

## Effects of Goal Orientations on Coping Strategies and Self-Efficacy for Ethiopian University Students in Their Academic Life

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**Abstract:** This study examined the effects of goal orientations endorsed by Ethiopian university students on their coping strategies when they encountered setbacks in their academic life and their self-efficacy. Participants were 163 male and 63 female students. Multiple regression and analysis of variance were used for the analysis purposes. Thus the research result in mastery goal orientation predicted active coping ( $\beta = 0.157$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), positive reinterpretation and growth ( $\beta = 0.288$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), planning ( $\beta = 0.245$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) in the face of failure whereas only performance avoidance goal predicted negative coping strategies. There is a significant difference in endorsing performance goal orientation due to gender difference in favor of male participants.

**Key words:** Achievement motivation, goal orientations, performance approach, mastery goal, performance avoidance goal, self-efficacy, university students, Ethiopia

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### INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the achievement goal approach to achievement motivation has become the predominant conceptual framework used to study behavior in school, sport and work settings. Achievement goals are defined as the purpose or cognitive-dynamic focus of competence-relevant activity (Elliot, 1999) and the specific goal adopted is posited to influence how individuals interpret and experience achievement settings (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984). Mastery goal orientation focuses on developing one's competence and a performance goal orientation focus on demonstrating one's competence (Linnenbrink, 2005). Mastery goals orient the student toward learning and understanding, developing new skills and a focus on self-improvement using self-referenced standards.

In contrast, performance goal represent a concern with demonstrating ability, obtaining recognition of high ability, protecting self-worth and a focus on comparative standards relative to other students and attempting to be best or surpass others.

The performance-avoidance refers to the motive to avoid failure. Individuals who possess such type of goal usually avoid difficult tasks and they don't want to be seen as failed one in front of others. This study based on the theoretical framework of the trichotomous goal orientation that comprises mastery, performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals.

The purposes of this study are one to investigate the impact of goal orientation endorsed by university students on their coping strategies when they encountered academic setback: two, is the goal endorsed has relationship to the self-efficacy of the students. Thirdly, it discover whether there is gender difference in the goal endorsed and the coping strategies employed when they encountered academic failure. Research in the area of achievement goals and self-efficacy were scarce in Ethiopia, in particular and Africa, in general. Therefore, this research may serve as one initiative to encourage future researchers to investigate whether finding in the Western countries also applicable in Africa and Ethiopia by taking in to cultural and developmental factors.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Procedures in data collection:** Participants were completed the goal items adopted from Elliot and Church (1997) that consists of 18 items 6 items for each goal i.e., performance approach, mastery and performance avoidance goals respectively and Self-efficacy adopted from Pintrich and De Groot (1990). After the completion of goals and self-efficacy scales they were received one of the two randomly assigned scenarios, shown in previous research to elicit motivational differences (Grant and Dweck, 2003). The scenario asked them to read about a failure experience in a college classroom and to imagine it that it happened to them. These two scenarios were

vividly written and selected to represent situations that they could easily personally relate to (i.e., performing poorly in the last year first semester of graduating while you badly need the good grade for further education). Here is an example:

Imagine that you are highly interested to join postgraduate study/master program/as soon as you completed your undergraduate study in order to specialize in one of your favorite field of study. You know very well that one of the most important requirements to get acceptance for that field of specialization is a CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average) of 3.00 point and above in undergraduate/bachelor degree/field of study. Your cumulative grade results up to the final year of the study were 3.05. Unfortunately, you got 2.5 semester average point in the first semester of the last year that brought your CGPA down to 2.85 i.e., 0.15 less than the required.

Participants were asked to indicate what they would think, how they would feel and how they would behave after the failure by rating their degree of agreement with a series of statements of Ways of Coping Scale (COPE; Carver *et al.*, 1989). This scale measures the ways in which individuals have coped with difficulties when they have arisen. Subscales include active coping, planning, positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance, denial, behavioral disengagement, suppression of competing activities, turning to religion, focus on and venting of emotions, restraint coping, seeking social support for instrumental and seeking social support for emotional reasons and alcohol-drug taking.

**Participants:** In this study, the relationship between individuals' goal orientations preferences and the coping strategies they employ when they encounter difficult and challenging academic experiences are presented. Totally there were 226 sophomores and above Arbaminch University, Ethiopia, students participated in this study; in which 163 of them were male and the remaining 63 were female. The number of females was smaller than their male counterparts due to gender demography of the present Ethiopians' universities. Although, the number of female students who joined university is growing steadily, the attrition rate is also high compared to male students.

## RESULTS

Each scenario were tested whether they were a predictor, it was found that there were no effect of scenario version. This followed by a multiple regression

Table 1: Goal orientations and responses to failure experience

Goals	Active coping	Positive reinter and growth	Planning	Focus on and venting emotions	Denial
P. approach	0.130	-0.002	0.081	0.024	-0.004
Mastery	0.157*	0.288***	0.245***	0.094	-0.066
P. avoidance	0.105	-0.038	-0.043	0.188**	0.146*

Values are standard regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ). \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

analysis for goal orientation and the different type of coping strategies. Then, a multiple regression analysis was done for self-efficacy and the three goal orientations. In both cases goal orientations, performance approach, mastery and performance avoidance goal were considered as predictors variables. In addition to this, ANOVA was done for whether there were gender differences among participants in their preference of one type of goal orientation than the other.

**Goal orientations and coping strategies:** Mastery goal orientation is good predictor of positive coping strategies in the face of failure or setback. It predicted active coping, ( $\beta = 0.157$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), positive reinterpretation and growth ( $\beta = 0.288$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), planning ( $\beta = 0.245$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Other types of positive as well as negative coping strategies were not significant (Table 1).

Performance goal orientation was not significant in predicting significantly either the positive or negative coping strategies in the face of setback. On the other hand, performance avoidance goal orientation is good predictor of negative coping strategies. It predicted focus on and venting emotions ( $\beta = 0.188$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and denial ( $\beta = 0.146$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Although there were no significance in the test of performance avoidance goal orientation and positive coping strategies in the face of setback, the direction of beta show it had negative relationship to planning and positive reinterpretation and growth. Similarly, both performance approach and mastery goal have an indication that they are negatively related to denial.

**Goal orientations and self-efficacy:** In addition to testing goal orientation to whether they are predictors of different coping strategies in the face of failure, it has been tested whether they are predictors of self-efficacy or not. Performance goal orientation and mastery goal orientation predicted self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.323$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and ( $\beta = 0.349$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), respectively. Although not significant, performance avoidance goal was a negative predictor of self-efficacy with  $\beta = -0.059$ . It is clear that its implication is self-efficacy is inimical to this goal.

**Goal orientations and coping strategies by gender:** Here, analysis of variance was done to test whether gender of the participants matter on the type of goal orientations they endorsed and coping strategies they employed in the face of setback. There were a gender difference in mean of male and female participants in respect to their goal orientation endorsed in which ( $F(1, 224) = 10.297, p < 0.01$ ). The male students dominantly endorsed performance approach goal orientation compared to their female counterpart in which (Males mean was 33.14 and Females mean was 30.48). There were no significant gender difference in the remaining goal orientation, i.e., mastery and performance avoidance goal orientations.

Analysis of variance revealed that there was gender difference in their preference of endorsing coping strategies when they encounter academically challenging experiences. The male students dominantly demonstrated suppression of competing activities compared to their female counterpart in which ( $F(1, 224) = 8.196, p < 0.01$ ). The rest of coping strategies were not significant, i.e., means have not significant effect on the type of coping strategies employed by students when they encountered academically challenging experiences regardless of their gender.

Parental education, fathers' and mothers' educational achievement have no significant contribution in the type of goal orientation and coping strategies preferred by their children. In addition to this, family background, neither the participants have rural nor urban background have showed no significance in compelling participants to select one type of goal orientation than the other or implementing positive or negative forms of coping strategies in the face of challenge or setback.

## DISCUSSION

As it was indicated in the introductory section the purposes of this study were to investigate how the goal endorsed by Ethiopian university students affect their academic coping strategies in the face of failure, how the goal endorsed relate to their self-efficacy and are their gender difference in the type of goal endorsed and coping strategies employed.

The result of this study uncovered there is distinction between performance approach and performance avoidance goal orientation in which negative coping strategies as focus on and venting emotions and denials were a characteristics feature of those individuals who endorsed performance avoidance goal orientation but not significant among those individuals who endorsed performance approach goal. Mastery goal

orientation was characterized by positive coping strategies like active coping, planning and positive reinterpretation and growth (Ames and Archer, 1988; Butler, 1993; Elliott and Dweck, 1988). The finding claim performance goals related to maladaptive behaviors, while mastery goal characterized by adaptive behaviors. Therefore, from this result one distinguish that performance approach and performance avoidance goals should be seen independently. It is the performance avoidance but not performance approach should be coined to negative coping strategies in the face of setbacks.

Self-efficacy refers to individual's belief in one's capability to perform certain tasks successfully. Bell and Kozlowski (2002) uncovered mastery orientation was significantly and positively related to individuals' self-efficacy, whereas performance orientation only related negatively to individuals' performance. However, the finding of this study uncovered it is not only those individuals who endorsed mastery goal display high levels of self-efficacy but also those individuals who endorsed performance approach goal demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy.

It is only those individuals who endorsed performance avoidance goal although it is not significant, negatively related to self-efficacy.

Another important finding of this study is the variation observed in performance approach goal orientation and coping strategies in the face of failure by individuals' gender. Male participants demonstrated better endorsement of the performance approach goal orientation than their female counterpart. The implication of this result is immense. It is known that performance goal represent a concern with demonstrating ability, obtaining recognition of high ability, protecting self-worth and a focus on comparative standards relative to other students and attempting to best or surpass others. Earlier study by McClelland *et al.* (1953) indicated that the quality of achievement training received by children varied as a function of their culture, their social class and the attitude of their parents about the value of independence and achievement. These imply that people from different societies think of achievement in very different ways. At the same time, suppression of competing activities when one encountered academic setback was observed among males than their counterparts. Therefore, the cultural factors, parenting style, beliefs of the society in which children brought up play an important role in inculcating coping strategies males and females adhere in the face of challenge or failure.

## CONCLUSION

It may be possible to safely conclude that there are cultural factors that play a role in encouraging male students to endorse performance approach goal than female. This may be due to cultural factors that enhanced males' competitive behaviors and discouraged females' competitiveness. Similarly, male participants suppress competing activities when they encountered setbacks so as to concentrate in tackling the challenge they encountered. Therefore, this can be one research direction for that particular culture; researchers should identify the factors that have contributed in strengthening performance approach goal orientation and preference of suppressing competing activities in the face of failures among males.

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