



# Parental involvement and elementary school students' goals, maladaptive behaviors, and achievement in learning English as a foreign language



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 25 September 2014

Received in revised form 11 January 2015

Accepted 28 March 2015

### Keywords:

Parents' literacy involvement

Perceived parent goals

Trichotomous goals

Maladaptive behaviors

English as a foreign language

## ABSTRACT

The study applied structural equation modeling to examine the predicted relationships among perceived parent goals, parents' literacy involvement at home, students' personal goals, maladaptive behaviors, and achievement for elementary school students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Taiwan. The results indicated: (1) parents' literacy involvement positively predicted students' mastery goals (MGs) and performance-approach goals (PAGs) but negatively predicted approach-avoidance goals (PAVs); (2) perceived parent performance goals were positively related to MGs and PAGs, whereas perceived parent mastery goals negatively predicted PAGs; (3) the predicted relations between PAGs and cheating, disruption, and help-avoidance were all negative, but MGs negatively predicted cheating and help-avoidance; and (4) cheating and help-avoidance were negatively related to English learning achievement. Parents' literacy involvement was a stronger predictor of students' goals than perceived parent goals. EFL elementary school students may be encouraged to adopt PAGs and MGs that are adaptive for English learning outcomes.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Trichotomous goals and maladaptive behaviors

One of the most prominent frameworks for investigating motivation and its influences on learning achievement in school is goal theory (Dweck, 1996; Linnenbrink, 2005; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Nicholls, 1984; Pintrich, 2000). According to this theory, the motivation to learn an academic subject in school is conceptualized as a goal that students endeavor to obtain. A trichotomous-goal model that embeds mastery goals (MGs), performance-approach goals (PAGs), and performance-avoidance goals (PAVs) has been proposed to illuminate students' three distinct purposes for learning (Cury, Elliot, Sarrazin, Da Fonseca, & Rufo, 2002; Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Church, 1997; Midgley, Kaplan, & Middleton, 2001). Students are deemed to adopt MGs if their ultimate purpose for classroom learning is to acquire content knowledge. Other students select PAGs if they strongly intend to demonstrate their superior subject-matter knowledge to peers or to outperform peers on exams (Senko, Hulleman, & Harackiewicz, 2011). By contrast, students espouse PAVs if they intentionally avoid task engagement or interactions with peers and teachers in order to conceal

insufficient knowledge. In other words, MGs, PAGs, and PAVs can be distinguished, depending on whether the purpose for learning a subject is to master knowledge, exhibit superior knowledge, or cloak inadequate knowledge.

Students' goals are associated with cheating, disruption, and help-avoidance (Anderman & Danner, 2008; Anderman & Midgley, 2004; Crouzevialle & Butera, 2013; He, Chang, Chen, & Gou, 2012; Kaplan, Gheen, & Midgley, 2002; Karabenick, 2004; Murdock & Anderman, 2006; Newman, 1990; Niiya, Ballantyne, North, & Crocker, 2008; Shih, 2007; Shim, Cho, & Wang, 2013). Prior research indicates that PAGs and PAVs tend to be positively related to cheating, disruption, and help-avoidance, whereas MGs are negatively associated with these behaviors. To illustrate, when students wish to build up and enrich knowledge in school subjects, those pursuing MGs actively seek help to clarify confusions or problems that puzzle them. They deliberately avoid cheating and disruption that do not benefit knowledge accumulation. Students endorsing PAVs, however, tend to cheat on classwork or tests to get high grades and scores, so knowledge deficits will not be noted. They disrupt lessons and use the disturbance as an excuse for not learning the material – an unsatisfactory learning outcome. Meanwhile, deficient knowledge that may signal failure to learn will not be detected. Additionally, seeking help is viewed as a sign of insufficient knowledge and, therefore, is purposely shunned. Students adopting PAGs also avoid help-seeking behavior because such behavior is a signal of inferior knowledge and prevents them from being recognized as

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smarter than their peers. Furthermore, they purposely disrupt the class to indicate to peers that they do not need to concentrate on subject learning because they have acquired knowledge. They also tend to cheat on schoolwork or tests in order to use the elevated scores to demonstrate their high ability or superior performances. From these perspectives, students' goals are the antecedents of cheating, disruption, and help-avoidance that happen in classrooms where structured learning and teaching take place.

### 1.2. Parental involvement as antecedents of goal adoptions

Parents assume a critical role in students' learning and academic performances in school by providing their children with cognitive and emotional support at home. The research shows that parental involvement (e.g., their help with homework) is positively related to students' interest in their completion of take-home assignments and management of study time (Cai, 2003; Xu, 2008; Xu & Wu, 2013). What is more, parental involvement is a multifaceted construct (Farver, Xu, Eppe, & Lonigan, 2006; Farver, Xu, Lonigan, & Eppe, 2013; Gonida, Karabenick, Makara, & Hatzikyriakou, 2014). Two of its facets, *parent goals* and *parents' academic involvement as perceived by students*, are found to predict students' choices of goals. Perceived parent mastery goals are defined through parents' goal-related messages that emphasize and encourage self-improvement in school, whereas perceived parent performance goals are recognized in those messages that highly value displays of ability or interpersonal comparisons (Midgley et al., 2000). Previous research indicates that perceived parent goals, no matter which type, are antecedents of students' goals (Friedel, Cortina, Turner, & Midgley, 2007; Régner, Loose, & Dumas, 2009). For instance, a study by Gonida, Voulala, and Kiosseoglou (2009) showed that perceived parent mastery goals positively predict junior high school students' MGs and PAGs, whereas perceived parent performance goals positively predict students' PAGs and PAVs. Friedel et al. (2007) reported that if parents emphasize superior performance and high test scores over self-perfection, then students are predicted to choose PAGs. Students perceive and interpret their parents' goal-related messages at home, and then apply such constructs to reinforce their selections of particular types of goals for learning a subject in school. As Friedel, Cortina, Turner, and Midgley (2010) concluded, "parental goal emphases are important contextual factors predicting students' achievement goals" (p. 110).

Perceived parents' academic involvement is another antecedent of students' goals (Gonzalez, Doan Holbein, & Quilter, 2002; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005). For instance, Régner et al. (2009) identified a positive relation between perceived parents' academic involvement and students' MGs, but no association with either PAGs or PAVs. Similarly, Chouinard, Karsenti, and Roy (2007) reported that parents' academic support positively predicts MGs, but it does not predict PAGs. These correlations suggest that perceived parents' academic involvement will affect students' intentions and willingness to improve themselves, exhibit superior knowledge, or retreat from learning in class. Patrick, Ryan, and Kaplan (2007) speculated that students benefit from parents' academic involvement, which may increase their knowledge, promote their confidence in accomplishing tasks, and escalate their interest in mastering school subjects. Subsequently, when engaging in classroom learning, they select those goals they believe are attainable.

### 1.3. Study purpose and research questions

Previous studies have shed light on the predicted relationships among goals, maladaptive behaviors, and parental involvement. Régner et al. (2009) speculated that parents' involvement, either perceived or actual, will affect students' goals. Most studies have examined perceived parents' academic involvement rather than parents' actual involvement, and thus more research effort is needed to confirm the full prediction. Moreover, Friedel et al. (2007) observed that studies

undertaken within goal theory "tend to ignore children's experiences at home" (p. 437). Even the few studies that had taken into account parents' influences did not focus on children who have just started learning their native languages or foreign languages. Accordingly, it remains unclear whether parents' involvement in literacy-related activities at home will affect children's choices of goals in school. Furthermore, although the two facets of parental involvement are antecedents of students' goal choices, they have not been examined concurrently in previous research. Further effort is needed to clarify whether they will exert the same effect. Then parents will better understand whether they should emphasize their messages or personally get involved in literacy activities or both. Additionally, Meece and Holt (1993) cautioned that achievement goals are subject-specific. Echoing this caution, Régner et al. emphasized that "parents and teachers can hold different attitudes and behaviors toward their children and students depending on the academic subject" (p. 271). From this perspective, research findings regarding goal-related consequences (e.g., maladaptive behaviors) or antecedents (e.g., perceived parent goals and parents' academic involvement) in mathematics or psychology should not be applied to all classrooms where different academic subjects are taught. As Crystal (2003) argued, there are over 750 million learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), but they have seldom been the focus of previous studies, let alone those young children who are learning English for a short period of time. Prompted by these shortcomings, the present study has aimed to answer the research questions:

1. Will perceived parent mastery goals and performance goals predict mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals of EFL elementary school students?
2. Will parents' actual involvement in literacy activities at home predict students' trichotomous goals?
3. Of perceived parent goals and parents' literacy involvement, which one will be a stronger predictor of students' goals?
4. Will students' mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals predict their cheating, disruption, or help-avoidance in English classes?
5. Will students' cheating, disruption, and help-avoidance predict their English learning achievement?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Student participants and parent participants

The sample consisted of 161 sixth graders (78 boys and 83 girls; mean age: 11.91) and their parents (96 mothers and 65 fathers of the student participants). Consent forms and participant information sheets had been previously distributed to students and their parents in an elementary school in north Taiwan. Only those who had signed consent forms were invited to take part in this research. Student participants and one of their parents were surveyed with questionnaires when attending a teacher–parent meeting held by the school.

In Taiwan's elementary schools, all subjects except for English are taught in students' native language, which is Taiwan Mandarin (TM). TM is a non-alphabetic language whose phonemes are represented by *Bopomofo*, a non-Romanized phonetic notation system. Its writing system is based on morphemes represented by ideographs (i.e., characters) rather than by graphemes (He & Wang, 2009). In phonology, TM does not have English vowels like /æ/, /au/, and /i/, and there are no TM counterparts to English consonants such as /θ/ and /ð/ (Zhang & Yin, 2009). Moreover, TM is a tone language whose four main tones will distinguish meanings of a syllable, but changes in highness or lowness of the pitch for an English syllable will not alter its meaning. As these differences suggest, once students start their English learning in the third grade, they will engage in learning two linguistically distinct languages.

In the school where participants were selected, English is taught twice a week with each lesson lasting 40 min. A school year consists

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