



# Do competitive performance goals and cooperative social goals conflict? A latent interaction analysis



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## ABSTRACT

From a multiple goal perspective, this study examined the potential interaction between competitive performance goals and cooperative social goals in their relationship with math achievement. A group of 297 Singapore Primary 4 students completed a survey on achievement goals and a math achievement test. We conducted a latent interaction analysis and found that after controlling for gender and socio-economic status (SES), these two types of goals did not predict math achievement, but there was a negative interaction between them. More specifically, higher social/performance goals were associated with higher math achievement when the other goals were low, and higher social/performance goals were associated with lower math achievement when the other goals were high. These findings suggest that competitive performance and cooperative social goals are conflicting when they are combined to predict achievement. The findings enhance our understanding of the multiple goals perspective and the implications for teaching and learning are discussed.

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Over the last three decades, achievement goals have been one of the most prominent constructs for understanding student motivation and learning. The theory of achievement goals has also undergone significant development over time. Most motivation researchers now agree that achievement goals are a multidimensional construct, which comprises various types of goals, such as mastery goals (approach and avoidance), performance goals (approach and avoidance), and social goals (e.g., social affiliation and social approval goals). In addition, from a multiple goals perspective, students can hold several goals at the same time, which might combine with each other in an additive, synergistic or antagonistic way. Although some studies examined the combined effect of mastery and performance goals in learning (e.g., Daniels et al., 2008; Luo, Paris, Hogan, & Luo, 2011; Pintrich, 2000), little research has examined the interplay between social goals and other achievement goals. Given the importance of the social context in schooling, achievement motivation should not be studied independently of social goals. In this study, we examined the interaction between social goals and performance goals with Singapore elementary students using a latent interaction analysis.

## 1. Achievement goals and learning

Early research of achievement goals generally supported the traditional normative goal perspective, in which mastery goals are regarded as adaptive and performance goals are maladaptive (for a review, see Ames, 1992). More recently, however, some studies reported that performance goals facilitated learning in some situations, such as academic performance of university students (e.g., Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999; Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, Carter, & Elliot, 2000). This inconsistency has prompted numerous empirical studies in student achievement goals. Furthermore, in recent years this motivational construct has undergone significant theoretical development in three areas.

First, both mastery and performance goals have been bifurcated by the approach-avoidance distinction, which leads to the  $2 \times 2$  achievement goal framework (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Recent studies have shown that in general mastery approach goals are associated with positive learning profiles (e.g., Luo, Aye, Hogan, Kaur, & Chan, 2013; Luo, Paris, Hogan, & Luo, 2011; Murayama & Elliot, 2009; Yeung, Craven, & Kaur, 2012). However, mixed findings have been associated with performance approach goals and researchers have not come to a consensus about whether performance approach goals should be encouraged (see Elliot & Moller, 2003; Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Thrash, 2002; Midgley, Kaplan, & Middleton, 2001). A recent meta-analysis suggests that there should be finer distinctions within performance approach goals, such as between those that focus on competitive/

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normative comparison and competence appearance/demonstration (Hulleman, Schragger, Bodmann, & Harackiewicz, 2010). The finding of this meta-analysis suggests that performance goals with a focus on normative comparison might be more adaptive to academic performance than performance goals with a focus on competence demonstration, but more studies should be carried out to examine their relative impact on student learning. The two types of avoidance goals have been generally associated with maladaptive learning, such as high anxiety, low perceived competence and low grades (for a meta-analysis, see Hulleman et al., 2010).

Second, a multiple goals perspective has been proposed. Compared to the normative achievement goals perspective that regards mastery goals as the only adaptive type of goals, a multiple goals perspective points out that students may adopt multiple goals simultaneously, which leads to multiple pathways of learning (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Harackiewicz et al., 2000; Harackiewicz et al., 2002; Pintrich, 2000). Using various methods, numerous studies have been conducted to examine the interplay between mastery and performance goals. Using median splits to dichotomize mastery and performance approach goals, Pintrich (2000) found that eighth and ninth graders who endorsed high mastery and performance approach goals had an equally adaptive pattern of motivation, affect, cognition and achievement as those who just focused on mastery goals. Using K-means cluster analysis, Daniels et al. (2008) classified 1002 Canadian undergraduate students into four clusters, according to their mastery and performance approach goals. They found that the multiple goals, mastery goals, and performance goals clusters achieved significantly better than the low-motivation cluster, but performance-oriented students displayed a maladaptive emotional profile relative to the other three groups. More recently, using latent class cluster analysis, Luo, Paris, Hogan, and Luo (2011) identified four goal clusters: Diffuse (moderate multiple), Moderate Mastery (moderate mastery/low performance approach and avoidance), Success Oriented (moderate mastery/high performance approach and avoidance), and Approach (high mastery and performance approach/low performance avoidance). By examining cluster differences in a number of learning variables, they suggested that the goal profile with high mastery and performance approach goals combined with low performance avoidance goals is most beneficial for learning, whereas high performance approach goals, when associated with performance avoidance goals, have some negative effects on affective outcomes. Some other studies (e.g., Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Harackiewicz, Barron, Carter, Lehto, & Elliot, 1997; Harackiewicz et al., 2000) examined the two types of goals and their multiplicative term in multiple regression models and found that the two types of achievement goals were independently beneficial for different academic outcomes. With college students as participants, these studies reported that in general those adopting mastery goals were more interested in subject learning, but those adopting performance approach goals achieved higher performance.

Third, researchers have proposed that in addition to mastery and performance goals, students also hold social goals in academic achievement situations (Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 1999). We analyze social goals in the following sections.

## 2. Social goals at school

Schools are inherently social environments, and thus student achievement motivation cannot be studied in isolation of the social context of teaching and learning. There are different approaches towards student social goals. For example, a goal orientation approach distinguishes three achievement goal orientations towards achieving social competence in social domains that are analogous to mastery, performance approach and performance avoidance goals identified in academic domains (Ryan & Shim, 2006, 2008). A content approach defines goals (Wentzel, 1999, 2000) to be outcomes that direct individual

behaviors, and students in school situations may try to achieve both academically (e.g., to do well in tasks) and socially (e.g., to please teachers, to gain approval from others, or to cooperate with classmates). To coordinate the pursuit of these goals effectively, students may prioritize goals and associate each other in hierarchical or causal fashion. For example, some students might pursue academic goals in order to achieve social goals (e.g., pleasing teachers or parents), while others might pursue social goals (e.g., pleasing teachers or adhering to classroom rules) in order to achieve academic goals (Wentzel, 1999, 2000). This former academic → social goal hierarchy is consistent with the definition of students' social goals to be the perceived social purposes for engaging or not engaging in academic study (Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). We adopt this definition of social goals in this study. Based on interviews and classroom observations, Dowson and McInerney (2003) found various forms of social goals for engaging in academic study, including social affiliation goals (to work together with other students cooperatively in academic study), social concern goals (to help others in academic study), social approval goals (to gain approval from parents, teachers, peers or others in academic study), social status goals (to promote present or future status through academic achievement), and social responsibility goals (to take the role expected or socially desirable in academic study).

Compared with mastery and performance goals, the role of social goals in student motivation and achievement is less clear. Some studies found the unique contribution of social goals in addition to other academic goals, while others revealed a less important role of social goals. For example, social goals to behave in prosocial and responsible ways have been related to student achievement and effort independently of academic goals (Wentzel, 1993, 1996). King, McInerney, and Watkins (2010) reported that social concern goals were associated with adaptive learning strategies and behaviors for Hong Kong students after controlling for mastery and performance goals. However, Ali, Craven, Yeung, McInerney, and King (2014) examined both performance and social goals and reported that only performance goals uniquely predicted the achievement of American high school students. In addition, researchers have suggested that social goals might have different meanings for achievement motivation across cultures, and in particular, social goals might be more salient in collectivistic than in individualistic cultures (Kumar & Maehr, 2007; Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Watkins & Hattie, 2012).

## 3. Performance and social goals

With the inclusion of social goals, a multiple goals perspective of achievement goals becomes more complex. Students may hold multiple academic and social goals simultaneously and these goals may work together in a complementing, conflicting or converging way (Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). For example, an early study reported that students' need for achievement and need for affiliation was in conflict because students high in both needs were less able to maintain attention effectively and achieved lower than those high only in achievement need (Schneider & Green, 1977).

From a multiple goals perspective, many studies have examined how performance goals and mastery goals are combined to influence student learning and achievement. However, little research has been done to examine the potential interplay between performance goals and social goals. Although researchers usually regard performance goals as a type of academic goals that are distinct from social goals (Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Luo et al., 2014; Urdan & Maehr, 1995), the others-referenced performance goals also have a social component, where students want to do better than others in social comparison or demonstrate higher competence than others (Ali et al., 2014; Elliot & Moller, 2003). According to Wentzel (1999, 2000), performance goal orientation reflects a type of academic → social goal hierarchy, where students engage in academic tasks in order to gain positive or avoid negative social judgments of the self. Because performance goals emphasize

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