command of the course content. PALS is reliable and has high concurrent, construct, and discriminated validity. A panel of experts determined the face validity and content validity and the items were revised according to their suggestions and pilot testing.

Students' responses to items about goal orientation were added to obtain their mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoid goal scores. They were then categorized into high and low achievement goal groups by using Median splits. Correlation coefficient (r) was applied to determine the strength of the association between variables. Regression analysis was used to identify significant predictors of achievement and to study the effects of students' achievement goal orientation on their performance.

Table 1. Types of achievement goal orientations of boys and girls

			Boys (N=1099)				Girls (N=1104)				t-test		
		Group	f	%	M	SD	f	%	M	SD	t	df	Sig
1	Mastery goal orientation	High	490	45	24.4	0.6	503	46	23.9	0.8	10.3	489	.000
		Low	609	55	19.6	3.9	601	54	19.8	2.5	-1.23	600	.219
2	Performance-approach goal orientation	High	523	48	23.2	1.0	606	55	23.0	1.1	3.28	522	.001
		Low	576	52	16.4	3.9	498	45	17.1	3.8	-3.25	497	.001
3	Performance-avoid goal orientation	High	567	52	18.8	1.0	590	53	19.4	0.7	-10.79	566	.001
		Low	532	48	12.9	2.7	514	47	14.8	3.0	-10.44	513	.000

$p<0.05$

Table 1 presented that 45% boys had high mastery goal orientation (Mean=24.4, SD=0.6) and 55% boys had low mastery goal orientation (Mean=19.6, SD=3.9). 48% boys had high performance-approach goal orientation (Mean=23.2, SD=1.0) as compared to 52% boys who had low performance-approach goal orientation (Mean=16.4, SD=3.9). Furthermore, 52% boys had high performance-avoid goal orientation (Mean=8.8, SD=1.0) while 48% boys had low performance-avoid goal orientation (Mean=12.9, SD=2.7).

It also showed that 46% of girls had high mastery goal orientation (Mean=23.9, SD=0.8) and 54% girls had low mastery goal orientation (Mean=19.8, SD=2.5). 55% girls had high performance-approach goal orientation (Mean=23.0, SD=.1) as compared to 45% girls who had low performance-approach goal orientation (Mean=17.1, SD=3.8). Furthermore, 53% girls had high performance-avoid goal orientation (Mean=19.4, SD=0.7) while 47% girls had low performance-avoid goal orientation (Mean=14.8, SD=3.0).

Table 2. Types of achievement goal orientations of all the students (N=2203)

		Group	f	%	M	SD	t	df	sig
1	Mastery Goal Orientation	High	993	45	24.1	0.8	38.4	992	.000
		Low	1210	55	19.7	3.3			
2	Performance-Approach Goal Orientation	High	1129	51	23.1	1.1	52.9	1073	.000
		Low	1074	49	16.7	3.8			
3	Performance-Avoid Goal Orientation	High	1157	53	19.1	0.9	54.2	1045	.000
		Low	1046	47	13.8	3.0			

$p<0.05$

Table 2 presented the goal orientation of all the students. It showed that 45% students had high mastery goal orientation (Mean=24.1, SD=0.8) and 55% students had low mastery goal orientation (Mean=19.7, SD=3.3). The difference between high and low mastery goal groups was significant (t=38.4, df=992, $p<0.05$) 51% students had high performance-approach goal orientation (Mean=23.1, SD=1.1) as compared to 49% students who had low performance-approach goal orientation (Mean=16.7, SD=3.8). The difference between high and low performance-approach goal groups was significant (t = 52.9, df=1073, $p<0.05$). Furthermore, 53% students had high performance-avoid goal orientation (Mean=19.1, SD=0.9) while 47% students had low performance-avoid goal orientation (Mean=13.8, SD=3.0). The difference between high and low performance-avoid goal groups was significant (t=54.2, df=1045, $p<0.05$). The data showed that that students had a multiple goal

orientation. They were slightly more mastery oriented in general but in the high-low category they had high performance avoid goal orientation, followed by high performance-approach, and high mastery goal orientation. Analysis of data revealed that boys and girls had different types of achievement goal orientations. The research hypothesis that boys and girls have different types of achievement goal orientation was, therefore, accepted.

Table 3. Achievement goal orientations and performance of boys and girl students

			Performance test score							
			Boys (N=1099)				Girls (N=1104)			
		Group	Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD
1	Mastery goal orientation	High	6	30	16.9	4.9	0	29	21.4	4.2
		Low	3	30	14.2	5.9	0	29	15.9	5.5
2	Performance approach goal orientation	High	5	30	16.1	5.4	0	29	19.8	5.1
		Low	3	30	14.8	5.8	0	29	16.7	5.8
3	Performance avoid goal orientation	High	5	30	16.6	5.0	0	29	19.0	5.8
		Low	3	30	14.2	6.0	0	29	17.7	5.3

Table 3 revealed that boys having high mastery goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 16.9 (Min.=6. Max.=30, SD=4.9) while boys having low mastery goals had a mean performance test score of 14.2 (Min.=3, Max.=30, SD=5.9). Similarly boys having high performance-approach goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 16.1 (Min.=5. Max.=30, SD=5.4) while boys having low performance-approach goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 14.8 (Min.=3, Max.=30, SD=5.8). Furthermore, boys having high performance-avoid goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 16.6 (Min.=5. Max.=30, SD=5.0) while boys having low performance-avoid goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 14.2 (Min.=3, Max.=30, SD=6.0).

Furthermore girls having high mastery goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 21.4 (Min.=0. Max.=29, SD=4.2) while girls having

low mastery goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 15.9 (Min.=0, Max.=29, SD=5.5). Similarly girls having high performance-approach goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 19.8 (Min.=0. Max.=29, SD=5.1) while girls having low performance-approach goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 16.7 (Min.=0, Max.=29, SD=5.8). Girls having high performance-avoid goals had a mean performance test score of 19.0 (Min.=0. Max.=29, SD=5.8) while girls having low performance-avoid goals had a mean performance test score of 17.7 (Min.= 0, Max.=29, SD=5.3). The data showed that girl students having one type of achievement goal orientation scored higher on achievement test than boy students having the same type of achievement goal orientation.

Table 4. Achievement goal orientations and performance of all students (N=2203)

		Performance test score							
		Group	**Min**	**Max**	**M**	**SD**	**T**	**df**	**Sig**
1	Mastery goal orientation	High	0	30	19.2	5.1	16.7	992	.000
		Low	0	30	15.1	5.8			
2	Performance-approach goal orientation	High	0	30	18.1	5.6	9.6	1073	.000
		Low	0	30	15.7	5.9			
3	Performance-avoid goal orientation	High	0	30	17.8	5.6	7.5	1045	.000
		Low	0	30	15.9	6.0			

$p<0.05$

Table 4 revealed that students having high mastery goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 19.2 (Min.=0. Max.=30, SD=5.1) while students having low mastery goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 15.6 (Min.=0, Max.=30, SD=5.8). The difference between high and low mastery goal groups was significant (t=16.7, df=992, $p<0.05$). Similarly students having high performance-approach goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 18.1 (Min.=0. Max.=30, SD=5.6) while students having low performance-approach goal orientation had a mean performance

test score of 15.7 (Min.=0, Max.=30, SD=5.9). The difference between high and low performance-approach goal groups was significant (t=9.6, df=1073, p<0.05). Furthermore, students having high performance-avoid goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 17.8 (Min.=0. Max.=30, SD=5.6) while students having low performance-avoid goal orientation had a mean performance test score of 15.9 (Min.=0, Max.=30, SD=6.0). The difference between high and low performance-avoid goal groups was significant (t=7.5, df=1045, p<0.05).

Table 5. Students achievement goal orientations and performance (N=2203)

	1	2	3	4
1 Test Score		.417*	.169*	.265*
2 Mastery goal orientation			.327*	.279*
3 Performance-approach goal orientation				.434*
4 Performance-avoid goal orientation				

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

p<0.05

From the analysis of the data it was revealed that students performance was highly and significantly correlated with students' mastery goal orientation (r=0.417, p<0.05), students' performance was also positively and significantly correlated with students' performance-approach goal orientation (r=0.169, p<0.05), similarly students' performance was also significantly correlated with students' performance-avoid goal orientation (r=0.265, p<0.05). Therefore, the research hypothesis that type of achievement goal orientation has significant effect on students' performance was accepted and the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 6. Coefficients showing predictability of student achievement through students' goal orientations

Model	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		

1	(Constant)	-2.922	1.163		-2.512	.012
	Mastery Goal Orientation	.614	.040	.351	15.310	.000
	Performance-Approach Goal Orientation	-.066	.033	-.048	-2.025	.043
	Performance-Avoid Goal Orientation	.300	.040	.175	7.399	.000

Regression analysis was carried out using performance test scores as dependent variable and students' Goal orientations as predictors. The table showed that students mastery goal orientation was statistically significant predictor of students' performance (β=0.351, $p<0.05$). Students' performance-approach goal orientation was statistically but negatively significant predictor of performance (β=-0.048, $p<0.05$), while Students performance-avoid goal orientation was statistically significant predictor of students' performance (β=0.175, $p<0.05$).

Conclusions and Recommendations

It was concluded that Students had a multiple goal orientation. Majority of students had mastery goal orientation, followed by performance-avoid goal orientation, which was followed by performance-approach goal orientation. For students having mastery goal orientation; majority of students had low mastery goal orientation. Girls had high performance-approach goal orientation than boys. Majority of students had high performance-avoid goal orientation. Achievement goal orientation of boys and girls were not significantly correlated and only boys performance-approach goal orientation was significantly but negatively correlated with girls' mastery goal orientation. It was concluded that students having high mastery goal orientation performed higher on performance test than students having low mastery goal orientation. Students having high performance-approach goal orientation scored higher on a performance test than students having low performance-approach goal orientation. Students having high performance-avoid goal orientation performed higher than students having low performance-avoid goal

orientation. Some gender differences were also observed as girls scored slightly higher on performance test than boys having the same type of goal orientation. The study concluded that students' performance was significantly correlated with students' goal orientation and students' mastery goal orientation was a strong predictor of achievement.

It was recommended that teachers may provide students with meaningful activities to increase motivation and should encourage them for learning. As studies have shown that performance-avoid goal orientation was linked with maladaptive learning practices, effort may be made to reduce performance avoid orientations in students.

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