

## Turkish Primary School Teachers' Goal Orientations for Teaching

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate what Turkish primary school teachers' goal orientations are in the teaching environment, how these goal orientations are correlated with one another and whether teachers' gender and teaching experiences make a significant difference. A relational survey method was used in this study. The participants consisted of 191 primary school teachers working at state schools in Nevşehir, Turkey. The "Goal Orientation Scale for Teaching", developed by Butler (2007) and finalized by Butler and Shibaz (2014), was used to collect the study data. The scale is composed of 21 five-point Likert-type items and consists of five sub-dimensions. To analyze the study data, independent t-test, one-way analysis of variance and simple correlation techniques were used. According to the results, while teachers highly favored the "mastery" and "relational" goal orientations, the "work avoidance" goal orientation turned out to be the one for which they had the lowest average. This situation indicates that primary school teachers would rather organize activities which help them to teach better in the teaching environment, improve their professional knowledge and skills and build close and caring relationships with their students. It seems that workload is not important for teachers when it comes to promoting their students' efforts for learning. Also, there were significant differences between male and female teachers, as well as between newly-qualified and experienced teachers, with regard to the "ability approach" goal orientation. It appears that female and newly-qualified teachers want to be recognized and appreciated more for their teaching abilities and efforts than their colleagues.

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Keywords:

Primary school teachers; goal orientations for teaching; gender and teaching experience differences

### Introduction

In the 19th century, learning was regarded as a formal discipline and the failures of learners were related to their personal limitations, such as intellectual inadequacy or insufficient effort. Students were expected to overcome their individual limitations to succeed at school where they mainly received their education. In the 20th century, with the adoption of psychology as a discipline, the idea of individual differences became a topic that drew many educators' attention (Zimmerman, 2002). At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, studies about metacognition brought a new perspective to the idea of individual differences. This perspective put forward the view that learning would take place along with the individual's awareness of the cognitive processes used in learning. Currently, with the influence of the social-cognitive approach, it has been understood that not only cognitive processes but also motivational factors are effective in achieving learning.

Goal orientation, one of the motivational factors, is defined as a learner's personal goal preferences in an academic situation (Elliot and McGregor, 2001). It is the continuation of the individual's motivation in the learning process by focusing on the end-achievement (Zimmerman, 2000). Goal orientation has been divided

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into several dimensions in different studies. Dweck (1986) conceptualizes it as a two-dimensional process, composed of *learning goal orientation* and *performance goal orientation*, while Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) perceive it as a two-dimensional process, consisting of *performance approach* and *performance avoidance*. Performance approach is defined as the learner's purpose for improvement to earn others' appreciation, whereas performance avoidance is defined as the learner's purpose for preventing the recognition of their failure by others.

According to Elliot and McGregor (2001), goal orientation is composed of learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation dimensions and the sub-dimensions of approach orientation and avoidance orientation. Individuals with a learning goal orientation motivate themselves to learn, acquire and develop new skills, possess positive attitudes for learning and use effective learning strategies. However, individuals with a performance goal orientation constantly compare themselves with others in the learning process and try to display themselves as successful ones, for they are concerned with what everybody else thinks about their achievements. Their learning interests and attitudes towards learning tend to diminish when they encounter any learning difficulty (Ryan, Pintrich and Midgley, 2001).

Students' positive and negative experiences in the learning environment bring the teacher factor to mind. It is presumed that students' goal orientations are formed through and affected by the teaching situations created by teachers. While the classroom environment is a setting which encourages students to be motivated for learning, it is also an environment that encourages teachers to be motivated for teaching. Students' goal orientations for success become teachers' goal orientations for success, at the same time. In other words, not only the performance and learning goal orientations of students but also the mastery and performance goal orientations of teachers play a part in the teaching-learning process (Thronsdon and Turmo, 2013). In the school environment, different teachers may have different goal orientations. While some may focus on improving their professional teaching skills and sharing them with their colleagues, others may try to hide their poor teaching skills from their colleagues (Cho and Shim, 2013).

Goal orientations of teachers have been grouped by Butler and Shibaz (2014) under five categories: (1) *mastery*, (2) *ability approach*, (3) *ability avoidance*, (4) *work avoidance* and (5) *relational*. Many studies have indicated that teachers' goal orientations not only affect their teaching activities but also students' motivations in the classroom (Butler and Shibaz, 2008, 2014; Dresel, Fasching, Steuer, Nitsche and Dickhäuser, 2013; Kucsera, Roberts, Walls, Walker and Svinicki, 2011). For example, in the classroom environment created by the *mastery* goal orientated teachers, such processes as meaningful learning, giving personal opportunities for students' self-development and making students aware of their efforts and improvements are prioritized. On the contrary, in the classroom environments created by *performance* goal oriented teachers, a high concentration is given to students' success levels, correct answers are highly valued and only high-achieving students are rewarded by providing no privileges for low-achieving students (Dresel et al., 2013).

Moreover, the *ability approach* goal oriented teachers preserve a more positive attribute to seeking for assistance than the *ability avoidance* goal oriented teachers when encountering a difficult teaching task (Butler, 2007). Also, there seems to be a negative correlation between the *mastery* goal orientation and the *work avoidance* goal orientation. It is indicated that the *mastery* goal oriented teachers have higher self-efficacy for teaching than the *work avoidance* goal oriented teachers (Nitsche, Dickhäuser, Fasching and Dresel, 2011). Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2013) study has further revealed that teachers' goal orientations are effective in terms of their participation in school activities and getting professional satisfaction from teaching. Similarly, the study by Dresel et al. (2013) has indicated that teachers' goal orientations also affect learners' goal orientations. It seems that students' learning objectives have a positive relationship with teachers' *ability approach* goal orientation while having a negative relationship with their *work avoidance* goal orientation.

As apparent from the current research literature, teachers' goal orientations affect not only their teaching motivations but also their students' learning motivations. The quality of teaching activities is particularly important during the primary education period in which children acquire their most significant cognitive and social skills (such as critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, collaborating with others, etc.). Taking into account the lack of relevant studies about teachers' goal orientations in Turkey, this

study aims to examine goal orientations of primary teachers for teaching. Specifically, the following questions guided the study:

1. What is the distribution of Turkish primary teachers' goal orientations for teaching?
2. Are there any correlations between these goal orientations?
3. Do their goal orientations differ with regard to their gender?
4. Do their goal orientations differ with regard to their teaching experience?

## Method

### Research Design

A relational survey method was used in this study. This model aims to determine the presence and degree of variance between two or more variables (Karasar, 2014).

### Participants

Participants consisted of 191 primary school teachers working at state schools in Nevşehir province of Turkey during the 2014-2015 school year. 113 participants (59.2%) were female and 78 (40.8%) were male. 33 teachers (17.3%) had between 1 and 5 years of teaching experience, 30 teachers (15.7%) had between 6 and 10 years of teaching experience, 38 teachers (19.9%) had between 11 and 15 years of teaching experience and the rest of the 88 teachers (46.1%) had 16 and more years of teaching experience.

### Data Collection

The "Goal Orientation Scale for Teaching", developed by Butler (2007) and finalized by Butler and Shibaz (2014), was used to collect the study data. The scale is composed of 21 five-point Likert-type items and consists of five sub-dimensions. The original scale reliability coefficient was calculated for each sub-dimension as follows: for *mastery* goal orientation  $\alpha=.74$ , for *ability approach* goal orientation  $\alpha=.80$ , for *ability avoidance* goal orientation  $\alpha=.81$ , for *work avoidance* goal orientation  $\alpha=.75$ , and for *relational* goal orientation  $\alpha=.86$ . The scale reliability coefficient in the present study was calculated for each sub-dimension as follows: for *mastery* goal orientation  $\alpha=.67$ , for *ability approach* goal orientation  $\alpha=.78$ , for *ability avoidance* goal orientation  $\alpha=.69$ , for *work avoidance* goal orientation  $\alpha=.72$ , and for *relational* goal orientation  $\alpha=.65$ .

### Data Analysis

To analyze the study data, first, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviations (sd) for each item and sub-dimension were calculated. Later, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to reveal the correlations between goal orientations for teaching, an independent t-test was used for gender comparisons and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for teaching experience comparisons.

## Findings

### Goal Orientations for Teaching

According to Table 1, the primary teachers' means ( $\bar{x}$ ) for each category of goal orientations varied as follows: the *mastery* goal orientation was at the "agree" level ( $\bar{x}=4.17$ ), the *ability approach* goal orientation was at the "undecided" level ( $\bar{x}=3.28$ ), the *ability avoidance* goal orientation was at the "disagree" level ( $\bar{x}=2.38$ ), the *work avoidance* goal orientation was at the "disagree" level ( $\bar{x}=2.19$ ), and the *relational* goal orientation was at the "agree" level ( $\bar{x}=4.17$ ).

These results indicate that while teachers' goal orientations for which they have the highest average were *mastery* and *relational*, the *work avoidance* goal orientation turned out to be the one for which they had the lowest average. This fact shows that primary school teachers would rather organize activities which help them to teach better in the teaching environment, improve their professional knowledge and skills, and build close and caring relationships with their students. Moreover, the mean of the *ability approach* goal orientation shows that participants appear to be "undecided" about comparing themselves with their colleagues and their students with other learners in the school. Participants seem also not to be disturbed by the educational issues at school and the teaching processes pushing them into challenges, but they feel very uncomfortable with teaching students in a competitive teaching environment.

**Table 1.** Means ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviations (sd) for each item and sub-dimension

	$\bar{x}$	sd
<b>Mastery</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>2.72</b>
5. I'd feel I had a successful day in school if something that came up in class made me want to deepen my professional understanding.	4.21	.90
6. A main goal for me in my work is to acquire new professional knowledge and skills.	4.23	.90
10. I'd feel that I had a successful day in school if I saw that I am developing as a teacher and improving my teaching.	4.44	.81
14. I'd feel I had a successful day in school if a student asked a question in class that made me think anew about the subject matter.	3.84	.98
20. I feel I had a successful day in school when I learned something new about myself as a teacher.	4.15	.88
<b>Ability approach</b>	<b>3.28</b>	<b>3.91</b>
1. I'd feel I had a successful day in school if I was praised for showing high teaching ability relative to my colleagues.	3.58	1.25
8. I'd feel I had a particularly successful day if the principal singled me out as one of the best teachers in the school.	3.01	1.34
13. I'd feel I had a particularly successful day if during a meeting my lesson plans were singled out as better than those of the other teachers.	2.85	1.28
18. I'd feel I had a successful day in school if my classes scored higher on an exam than those of other teachers.	3.71	1.3
<b>Ability avoidance</b>	<b>2.38</b>	<b>3.15</b>
2. I'd feel I had successful day in school if pupils did not ask any questions that I could not answer.	1.98	1.08
9. I'd feel I had a successful day in school if in a meeting the principal did not include me as one of the teachers having difficulty.	2.59	1.22
16. I aim to avoid teaching things that might show that I have poor teaching ability.	2.16	1.12
19. My goal is that my classes do not do worse than those of other teachers on exams.	2.81	1.26
<b>Work avoidance</b>	<b>2.19</b>	<b>3.23</b>
3. I feel I had a successful day in school when I got by without having to work hard.	1.90	1.11
7. I feel I had a successful day in school if the material was easy and I didn't have to prepare lessons.	2.42	1.16
12. I feel I had a particularly good day when I didn't have any tests or homework to mark.	2.59	1.13
21. I'd feel I had a successful day if some of my classes were cancelled.	1.85	0.94
<b>Relational</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>2.50</b>
4. More than anything, I strive in my work to create close and caring relationships with students and classes.	4.57	0.69
11. A main goal as a teacher is to build a deep personal relationship with each and every student.	3.65	1.17
15. My main goal as a teacher is to show my students that I care about them.	4.34	0.80
17. I'd feel that I have had a successful day in school if I saw that I was developing closer and better relationships with students and classes.	4.15	0.85

**Correlations between Goal Orientations for Teaching****Table 2.** Correlations between sub-dimensions

	Mastery	Ability approach	Ability avoidance	Work avoidance	Relational
Mastery	1				
Ability approach	.192**	1			
Ability avoidance	-.052	.532**	1		
Work avoidance	-.028	.444**	.667**	1	
Relational	.573**	.250**	.057	.083	1

p&lt;0.01

According to Table 2, there is a low-level positive and significant correlation between *mastery* and *ability approach* goal orientations ( $r=.192$ ), a medium-level positive and significant correlation between *mastery* and *relational* goal orientations ( $r=.573$ ), a medium-level positive and significant correlation between *ability approach* and *ability avoidance* goal orientations ( $r=.532$ ), a medium-level positive and significant correlation between *ability approach* and *work avoidance* goal orientations ( $r=.444$ ), a low-level positive correlation between *ability approach* and *relational* goal orientations ( $r=.250$ ), and a high-level positive and significant correlation between *ability avoidance* and *work avoidance* goal orientations ( $r=.667$ ). Also two negative, but not significant correlations between *mastery* and *ability avoidance* goal orientations ( $r=-.052$ ) as well as between *mastery* and *work avoidance* goal orientations ( $r=-.028$ ) were observed.

### Comparisons of Goal Orientations for Teaching by Gender

**Table 3.** Comparison of goal orientations for teaching by gender

	Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	sd	t	p
Mastery	Female	113	4.14	.75	1.01	.311
	Male	78	4.22	.68		
Ability approach	Female	113	3.42	.96	2.31	.002
	Male	78	3.09	.73		
Ability avoidance	Female	113	2.45	.42	1.53	.128
	Male	78	2.28	.67		
Work avoidance	Female	113	2.19	.12	0.02	.978
	Male	78	2.19	.41		
Relational	Female	113	4.21	.54	0.95	.340
	Male	78	4.12	.46		

According to Table 3, there is a significant difference between male and female teachers only with regard to the *ability approach* goal orientation  $t(191)=2.31$ ,  $p<0.05$ . The mean of female teachers for this goal orientation ( $\bar{x}=3.42$ ) is higher than the mean of male teachers ( $\bar{x}=3.09$ ). It appears that female teachers want to be recognized and appreciated for their teaching abilities and efforts more than their male colleagues. For example, they would feel pleased if their students scored higher on exams than those of male teachers.

### Comparisons of Goal Orientations for Teaching by Teaching Experience

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics for teaching experience

		N	$\bar{x}$	sd
Mastery	Between 1 and 5 years	33	4.29	2.38
	Between 6 and 10 years	30	4.20	2.61
	Between 11 and 15 years	39	4.03	3.28
	16 years and more	89	4.18	2.53
Ability approach	Between 1 and 5 years	33	3.79	3.78
	Between 6 and 10 years	30	3.07	4.08
	Between 11 and 15 years	39	3.11	3.94
	16 years and more	89	3.25	3.69
Ability avoidance	Between 1 and 5 years	33	2.52	3.44
	Between 6 and 10 years	30	2.12	2.71
	Between 11 and 15 years	39	2.48	2.90
	16 years and more	89	2.37	3.24
Work avoidance	Between 1 and 5 years	33	2.27	2.84
	Between 6 and 10 years	30	2.15	2.94
	Between 11 and 15 years	39	2.23	3.22
	16 years and more	89	2.15	3.50
Relational	Between 1 and 5 years	33	4.33	2.64
	Between 6 and 10 years	30	4.02	2.51
	Between 11 and 15 years	39	3.98	2.95
	16 years and more	89	4.25	2.14

Table 5 shows ANOVA results for comparison of goal orientations for teaching by teaching experience.

**Table 5.** ANOVA results for comparison of goal orientations for teaching by teaching experience

		Total square	sd	Mean square	F	p	Significant difference
Mastery	Between groups	32.130	3	10.710	.450	230	No significant difference
	Within groups	1380.854	187	7.384			
	Total	1412.984	190				
Ability approach	Between groups	179.798	3	59.933	.101	008	<b>1-2, 1-3</b>
	Within groups	2732.799	187	14.614			
	Total	2912.597	190				
Ability avoidance	Between groups	49.157	3	16.386	.667	176	No significant difference
	Within groups	1838.372	187	9.831			
	Total	1887.529	190				
Work avoidance	Between groups	7.562	3	2.521	.237	870	No significant difference
	Within groups	1984.836	187	10.614			
	Total	1992.398	190				
Relational	Between groups	55.585	3	18.528	.037	030	<b>1-2, 1-3, 3-4</b>
	Within groups	1140.803	187	6.101			
	Total	1196.387	190				

According to Table 5, significant differences were observed between newly-qualified and experienced teachers with regard to two goal orientations: (1) the *ability approach* goal orientation ( $F(3.187)=4.101$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and (2) the *relational* goal orientation ( $F(3.187)=3.037$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In terms of the *ability approach* goal orientation, the mean of teachers with 1 to 5 years of teaching experience ( $\bar{x}=3.79$ ) is higher than the mean of teachers with 6-10 years of teaching experience ( $\bar{x}=3.07$ ) and the mean of teachers with 11-15 years of teaching experience ( $\bar{x}=3.11$ ) (see Table 4). In terms of the *relational* goal orientation, the mean of teachers with 1 to 5 years of teaching experience ( $\bar{x}=4.33$ ) is higher than the mean of teachers with 6-10 years of teaching experience ( $\bar{x}=4.02$ ) and the mean of teachers with 11-15 years of teaching experience ( $\bar{x}=3.98$ ) (see Table 4). Accordingly, as in the case of female teachers, newly-qualified teachers also want to be recognized and respected for their teaching abilities and efforts, more than their experienced colleagues. They regard the development of caring relationships with students as one of the most important goals of the teaching profession. Thus, newly-qualified teachers tend to spend more time building deep relationships with each of their students in the classroom and expect them to be the best achievers in the school.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study shows that Turkish primary teachers have the highest mean in the *mastery* and *relational* goal orientations while having the lowest mean in the *work avoidance* goal orientation. It seems that participants are mostly concerned with developing their pedagogical knowledge and skills, as well as building deeper relationships with their students. The idea that each student in the classroom is unique and needs to be respected is seen as a crucial point by primary teachers participating in the study. Participants seem not to like being compared with their colleagues, in terms of learning achievements. They seem to be negative about the *ability avoidance* and *work avoidance* goal orientations. In other words, participants appear to be unwilling about seeming to be result-oriented, and they feel rather more comfortable with expressing their weak teaching skills. Similar results were also observed in the study of Retelsdorf, Butler, Streblov and Schiefele (2010). This study found that the teachers had positive viewpoints about the *mastery* and *relational* goal orientations but had a negative viewpoint about the *work avoidance* goal orientation. Likewise, in the study of Retelsdorf and Gunther (2011), teachers were eager to deepen their understanding of the teaching profession and did not avoid various teaching duties.

In terms of the correlations between Turkish primary teachers' goal orientations, a high-level positive and significant correlation between *ability avoidance* and *work avoidance* goal orientations was observed. According to this correlation, if the *ability avoidance* goal orientation of teachers increases, the *work avoidance* goal orientation of teachers also increases. This means that when some teachers avoid teaching matters that might show their poor teaching abilities, they might also avoid spending time in order to prepare teaching materials for these subjects.

Regarding the comparisons of goal orientation for teaching by gender, a significant difference between male and female teachers was observed with regard to the *ability approach* goal orientation. It would appear that female teachers tend to desire respect for their teaching efforts more than their male colleagues. The comparisons of goal orientations for teaching by teaching experience have also revealed significant differences between newly-qualified and experienced teachers with regard to the *ability approach* and *relational* goal orientations. It would appear that newly-qualified teachers would feel appreciated if they are recognized for their hard-working attributes more than their experienced colleagues. They would also be more willing to spend time so as to build deeper relationships with each of their students in the classroom.

Further studies of goal orientations for teaching can be conducted with secondary teachers in Turkey. Also, more in-depth data through observations and interviews can be obtained in addition to the survey technique.

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