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Teachers' perceptions of the school goal structure: Relations with teachers' goal orientations, work engagement, and job satisfaction[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Research on goal theory has almost exclusively focused on students' goals and their perception of the classroom goal structure. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perception of the school goal structure as well as relations between goal structure, teaching related goal orientation, engagement for teaching, and job satisfaction. The participants were 2569 teachers in elementary and middle school. Data were analyzed by means of structural equation modeling. Mastery goal structure was directly and positively related to teachers' work-related motivation (engagement and job satisfaction) whereas performance goal structure related to work-related motivation through the teachers' personal goal orientation.

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1. Introduction

Research on teachers' motivation has primarily been concerned with reasons for seeking teacher education (e.g., Richardson & Watt, 2006) whereas surprisingly little theory-driven research has been done to explore teachers' continuous motivation for teaching (Retelsdorf, Butler, Streblov, & Schiefele, 2010). However, recently researchers have used expectancy-value theory (Watt & Richardson, 2007), self-determination theory (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007), and achievement goal theory (Butler, 2007; Papaioannou & Christodoulidis, 2007) in studies of teacher motivation. For instance, in an attempt to establish a theoretical foundation for studying teachers' motivation, Butler (2007) proposed that goal orientation might offer a promising framework for analyzing teachers' motivation. Research on students has shown that goal orientation is predictive of motivational, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes. Following Butler's suggestion the purpose of the present study was therefore to explore how teachers' engagement in teaching and job satisfaction were related both to their personal goal orientation and to their perception of the school goal structure. Whereas goal structure is assumed to influence students' goal orientation we know of no studies exploring both teachers' perceptions of the goal structure at the school where they are teaching and their teaching related goal orientations.

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1.1. Goal orientation

Research on goal theory has primarily been concerned with individual students' goals or goal orientation. Students' goal orientation may be perceived as purposes that students pursue as they engage in achievement tasks (Ames, 1992; Conley, 2012). Historically, researchers discriminated between mastery, learning, or task goals and performance or ego goals (Nicholls, 1983, 1989; Pintrich, 2000). Mastery goals means that learning, understanding, and solving problems are ends in themselves whereas performance goals means that the purpose of achievement behavior is to demonstrate high ability and to be positively perceived by others (Ames & Archer, 1988a, 1988b; Duda & Nicholls, 1992). During the last two decades researchers have discriminated between two dimensions of performance goals, performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals (Skaalvik, Valås, & Sletta, 1994; Skaalvik, 1997; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot & Church, 1997). Central to performance-approach goals is the desire to demonstrate superior abilities whereas performance-avoidance goals refer to the desire to avoid demonstrating inferior abilities.

Research on students has consistently shown that mastery goals are associated with more adaptive motivational, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes (Anderman & Wolters, 2006; Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, Carter, & Elliot, 2000; Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, & Elliot, 2002; Meece & Miller, 2001; Wolters, 2004) whereas performance-avoidance goals are associated with less adaptive outcomes (Skaalvik, 1997; Kaplan & Meahr, 2007; Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006). Research on performance-approach goals shows more inconsistent results; however, recent research shows that it is associated with a number of positive outcomes, for instance effort and persistence (Skaalvik, 1997; Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999; Law, Elliot, & Murayama, 2012).

Although most research on goal orientation has been concerned with students' goals some researchers have used goal orientation in studies of work motivation. For instance, a mastery goal orientation has been found to predict effort (Sujan, Weitz, & Kumar, 1994) and performance (Vande Walle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1999) among salespersons. Research on teachers' goal orientation is scarce. However, Retelsdorf et al. (2010) found a positive correlation between teachers' mastery goal orientation and interest in teaching whereas performance goal orientation was not systematically related to interest in teaching. Also, Papaioannou and Christodoulidis (2007) found that teachers' job satisfaction was positively related to mastery goals, unrelated to performance-approach goals and negatively related to performance-avoidance goals. Butler and Shibaz (2008) also showed that teachers' achievement goals was related to students' perceptions of the teachers and to their classroom behavior. Teacher mastery goals were associated with higher levels of perceived teacher support whereas performance avoidance goals were associated with lower levels of teacher support. Moreover, Butler and Shibaz also found a weak tendency that teacher performance avoidance orientation was predictive of student cheating behavior.

1.2. Goal structure

Goal theory has been concerned not only with personal goals or goal orientation, but also with classroom or school goal structure. Researchers early argued that these achievement goals may be affected by the classroom or school goal structure (Ames, 1992; Ames & Ames, 1984). A mastery goal structure has been described as an environment in which the instructional practices and norms convey to students that learning and understanding is important, that effort and improvement are valued and that all students are valued (Wolters, 2004). In contrast, a performance goal structure has been described as an environment that communicates to students that achievement is more important than effort and that doing better than others is more valued than individual improvement. It is important to note that students in the same class may experience the educational context differently and therefore have different perceptions of the classroom goal structure (Ames, 1992; Patrick, Kaplan, & Ryan, 2011).

Research evidence supports the expectation that students' personal goal orientations correspond with their perceptions of the classroom goal structure (Luo, Hogan, & Paris, 2011; Urdan, 2004). Research also shows that classroom goal structure is not only related to students' goal orientation, but to different cognitive and motivational responses. For instance, in a study of high school students Wolters (2004) found that a mastery structure was positively related to effort and persistence as well as adaptive learning strategies whereas it was negatively related to procrastination. In contrast, a performance goal structure was not significantly related to effort, negatively related to persistence and positively related to procrastination. A mastery goal structure has also been found to positively predict students' acceptance of challenging tasks (Ames & Archer, 1988a, 1988b), students' feeling of belonging (Walker, 2012), and students' perception of emotional and academic support from teachers (Patrick et al., 2011; Polychroni, Hatzichristou, & Sideridis, 2012).

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011a) argued that teachers also receive signals about which values are important in school. Whereas they conceptualized *classroom* goal structure as structures and practices that influence *students'* perception of goals and values in the classroom the *school level goal structure* was conceptualized as structures and practices that influence *teachers'* perception of the goals and values of the school. These structures and practices include goals, norms, and values that are emphasized both within each school and by the national school curriculum, the use of national and international achievement tests, and the public educational discourse. Similar to students we suggest that teachers at the same school do not necessarily perceive the school goal structure the same way.

In a study of 231 Norwegian teachers, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011a) found that teachers' perception of the school goal structure was predictive of value consonance which they defined as the degree to which teachers feel that they share the prevailing norms and values at the school where they are teaching. Teachers' perception of a mastery goal structure was

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