

Relationship between intrinsic orientations and academic burnout in students

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to analyze the relationship between burnout and engagement in a sample of 3512 students (M=14.55; DT=1.68) belonging to 12 secondary education highschools. The instruments used were the Spanish version of the Perception of Success Questionnaire (POSQ) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) and the *Intrinsic Satisfaction Classroom Scale* (ISC). The results showed significant relationships between task orientations with academic efficacy and fun, in a more self-determined behavior than the relationship of ego orientations with physical/emotional exhaustion, cynicism and boredom, in a less self-determined behavior. Its revealed the importance of promoting adaptive behaviors oriented to the effort, engagement and self-efficacy that improve the well-being and academic life of the students in their high schools.

Keywords: Goal orientations; burnout; students.

Relación entre orientaciones intrínsecas y burnout académico en estudiantes

Resumen

El objetivo del presente trabajo fue analizar la relación entre las orientaciones de meta y el burnout académico en una población de 3512 alumnos (M=14.55; DT=1.68) pertenecientes a 18 centros de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO). Los instrumentos que se utilizaron fueron las versiones españolas del *Perception of Success Questionnaire* (POSQ), el *Maslach Burnout Inventory – Student Survey* (MBI-SS) y la *Intrinsic Satisfaction Classroom Scale* (ISC). Los resultados mostraron relaciones significativas entre las orientaciones de meta hacia la tarea, eficacia académica y la diversión, en una clara línea de comportamientos más adaptativos así como, por otra parte, la relación de las orientaciones de meta hacia el ego con el agotamiento físico/emocional, cinismo y aburrimiento, en línea más desadaptativa. Se dedujo la importancia de la promoción de comportamientos adaptativos orientados al esfuerzo, trabajo y autoeficacia que mejoren el bienestar y la vida académica de los estudiantes en colegios.

Palabras clave: Orientaciones; burnout; estudiantes.

Relação entre orientações intrínsecas e burnout acadêmico em estudantes

Resumo

O objetivo do presente estudo foi analisar a relação entre as orientações de meta e o *burnout* acadêmico em uma população de 3512 alunos (M=14.55; DT=1.68) pertencentes a 18 centros de Educação Secundária Obrigatória (ESO). Os instrumentos utilizados foram as versões espanholas do *Perception of Success Questionnaire* (POSQ), o *Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey* (MBI-SS) e a *Intrinsic Satisfaction Classroom Scale* (ISC). Os resultados mostraram relações significativas entre as orientações de meta para a tarefa, eficácia acadêmica e a diversão, em uma clara linha de comportamentos mais adaptativos assim como, por outro lado, a relação das orientações de meta para o ego com o esgotamento físico/emocional, cinismo e tédio, em linha mais mal adaptativa. Deduziu-se a importância da promoção de comportamentos adaptativos orientados ao esforço, trabalho e auto eficácia que melhorem o bem-estar e a vida acadêmica dos estudantes em colégios.

Palavras-chave: Orientações de meta; burnout; estudantes.

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Introduction

In the educational process of students in education centers, many contextual and personal situations arise that can considerably affect students while they learn (Baena & Granero, 2015). Such situations are more marked in Secondary Education, which coincides with people's vitally important life adolescence stage, which is an intermediate step to adulthood (Gómez-Fraguela, Fernández, Romero, & Luengo, 2008). Hence at times some adolescent students might not use the strategies and competences they need to face the demands of academic life, and may note feelings that go against their motivation for and adherence to study (Usán, Salavera, Murillo, & Mejías, 2016); e.g., physical and/or mental exhaustion (Palacio, Caballero, González, Gravini, & Contreras, 2012) or they may take negative attitudes and show no interest in the school institution (Danielsen, Samdal, Hetland, & Wold, 2009), etc., which might lead to academic failure or abandoning studies at early ages (Inglés, Martínez, García, Torregrosa, & Ruiz Esteban, 2012).

In line with this, one of the most relevant cognitive-social theories to study academic motivation is the *Goal Theory Approach* (Nicholls, 1989), a widely used reference framework in Education Psychology (Ames, 1992). It refers to the purposes, ideals or reasons that lead students to guide their behavior in academic situations. Thus in goal contexts (e.g. school), students' fundamental objective is to demonstrate having the competence or skill by means of two motivational engagement states: the first is more adaptive and task-oriented, while the other is less adaptive and ego-oriented.

Thus the students who are more motivationally task-oriented tend to believe that academic success comes from making an effort, motivation and cooperation while carrying out academic activities. The students who are ego-oriented tend to presume they possess a superior skill or competence over their classmates (Guivernau & Duda, 1994).

Reviewing the scientific literature reveals that many studies positively relate task-oriented motivation to different psychological variables, like showing more persistence, willingness and commitment at school (Lukwu & Luján, 2011), and a better use and development of coping strategies when faced with adverse situations (Salavera & Usán, 2017), effort and perseverance (Lopez, 2008), enjoying classes (Chu & Wang, 2012), intrinsic motivation when performing tasks (Casas, Baltatescu, Bertran, González, & Hatos, 2013) and, basically, more physical, psychological and emotional well-being in students' academic lives (Gaeta, Cavazos, Sánchez, Rosario, & Högemann, 2015).

A relation exists between ego-oriented motivations and extrinsic motivations when performing academic activities (Vasters & Pillon, 2011), lack of commitment when performing academic tasks and then abandoning studies (Downey, Rosengren, & Donovan, 2011), anxiety problems (Sebire, Standage, & Vansteenkiste, 2009) and, in general, students psychic and emotional well-being is worse (Gillet, Vallerand, & Paty, 2013).

The *Goal Theory Approach* proposes adopting task- or ego-oriented motivation depending on how students interpret, respond and live an achievement activity with the implications that are inherent to each one (Ames, 2002).

Furthermore based on a more non adaptive behavioral pattern, during the schooling process at an education center, some students can lose interest in their studies, and may find they have doubts and/or contradictions about their capability of carrying their studies out which, as previously mentioned, may trigger complete demotivation for certain students, who may go on to abandon their studies (Musitu, Jiménez, & Burgui, 2012). *Academic burnout syndrome* is the name given to the simultaneous presence of such problems (Schaufeli, Martínez, Marques Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007), and three main dimensions characterize it: emotional exhaustion, cynicism and efficacy. Emotional exhaustion relates to physical exhaustion, and the emotional burnout that students may have at a given time and more or less persistently; cynicism refers to them not showing interest in their studies; academic efficacy is associated with students' aptitude for performing their academic tasks and activities.

Thus traditionally, academic burnout relates to high levels of stress (Extremera, Durán, & Rey, 2007), low levels of self-efficacy (Durán, Extremera, Rey, Fernández-Berrocal, & Montalbán, 2006), poor academic performance (Salanova, Martínez, & Llorens, 2014) and students not feeling very happy in academic terms about going to school (Salanova, Martínez, Bresó, Llorens, & Grau, 2005). Some research works relate students' goal orientation to their academic burnout levels by showing how a relation exists between their levels of task-oriented motivation and academic efficacy in an more adaptive behavior pattern (Salanova, Schaufeli, Martínez, & Bresó, 2009; Bresó, Schaufeli, & Salanova, 2011) and the relations between ego-oriented motivation with the emotional exhaustion and cynicism dimensions of academic burnout in a less adaptive behavior pattern (Salanova, Del Libano, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2014).

Finally, *intrinsic satisfaction* with school is the cognitive-affective evaluation that students make based on their school experience (Baena & Granero, 2015). Student well-being at school is very relevant for their individual and academic development (Fernández, 2011).

With the Subjective Well-being Scale (Diener, 2009), this satisfaction comprises two components: a cognitive one related to satisfaction with life; an affective one associated with someone's affective balance. If we bear in mind both these components, satisfaction with life would relate to a series of students' own personal experiences and, specifically, students' affective balance would be the result of their immediate and continuous reactions to the events they have lived (Rodríguez & Goñi, 2011).

According to different studies, satisfaction with their school is a variable that determines students' development because one the many objectives of teaching is, apart from the learning that they acquire, that students enjoy themselves (Baena & Granero, 2015). Satisfaction also takes deter-

mining connotations in the teaching-learning process insofar as students' satisfaction with school relates to students feeling general levels of satisfaction with their lives (Huebner, Gilman, Reschly, & Hall, 2009), lowering their levels of stress (Hui & Sun, 2010), enjoying better social relationships among peers (Skinner et al., 2008) and improving students' academic performance (Salanova et al., 2014).

Students' dissatisfaction with school has been associated with less adaptive behaviors like less self-esteem (Thøgersen-Ntoumani & Ntoumanis, 2007), making less effort or being less dedicated to perform academic tasks (Reyes, 2009), not enjoying school (Chu & Wang, 2012) high levels of stress (Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch, & Barber, 2010), being less committed to school (Busse & Walter, 2013), and even high prevalences of adolescent drug use (Usán et al., 2016). All these behaviors may lead to feeling less physical, psychological and emotional well-being (Sebire et al., 2009).

Thus the importance attached to the goal-oriented variables of academic burnout and intrinsic satisfaction with school for students' personal and academic development while they are at school is deduced, along with other situational variables, which will determine students' future in the education system which, in turn, will affect their more immediate personal and professional future.

Thus, according to Moloi (2010), further studies are necessary to investigate the interrelation of the different psychological constructs in students' academic lives to improve their well-being and their personal/academic growth while they are at school.

Therefore, as very few studies have intrinsically related the aforementioned variables, the main objective of this study is to focus on analyzing the relation linking goal orientation, academic burnout and intrinsic satisfaction with school in a sample of adolescent students studying Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE).

To meet this objective, two hypotheses are put forward: (a) the students who are task-oriented will positively relate to academic efficacy and enjoy school in a more adaptive line of behaviors than (b) the students who are ego-oriented will be related to more physical/emotional exhaustion and cynicism, and feeling bored with school in another line of less adaptive behaviors.

Method

Design: The present study is a prospective ex post-facto study with a simple descriptive design that responds to simple random sampling (Ato, López, & Benavente, 2013).

Sample: The work includes 3512 male (N=1816; 51.07%) and female (N=1696; 48.29%) students who go to 18 public CSE centers in the province of Zaragoza (Spain), whose age range goes from 12 to 18 years (M=14.55; SD=1.68).

Table 1. Students' age, gender and academic year.

		N	%
Gender	Male	1816	51.07
	Female	1696	48.29
Age	12 years	307	17.89
	13 years	293	16.54
	14 years	403	24.02
	15 years	417	23.93
	16 years	269	14.03
	17 years	56	2.71
	18 years	11	0.88
Academic year	1 CSE	338	20.09
	2 CSE	436	25.63
	3 CSE	567	32.11
	4 CSE	415	22.17

Evaluation instruments: To deal with the study objective, three questionnaires are used.

The Perception of Success Questionnaire (POSQ), of Roberts, Treasure and Balagué (1998), was translated into and validated in Spanish by Martínez, Alonso and Moreno (2006). It contains 12 items that define goal orientations with two dimensions; *task-oriented* (6) ($\alpha=.84$) (e.g. "In class I feel successful when I do the tasks the best I can") and *ego-oriented* (6) ($\alpha=.81$) (e.g. "In class I feel successful when I show the teacher and my classmates that I'm the best"). Answers respond to the degree of agreement or disagreement with the items on a Likert-type scale ranging from "Totally disagree" (1) to "Totally agree" (5).

The Maslach Burnout Inventory – Student Survey (MBI-SS) (Schaufeli et al., 2002) comprises 15 items distributed in three dimensions: *physical/emotional exhaustion* (5) ($\alpha=.82$) (e.g. "Studying or attending classes all day is really a strain for me); *cynicism* (4) ($\alpha=.77$) (e.g. "I have become less enthusiastic about my studies") and *efficacy* (6) ($\alpha=.78$) (e.g. "I feel stimulated when I achieve my study goals"). Answers range on a Likert-type scale from "Totally disagree" (1) to "Totally agree" (5).

The Intrinsic Satisfaction Classroom Scale (ISC) (Duda & Nicholls, 2002) includes seven items divided into two dimensions: *satisfaction/fun* (5) ($\alpha=.77$) (e.g. "I enjoy learning at school") and *boredom* (2) ($\alpha=.75$) (e.g. "I hope the time I'm at school passes quickly"). Responses are given on a Likert-type scale from "Totally disagree" (1) to "Totally agree" (5).

Procedure: On one week day, which was previously agreed on with the center, the questionnaires were completed in all the classes of one same center. Approval was obtained from students' parents/guardians by informed consent to take part in the research. All the students and their parents/guardians were told about the nature of the study they were voluntarily participating in beforehand. The ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki were respected (AMM, 2000).

Data analysis: Descriptive statistics was carried out to know the sample's socio-demographic data and the studied variables. Then correlations were made among the goal-oriented variables, academic burnout and intrinsic satisfaction with school, which were processed and analyzed with the IBM SPSS software, v23.0. Finally, a structural equations model was considered using the maximum likelihood method, which allowed the causal relations among burnout, engagement and self-efficacy to be validated and quantified with the AMOS software, v24. The level of significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$ and the confidence level was 95%.

Results

The results obtained with the different studied variables are presented below:

Descriptive variables

Table 2 shows that the scores obtained from the dimensions are heterogeneous. The task-oriented motivation variable ($M=3.82$) obtained a higher score than the other dimensions comprising burnout and intrinsic satisfaction with school. Academic efficacy stood out for the former ($M=3.34$) and physical/emotional exhaustion ($M=3.20$) exceeded cynicism ($M=2.12$). The boredom dimension was highlighted for intrinsic satisfaction ($M=3.48$) more than for satisfaction/fun ($M=2.86$).

Relation linking goal-oriented, academic burnout and intrinsic satisfaction

For the goal-oriented variables, academic burnout and intrinsic satisfaction with school, the following significant correlations were found (see Table 3).

First, a close relation between being task-oriented and academic burnout efficacy appeared ($r=.536$), as it did with satisfaction/fun ($r=.428$). Significant inverse relations were observed between it with physical/emotional exhaustion ($r=-.180$), cynicism ($r=-.439$) and boredom ($r=-.102$). Moreover, being ego-oriented was positively linked to the physical/emotional exhaustion ($r=.143$) and cynicism ($r=.168$) of burnout, and also to the boredom ($r=.169$) or intrinsic satisfaction with school. Regarding academic burnout, physical/emotional exhaustion and cynicism correlated with one another ($r=.330$), and did so positively with boredom, and inversely with satisfaction/fun. Finally, the variable intrinsic satisfaction with school, satisfaction/fun and boredom correlated with one another, but inversely ($r=-.329$).

The structural equations model among goal orientation, burnout and intrinsic satisfaction

Figure 1 provides the result of analyzing with structural equations by the maximum likelihood method, which confirmed that the model made up of the constructs considered in the research was suitable. The model reflected a high correlation between goal orientations and burnout ($r=-.71$), and also with intrinsic satisfaction with school ($r=-.59$). This indicated that high levels of burnout would entail lower prevalences of goal orientations and intrinsic satisfaction with school. The correlation between goal orientation and intrinsic satisfaction with school ($r=.52$) indicated that a relation existed between them. The various indices proved suitable for the model's fit, so it can be stated that the model

Table 2. Descriptives of the goal-oriented variables, burnout and intrinsic satisfaction.

		Mean	SDT	a
Goal-oriented	Task	3.82	.82	.84
	Ego	2.90	1.04	.81
Academic burnout	Physical/emotional exhaustion	3.20	.95	.82
	Cynicism	2.12	1.07	.77
	Efficacy	3.34	.79	.78
Intrinsic satisfaction	Satisfaction/Fun	2.86	.89	.77
	Boredom	3.48	1.02	.75

Table 3. Relation linking the goal-oriented variables, burnout and intrinsic satisfaction

		1	2	3	4	5	6
Goal orientation	1. Task	1					
	2. Ego	.292**	1				
Academic burnout	3. Physical/emotional exhaustion	-.182**	.132**	1			
	4. Cynicism	-.434**	.168**	.330**	1		
	5. Professional efficacy	.536**	.259**	-.155**	-.490**	1	
Intrinsic satisfaction	6. Satisfaction/fun	.428**	.041	-.308**	-.298**	.479**	1
	7. Boredom	-.104**	.169**	.289**	.225**	-.157**	-.329**

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral)

* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (bilateral)

proposed about the factorial structure among goal orientations, academic burnout and intrinsic satisfaction with school was sustainable: $\chi^2(14) = 45.307$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 3.236$; CFI = 0.96; NFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.88; RMSEA = 0.051, IC 95% (0.036 – 0.067).

When comparisons were made of the nested models (Table 4), and when assuming that the unrestricted model was correct, a comparison was made with the measurement weights which indicated that the invariance model gave a worse fit than the unrestricted model. The structural covariances models and the residual measurement values and their comparison indicated that the model statistically differed and gave a worse fit. These results indicate that it was not necessary to include gender differences in the model established among the three variables.

Discussion

The main research objective was to analyze the relation linking goal orientations, academic burnout and intrinsic satisfaction with school in a sample of adolescent CSE students.

The first hypothesis defined that those students who are more task-oriented would be related with academic efficacy, finding the school institution fun, and would clearly fall in line with adaptive behaviors. This hypothesis was met; our results revealed a close relation between task-oriented goals in the assumed case that academic success stems from making efforts, and from showing interest and motivation, along with academic self-efficacy and intrinsic satisfaction of fun at school.

From this perspective, many studies have revealed a relation among task-oriented goals, academic efficacy and satisfaction/fun. Ferriz, Sicilia and Sáenz (2013) worked with

a sample of adolescent students to show more intrinsically task-motivated relations with students and their perceptions of academic efficacy when performing school activities. Cuevas, García and Contreras (2013) predicted task-oriented motivation for students' levels of satisfaction/fun related to a close link between fun and behavior pattern in which the academic efficacy of burnout was positively related with task-oriented motivations, which left students' boredom and their physical/emotional exhaustion to one side.

The second hypothesis indicated a possible relation linking ego-oriented motivation and students' physical/emotional exhaustion, cynicism and boredom in a clear line of less adaptive behaviors than the first hypothesis. Once again the second hypothesis was met according to our research results, which defined a relation between ego-oriented motivations and physical/emotional exhaustion, cynicism and boredom. In other words, the students who participated in the present research were more motivated to believe that academic success stems from possessing a superior skill or competence to others being related to more exhaustion and cynicism along with high prevalences of boredom with the school institution.

These results are corroborated by other studies in the scientific literature. Baena, Granero, Sánchez and Martínez (2012) argue that those students who perceive higher levels of physical/emotional exhaustion will experience more cynicism and, therefore, less self-efficacy, which will be negatively associated with their overall satisfaction with their studies and with more extrinsic goal orientations. Méndez, Fernández, Cecchini and González (2013) reflect that ego-oriented motivations predict boredom with school, along with other less self-determined factors, like tiredness and less perseverance with learning. Salanova et al. (2014) maintain the unequivocal relation of ego-oriented motivations with the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and cynicism of academic

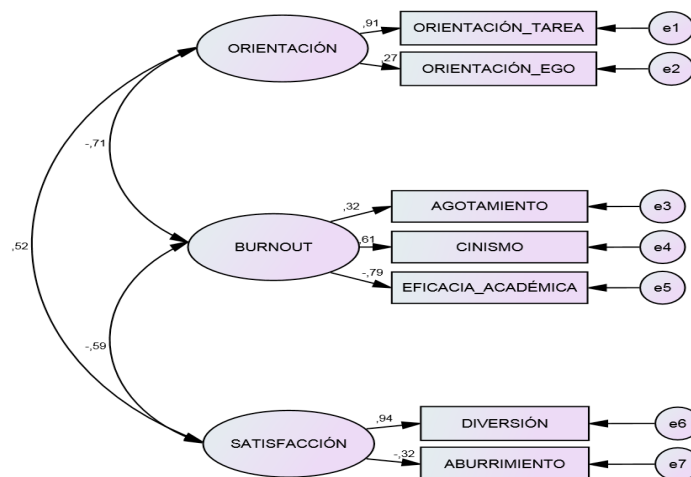


Figure 1. The structural equations model by means of the maximum likelihood method (normalized data) among goal orientations, burnout and intrinsic satisfaction.

Table 4. Analysis of the multiple groups of goal orientation, burnout and satisfaction.

Model	DF	CMIN	P	NFI Delta-1	IFI Delta-2	RFI rho-1	TLI rho2
Unrestricted model	4	15.442	.004	.016	.016	-.037	-.040
Invariance model	11	51.875	.000	.054	.055	-.064	-.068
Structural covariances	17	58.775	.000	.061	.062	-.116	-.123
Residuals models	24	92.652	.000	.096	.098	-.126	-.134

burnout. Likewise, ego-oriented motivations relate to poor academic performance (Salanova et al., 2014), which may lead to higher levels of stress and fatigue (Tsouloupas et al., 2010) and might even be connected to adolescent drug use (Usán, 2014), which could act as a factor to trigger students abandoning school and/or their academic failure (Musitu et al., 2013).

As the present work shows, and as previously mentioned, the influence of goal orientations on students is noted which, along with their levels of academic burnout and intrinsic satisfaction with school, may affect the future of the students who take part in the educational process because their performance and staying at school may be conditioned (Ervasti et al., 2011). Hence it is fundamental to deal with them so they optimally work toward their personal and academic lives (Bresó et al., 2011; Salanova et al., 2014; Vera, Le Blanc, Taris, & Salanova, 2014). Thus our research results encourage us to continue investigating and seeking new questions to help us to define methodologies that en-

counter responses so we can move forward to help adolescent students to progress.

Study limitations

The study limitations may lie in this study's cross-sectional design, whose data were collected at a given spatial-temporal moment. It also took into account fit indices below a CFI of 0.96 and with a RMSEA value higher than 0.051. The surveyed secondary education centers responded randomly to be included in the present study, thus no uniform sample of all the districts and/or areas of the city was taken, which could affect any possible differences between their socio-economic levels or their levels of education. Finally, the prevalences of goal-oriented motivation, burnout and intrinsic satisfaction with school may vary from one academic year to the next, and even within the same year, depending on students' personal and contextual circumstances.

Future prospects

One future prospect is that it would be interesting to study longitudinal models as they allow the evolution of the constructs studied over a longer time period to be evaluated by implementing a program to improve the proposed variables. It would also be relevant to look at other education stages, such as Primary Education or Higher Secondary Education, or even other stages of students' academic life, like university degree studies or university itself.

Practical implications

This research may have practical implications that could lead to didactic strategies being adopted with students via their teachers or counselors that focus on adaptive behaviors, like promoting effort, perseverance and/or satisfaction/fun with studying which make students feel efficacious when they perform academic tasks as they act as a protection factor against poor academic performance. Moreover, intervention programs conducted by professionals in the education domain can contribute integral educational student training to help lower rates of abandoning school early and promote students' academic performance.

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