

# Predicting Academic Burnout Based on Attribution Styles and Goal Orientation of Female Students

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**Abstract:** This study aims to predict academic burnout based on attribution styles and goal orientation of female students in 2012-13 school years. Correlational research method was used for this purpose. The statistical population consisted of all female students in the junior high school with a total of 240, that using multistage cluster sampling method, in total 150 were randomly selected as samples. Then to measure each variable, general attribution scale questionnaire of Deci and Ryan, goal orientation questionnaire of Buffard and academic burnout questionnaire of Berso was conducted on each subject of sample. Data were analyzed using the Pearson correlation statistical method and multivariable regression. The findings showed that the attribution styles (autonomous and controlled) had significant relationship with academic burnout and its subscales. Also, a significant relationship was achieved between goal orientation (learning and avoidance) and academic burnout. In addition, both variables of attribution styles and goal orientation with their subscales were able to predict academic burnout.

**Keywords:** Academic Burnout, Attribution Styles, Goal Orientation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Many times we have seen students who are very similar in terms of ability and learning talent, but much different in the academic achievement relative to each other. These differences not only are seen in learning school materials but in other non-academic activities.

This aspect of human behavior is related to the field of motivation. If students do not do their homework it may be because they don't have sufficient motivation and vice versa if they attempt a lot in doing their homework and overcome the obstacles they may have the motivation.

Identification of various cognitive-motivational concepts such as causal attributions and goal orientation and their effect on learning process and academic performance of students help teachers to employ better methods in the design and implementation of their educational programs to create interest and effectiveness of students [1].

Since the criterion variable in this study is academic burnout, based on previous studies and researches we can say that academic burnout in educational situations with attributes like fatigue due requirements relates to study, growth of attitude and cynical sense and lack of sensitivity to materials (indifference) and also a weak sense of personal achievement and low competencies in academic and school affairs [2]. People who have academic burnout, typically experience symptoms like inappetence about the course, failure to attend their classes regularly, not participating in class activities, feeling a sense of meaningless-

ness in educational activities and feeling disability in learning materials, frequent absences, feeling of inadequacy, and finally academic failure [3]. So, academic burnout consists of three aspects of academic fatigue, academic indifference, and academic inefficiency. Academic burnout among students may be correlated with teachers' teaching, school atmosphere and parents' support and dispute. So make plans to avoid stress and to improve educational conditions can rescue students from emotional exhaustion, depersonalized and inefficiency [4]. Studies have shown that academic burnout in terms of characteristics, circumstances and consequences is similar to mental failures including anxiety, depression, oppression, hostility or fear [5].

In research, Salmela et al [6] showed that trend performance during studying periods predicts a high level of work commitment and a low level of burnout. Conversely, a high level of avoiding performance during studying periods is predictors of low levels of work commitment and a high level of burnout. Boudreau et al [7] claim that academic burnout is related to high level of stress, long hours working with studying, concerned and worried about course grades, uncertainty about the future, low levels of control, low satisfaction about the imbalance between personal life and professional life and a low level of support receiving from peers and friends.

Attribution styles predictor variable in this study is discussed in cognitive theories related to motivation which is called attributions theories. We humans bring reason for explaining and justifying our behavior, or attribute it to a factor. In fact, the way of an individual's perception and interpretation of the causes of success and failure is considered as a major determinant of his motivation [8], [9] and in this study has three dimensions: 1- autonomous orientation which is a source of intrinsic reason and evaluates the individual's attitude to intrinsic motivations; 2- controlled orientation that refers to the tendency of individuals to control the behavior by rewarding, encouragement, punishment and beliefs of others; 3- impersonal orientation that refers to a level of individual's belief to success that depends on fate and out of his own will [10], [11].

Sanjanet al [12] in their study entitled "Interaction of attribution styles for positive and negative events on psychological distress" showed that negative attribution styles or tendency to explaining negative situations through internal and stable causes have higher negative effect and lower positive effect. According to the learned helplessness model formula, people with negative attributions to positive events with external, unstable and specific

causes record higher negative effects. Furthermore, the increase in negative attribution styles through internal and sustainable causes accompanied with positive effect. They also concluded that negative attribution styles associated with psychological distress and show that an aspect of attribution for positive situations may play an important role in people's discomfort or well-being. Because research showed that students with internal, positive and stable attribution styles, and the direction of their goal is to dominate, have higher intrinsic motivation, and also the way of teacher - student relationship has the highest effect on explanation of academic burnout [13].

The concept of goal orientation as the second predictor variable in this research refers to student achievement goal and that is the desire or effort that person expresses to achieve goal, or to dominate objects, individuals, thoughts or a high standard. Boofard<sup>1</sup> [14] draw three independent goal orientation: 1. tendency performance goal, which emphasizes on acquiring competencies and confirmation in the presence of others. In this orientation, comparison and display of power and capabilities of self and others are focused, and this display of power is the base of the individual's self-value. The individual likes to pursue objectives that are competence norm in the society [15]. 2- performance-escape goal, which focuses on avoiding unworthiness in the presence of others. In other words, while the individual will not be the best but the person does not like defeat, that is in fact the person emphasizes on comparing himself with others, and avoidance of the emergence of incompetence. 3-Domination or mastery goal orientation that focuses on increasing the competence and acquiring skills in task. Such people have positive emotions and say they enjoy challenge and often educate themselves for attention, carefully thinking and remembering the strategies that have been fruitful for them in past [16]

From the viewpoint of Ames [15] parents' targets is effective on students' goal orientation; because parents' reaction is effective on their children's performance in school. Among other effective factors are the role of environmental structure and the effect of cultural factors in the formation of orientation types [15]. Also the personal goals that a person adopts are very sensitive to the properties of texture. Thus, texture type can have very high effect on the goals that students choose in the class [17].

Research has shown that negative perfectionism, avoidance goal orientation and mastery goal orientation are positively and significantly and positive perfectionism and tendency goal orientation and academic performance are negatively and significantly associated with academic burnout [18],[19].

The research conducted in recent years indicates that individuals don't do causal explanation of events in the lives of their peers, so according to previous studies, this agent is effective on the type of goal orientation that students apply. Because the students who have positive attribution styles have higher intrinsic motivation to progress relative to the students who have negative

attribution styles, that is the first group study enthusiastically to learn something (Shahrzad, Farzad, Zarei) and so the students that have internal, positive and stable attributions, their goal orientation is toward dominant learning that can profoundly be associated with ability to do activities and the students' social relations so that teacher-student relation has the high estimation explaining academic burnout (Na'ami, 2009).

Moneta<sup>1</sup> [20] quoted by Seyed Abbas Zadeh, Ganji and Shirzad, showed in a research that the need to progress directly predicts each of three-component of academic burnout.

Researchers such as Jerins and Halsten [21], Haifoul and Faridi [22] believe that students who have no control over their actions and goals can easily get burnout and are usually lacking compatibility.

Understanding the relationship helps lot parents and teachers in creating solutions for pushing students toward learning goal orientation and knowing the real causes of strengths and weakness of their academic achievement. Given the lack of previous studies analytically and simultaneously on the same factors as well as differences in individuals' goals and attributions, finding the value of relationship of above variables and the newness of this issue, this research is of great importance. So by revealing a functional assessment can guide help considerably decision-makers and education officials, students and parents?

So this study seeks to answer the question of whether there is any relationship between attribution styles and goal orientation with academic burnout or not, and also whether by attribution styles and goal orientation we can predict the quality students' academic burnout or not?

## **2. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

1) There is a relationship between attribution styles and academic burnout of the first grade high school girl students of Ghorveh city.

2) There is a relationship between goal orientation and academic burnout of the first grade high school girl students of Ghorveh city.

3) By attribution styles and goal orientation we can predict the academic burnout of the first grade high school girl students of Ghorveh city.

## **3. METHOD**

The method of this study is descriptive and of correlational type. Therefore the nature of variables and the relationship between them were analyzed through the data obtained from the related questionnaires. Population of the present study are all students in public high schools first grade girl students in the 2012-13 school year of Ghorveh city with a total of 240 people. The number of subjects in this study using the Krejcie and Morgan table were 150 students from the mentioned statistical population that were selected using the multi-stage cluster sampling method; in a way that from 5 public high schools

in Ghorveh city 3 high schools randomly and among the first grade classes of each high school 2 classes, each one with 25 students were selected.

#### 4. RESEARCH TOOLS

To collect research data, general attribution scale questionnaire of Deci and Ryan [10], goal orientation questionnaire (AG-AQ) of Buffard et al [14], and academic exhaustion questionnaire (SBT of Bersoet al [4] were used.

General attribution scale questionnaire: the scale of general attribution orientation in 1985, was made by Deci and Ryan [8], the questionnaire consists of 17 items and evaluates three different motivational tendencies in people: the tendency to autonomy, tendency of being control and impersonal tendency. Reliability coefficient for each of the subscales of the questionnaire in this study was obtained 0.69 for autonomous attribution styles, 0.70 for controlled one, 0.68 for impersonal, and 0.78 for total test of attribution styles.

Goal orientation questionnaire: This test has been prepared with adaptation from 20-item goal orientation questionnaire of Buffard et al. 1998 [14], and evaluates 3 types of goal orientation of mastery learning, performance tendency and performance avoidance. Coefficients reported by Buffard et al. by Cronbach's alpha method for dimensions of mastery, performance tendency and performance avoidance were 0.88 and 0.75 respectively [14] and in the study of Noshadi 2000, also Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained for mastery factor was 0.83, for tendency factor 0.72 and for avoidance factor 0.85 [13]. In this study also reliability coefficients for each subscale obtained 0.69 for mastery learning goal orientation, 0.80 for performance tendency, 0.66 for performance avoidance and 0.76 for the total of goal orientation test.

Academic burnout questionnaire: This questionnaire is prepared by Berso et al. 1997 that assess three domains of academic burnout that is academic fatigue academic due to demand and requirements of the study, academic indifference that is having a cynical and lack of interest toward intrinsic assignment and academic inefficacy that is the sense of incompetency [4]. Reliability of the questionnaires has been calculated 0.70, 0.82 and 0.75 by its creators respectively for three domains of academic burnout. Researchers have calculated the validity of the questionnaire by factor analysis method that indexes of adaptation fitness, increasing fitness index, and root mean square error of approximation were reported as desirable. Na'ami 2009 has calculated this questionnaire's reliability 0.79 for academic fatigue, 0.82 for academic indifference and 0.75 for academic inefficiency [3]. In Na'ami's study, the calculated Cronbach's alpha for the whole questionnaire was 0.85 and for domains of emotional exhaustion, in difference and inefficiency in the course obtained 0.77, 0.82 and 0.66 respectively. In this study also reliability coefficients for each domains of obtained as follows: academic exhaustion 0.74, academic indifference 0.76, academic inefficiency 0.72 and the total of academic burnout 0.85.

#### 5. FINDINGS

In this section in order to use the Pearson correlation coefficient test and multiple regressions to test the research hypothesis, first we investigated the hypothesis, and then the hypothesis test results of the study will be presented.

First hypothesis: There is a relationship between attribution styles and academic burnout of students. The hypothesis test results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Relationship between attribution styles and academic burnout of students

Attribution styles \ Academic burnout	Autonomous		Controlled		impersonal	
	r	P	R	P	R	P
Exhaustion	-0.002	0.981	0.315	0.0001**	0.272	0.001**
Indifference	0.041	0.618	0.238	0.003**	0.208	0.011*
Inefficacy	-0.185	0.023*	0.060	0.464	0.212	0.009**
Total	-0.061	0.456	0.251	0.002**	0.283	0.0001**

n=150, \*P<0.05, \*\*P<0.01

To test the first hypothesis, Pearson correlation coefficient test results show that there is significant inverse relationship between autonomous attribution styles and inefficacy aspect. Also a direct significant relationship was seen between controlled attribution style and exhaustion, indifference and academic burnout dimensions. In the meantime, a direct significant relationship was seen between impersonal attribution style and exhaustion, indifference, inefficacy and academic burnout

dimensions. But no significant relationship was seen between autonomous attribution styles and exhaustion, indifference and academic burnout dimensions. Also no significant relationship was seen between controlled attribution style and inefficacy dimension.

Second hypothesis: There is a relationship between goal orientation and academic burnout of the students. The hypothesis test results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The relationship between goal orientation and academic burnout

Academic burnout \ Goal orientation	Mastery learning		Tendency performance		Performance-avoiding	
	r	P	r	P	r	P
Exhaustion	-0.363	0.0001**	0.061	0.459	0.400	0.0001**
Indifference	-0.226	0.005**	0.119	0.148	0.433	0.0001**
Inefficacy	-0.285	0.0001**	-0.156	0.057	0.253	0.0001**
Total	-0.360	0.0001**	0.007	0.929	0.440	0.0001**

n=150, \*\*P<0.01

To test the second hypothesis, Pearson correlation coefficient test results show that there is significant inverse relationship between goal orientation of mastery learning and dimensions of fatigue, in difference, inefficacy and academic burnout. Also a direct significant relationship was seen between goal orientation of performance-avoiding and dimensions of fatigue, in difference, inefficacy and academic burnout. But no

significant relationship was seen between goal orientation of tendency performance and dimensions of fatigue, indifference, inefficacy and academic burnout.

Third hypothesis: By attribution styles and goal orientation we can predict the academic burnout of the first grade high school girl students of Ghorveh city. The hypothesis test results are presented in Tables 3 to 5.

Table 3: List of variables included in the regression analysis of academic burnout attribution styles and goal orientation of students

Model	Predictor variables included	Basis variable	method
1	goal orientation of performance-avoiding	Academic burnout	Stepwise
2	goal orientation of mastery learning		
3	Controlled attribution styles		
4	Autonomous attribution styles		

Table 4: Summary of regression models of academic burnout based on attribution styles and goal orientation of students

model	Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	AR <sup>2</sup>	SE
1	goal orientation of performance-avoiding	0.440	0.193	0.188	8.154
2	goal orientation of performance-avoiding and mastery learning	0.492	0.242	0.232	7.930
3	goal orientation of performance-avoiding, mastery learning and controlled attribution styles	0.536	0.287	0.272	7.719
4	goal orientation of performance-avoiding, mastery learning and controlled attribution styles and autonomous	0/0.568	0.323	0.304	7.549

The results of the regression analysis test show that based on the first model goal orientation of performance-avoiding ( $F_{(1,148)}=35/483P,<0.01$ ), based on the second model of goal orientation of performance-avoiding and mastery learning ( $F_{(2,147)}=23/495P,<0.01$ ), based on the third model goal orientation of performance-avoiding,

mastery learning and controlled 1 ( $F_{(3,146)}=19/589P,<0.01$ ), and based on the fourth model goal orientation of performance-avoiding, mastery learning and controlled attribution styles and autonomous ( $F_{(4,145)}=17/275P,<0.01$ ) are significantly able to predict the academic burnout of the first grade high school girl students of Ghorveh city.

Table 5: Regression coefficients of predicting academic burnout based on attribution styles and goal orientation of students.

Model	Coefficient	B	SE	Beta	t	P
1	Constant	21.168	2.858		7.405	0.0001**
	performance-avoiding	0.807	0.135	0.440	5.957	0.0001**
2	Constant	38.040	6.146		6.169	0.0001**
	performance-avoiding	0.657	0.140	0.358	4.679	0.0001**
	Mastery learning	-0.583	0.190	-0.236	-3.078	0.002**
3	Constant	27.578	6.908		3.992	0.0001**
	performance-avoiding	0.591	0.138	0.322	4.267	0.0001**
	Mastery learning	-0.631	0.185	-0.255	-3.408	0.001**
	Controlled style	0.159	0.052	0.214	3.027	0.001**
4	Constant	30.827	6.857		4.496	0.0001**



performance-avoiding	0.604	0.135	0.329	4.461	0.0001**
Mastery learning	0.529	0.185	-0.213	-2.860	0.005**
Controlled style	0.256	0.062	0.346	4.118	0.0001**
Autonomous style	-0.156	0.056	-0.235	-2.767	0.0001**

\*\*P<0.01

So according to the fourth model, the prediction equation of academic burnout based on attribution styles and goal orientations of the target students can be written as follows:

In the above equation:  $y' = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + b_4x_4$

- $y'$  The prediction of students' academic burnout
- $a$  A constant coefficient which is 30.827
- $b_1$  The coefficient of goal orientation of performance-avoiding which is 0.604
- $x_1$  The score of goal orientation of performance-avoiding
- $b_2$  The coefficient of goal orientation of mastery learning which is 0.529
- $x_2$  The score of goal orientation of mastery learning
- $b_3$  The coefficient of controlled attribution style which is 0.256
- $x_3$  The score of controlled attribution style
- $b_4$  The coefficient of autonomous attribution style which is -0.156
- $x_4$  The score of autonomous attribution style

## 6. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

A. The result obtained from Pearson correlation coefficient test in the first hypothesis shows that there is a significant inverse relationship between autonomous attribution style and inefficacy dimension, and also a direct significant relationship was seen between controlled attribution style and dimensions of exhaustion, indifference and academic burnout. In addition, a direct significant relationship was seen between impersonal attribution style and dimensions of exhaustion, indifference and academic burnout. But no significant relationship was observed between autonomous attribution style and dimensions of exhaustion, indifference and academic burnout as well as between controlled attribution style and dimension of academic inefficiency. About this hypothesis, no research was done completely similar to the first hypothesis but it has been shown in other research that in the review of relationship between academic burnout and academic performance there is a negative and significant relationship between these two variables [24]. In another study, between 1 and academic achievement for good events there was a positive and significant relationship and for bad events no relationship was observed [13]. With regard to the first hypothesis results it can be explained that the student whose attribution styles is autonomous and his behavior depends on his own intrinsic motivations [8], [9] it is natural that in case of defeat attribute it to his lack of attempt and accept the responsibility of his performance and therefore experience

inefficiency feeling and again continue his effort for success [13] and never have the feeling of exhaustion, indifference, and academic burnout. Student who has controlled attribution orientation, because doesn't try himself, in case of defeat will experience exhaustion and indifference feeling more and naturally because his performance depends on others' beliefs and he himself has no control over his behavior [8] and [9], never have the feeling of inefficiency. A student, who has impersonal attribution orientation, knows success out of his will and power [8] thus, in case of failure will experience academic burnout, indifference and exhaustion, but because he isn't interested in defeat will have inefficiency feeling.

B. Pearson correlation coefficient test results in the second hypothesis showed that there is a significant inverse relationship between mastery learning goal orientation and exhaustion, indifference, inefficiency and academic burnout. Also there is a significant direct relationship between performance-avoiding goal orientation and exhaustion, indifference, inefficiency and academic burnout. But no relationship was observed between tendency performance goal orientation and exhaustion, indifference, inefficiency and academic burnout. These results are consistent with a part of research performed by Maslach et al. and Na'ami and inconsistent with other part their research [19], [18] and [3]. They showed that performance-avoiding goal orientation and mastery learning goal orientation among students are directly and significantly related to academic burnout. But tendency performance goal orientation has a significant and inverse relationship with academic burnout. Also the results of the second hypothesis are consistent with a part of research performed by Salmela et al [25] and [26]. They showed that performance-avoiding orientation and learning motivation involvement are accompanied with high level of academic burnout (exhaustion, cynicism or indifference and lack of efficiency or inefficiency). With regard to the consistency of the previous findings with the second hypothesis results it could be deduced that according to Buffard [14] students who have mastery learning goal orientation, not likely such students feel indifference, exhaustion, inefficiency and academic burnout, because their attempt represents their interest and tireless efforts toward learning. Students who have performance goal orientation, because they avoid failure, when their academic performance is low, soon get tired and feel they are inefficient because they did not try interestingly. Thus, the more is performance-avoiding goal orientation, the more is academic burnout.

C. Pearson correlation coefficient test results in the third hypothesis showed that performance avoidance goal orientation, mastery learning, controlled and autonomous attribution styles significantly are able to predict the

academic burnout of the first grade high school girl students of Ghorveh city. Researchers know the reduced efficiency due to reduced achievement motivation and type of achievement motivation, failure in studying mode and the high level of anxiety. No positive and significant relationship was observed between academic achievement and attribution style for good events, and no relationship for bad events [13]. The results of this hypothesis is also inconsistent with a part of research conducted by Maslach et al. that performance-tendency goal orientation negatively and significantly is related to academic burnout [18]. But it is consistent with research conducted by Na'ami; Maslach and et. al.; Salema et al.; [3], [18], and [2] that there is a direct and significant relationship between performance-avoiding orientation and mastery-learning orientation with academic burnout.

## 7. THE GENERAL CONCLUSION

Totally it can be said that both the variables of attribution styles and goal orientation with the overlapping they have are able to predict academic burnout in target girl students of this study. Finally it should be mentioned that some of the differences in results of previous research relative to this research may be due to using scales, class environments, difference in gender and various participators. It is evident that the development of theories in this field, particularly criterion variables in the present study is needed and the experimental work is needed to go beyond correlation in order to these relations get clearer and summing up the results turned out to be easier. So it is recommended that teachers further try to guide students toward mastery learning goal orientation and autonomous attributions education in order through this way give a considerable help in improving the academic problems and reducing students' academic burnout.

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