



Research Paper

Goal Orientations for Teaching: Exploration the Factors and Investigation the Effect of Teacher's Perception of Principal Support on Factors of Goal Orientation



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Abstract

One of the critical topics in educational settings is the examination of goal orientation. This construct has a motivational basis and is highly significant for a teacher's success in the educational domain, serving as a key component related to achievement motivation. The present study aimed to identify the constituent factors of goal orientation in education and to investigate the impact of teachers' perception of managerial support on these factors. The study population consisted of female secondary school teachers in public schools in Isfahan. A total of 130 teachers were selected using cluster random sampling and completed the research questionnaires. The instruments employed in this study included the Goal Orientation in Education Questionnaire (Nitch et al., 2011) and the Perceived Managerial Support Questionnaire (Escalouik & Escalouik, 2011). The collected data were analyzed using SPSS-20 and AMOS-20. Statistical results indicated the presence of three factors underlying goal orientation in education. These factors were labeled based on their content as: Learning Goal Orientation, Performance-Approach Goal Orientation, and Performance-Avoidance Goal Orientation. Confirmatory factor analysis indices demonstrated an adequate fit for the proposed three-factor model. Among the goal orientation factors, perceived managerial support was found to predict only Learning Goal Orientation. The findings underscore the importance of teachers' goal orientation in enhancing educational quality. Additionally, the study highlighted the significance of managerial support in schools for promoting efforts to improve performance. According to the present findings, managerial support in schools may be considered a potential factor influencing teachers' orientation toward goals and their pursuit of learning. Therefore, it is recommended that school administrators provide a supportive environment to enhance teachers' motivation and facilitate their goal-oriented learning efforts.

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Introduction

Goal orientation has been extensively studied in students (Inglés, Martínez-Montegudo, García-Fernández, Valle, & Castejón, 2015; Sheikholeslami & Daftarchi, 2015; Zhao & Ma, 2025), university students (Hakami & Shokri, 2015; Kim, 2015; Liu, Zhang, & Cao, 2024) and work environments, particularly among employees (Maden, 2015; Puhakka, Niemivirta, Postareff, & Nokelainen, 2025; To, Fisher, & Ashkanasy, 2015). Given the importance of educational settings and schools, this construct has recently been investigated among teachers (Kuhn, Hagenauer, & Gröschner, 2024; Nitsche, Dickhäuser, Fasching, & Dresel, 2011).

In fact, schools are not merely places for students to learn and acquire knowledge (Butler, 2007); rather, the educational environment extends learning beyond the walls of the school (Makweya & Sepadi, 2025). In this process, teachers are required to demonstrate high performance in their profession, which significantly affects school effectiveness. To enhance their performance, teachers continuously engage in professional learning and develop their skills (Borko, 2004), and teacher self-improvement has consistently attracted scholarly attention (Morales & Cabezas, 2025; Murwaningsih, 2024). Accordingly, teachers can be considered learners similar to students, yet they differ in their methods, interpretations, and responses to work-related challenges.

The concept of goal orientation has recently gained attention in describing teacher

motivation (Dickhaeuser, Butler, & Toenjes, 2007; Janke, Bardach, Oczlon, & Lüftenegger, 2019; Malmberg, 2008; Retelsdorf, Butler, Streblow, & Schiefele, 2010). Goal orientation is associated with human achievement motivation (Urduan & Kaplan, 2020; Wigfield, Muenks, & Eccles, 2021), which is linked to numerous behavioral, cognitive, motivational, and emotional variables. These factors relate to self-regulated behaviors and achievement in diverse contexts, such as school, sports, and work environments (Kaplan & Maehr, 2007; Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). Goal orientation can be conceptualized as a relatively stable motivational orientation toward achievement tasks that directs behaviors and activities toward success in specific situations (Elliot & Murayama, 2008).

Butler (2007) described schools as settings for success and achievement, asserting that this success applies not only to students but also to teachers. Accordingly, goal orientation has been applied in studies investigating teacher motivation. Butler's research revealed four dimensions of teachers' goal orientation: learning goals (involving questions regarding factors that create a sense of daily success), performance-related goals (e.g., perceptions of being recognized by management for higher performance compared to others), performance-avoidance goals (including feelings such as "no one asked a question I could not answer"), and work-avoidance goals (including feelings such as "the lesson was easy enough that I did not need to

review"). Butler emphasized applying this framework to novice teachers, although his study focused on experienced teachers.

Butler (2007) and Dickhauser et al. (2007), demonstrated that goal orientation is related to help-seeking perceptions. This relationship is theoretically supported by prior research on students as help-seeking is an important strategy for self-regulated learning, which plays a vital role in teacher competency development (Nitsche et al., 2011). Nitch et al. (2011) highlighted the importance of teacher self-efficacy in goal orientation, proposing it as a key factor. Based on these factors, they developed a questionnaire to measure goal orientation and confirmed four

Research Methodology

The present study is correlational in nature and employed exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify the constituent factors of teachers' goal orientation in education, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the fit of the model obtained from EFA. To investigate the effects of supervisor support on teachers' goal orientation in education, regression analysis was applied. The findings from the EFA and regression analysis were analyzed using SPSS-20, while CFA was conducted using AMOS-20.

The study population consisted of female secondary school teachers working in public schools in Isfahan during 2016–2017. Following coordination with the Education Department, 130 teachers were selected through cluster sampling. Sample adequacy was confirmed using the Holter index in AMOS. The teachers were all female,

factors: learning goal orientation, performance-approach goal orientation, performance-avoidance goal orientation, and work-avoidance goal orientation.

Given this background, the present study is the first in Iran to identify teachers' goal orientation factors in education using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Furthermore, considering that teachers view school management as a key figure in support and guidance (Varrati, Lavine, & Turner, 2009) and that managerial support is a significant construct in educational contexts, this study also examined the effects of managerial support on teachers' goal orientation in education.

officially employed by the Education Department, and aged 25 years and above. Among them, 16.9% were single, and the remaining were married.

The instruments used in this study were paper-based questionnaires, as detailed below:

Teacher Goal Orientation in Education Questionnaire: This questionnaire was developed based on three teacher goal orientation questionnaires for education (Butler, 2007; Dickhaeuser et al., 2007), teacher self-efficacy in education (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008), and teacher perceptions of help-seeking (Dickhaeuser et al., 2007). It was validated among a sample of teachers in Germany (Nitsche et al., 2011). In the present study, four factors across 36 items were examined and analyzed through factor analysis: learning goal orientation, performance-approach goal orientation,

performance-avoidance goal orientation, and work-avoidance goal orientation. Cronbach’s alpha for these four factors in the original study was reported above 0.75, and the model fit of the four-factor structure was confirmed. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the three factors identified through EFA was as follows: learning goal orientation with 9 items = 0.92, performance-approach goal orientation with 12 items = 0.95, and performance-avoidance goal orientation with 13 items = 0.84.

Managerial Support Questionnaire: This questionnaire was developed by Skalowik & Skalowik (2011) to assess cognitive and emotional support from school management for teachers. It consists of three items, and its Cronbach’s alpha was reported as 0.88. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Content validity of the instrument was confirmed in an Iranian teacher sample by (Masah, 2016), and in the

present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the three items was 0.81. An example item assessing teachers’ perception of managerial support is: “My relationship with school management is based on mutual respect and honesty.”

The study procedure involved initial coordination and review of the instrument’s content and form by experts in psychology and several school administrators. Following this review, items were finalized and administered to the sample of teachers.

Finding

The factor structure of the Teacher Goal Orientation in Education Questionnaire was examined using both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Initially, EFA was employed to identify the underlying factors of goal orientation in education. Prior to conducting the factor analysis, the assumptions of sample adequacy and sphericity were assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett’s test of sphericity, respectively. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Assessment of Sample Adequacy and Sphericity for Exploratory Factor Analysis

Assumption Type	Index	Reported Value	Acceptance in the Present Study
Sample Adequacy	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.80	Acceptable and satisfactory (KMO > 0.75)
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3566.82	Significant and accepted
	Degrees of Freedom	630	
	Significance Level	0.0000001	

After confirming these assumptions, the latent factors were extracted using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. In

this model, eight general factors were identified, each with eigenvalues greater than one and factor loadings above 0.3. Figure 1

presents the scree plot illustrating the slope of the test variables.

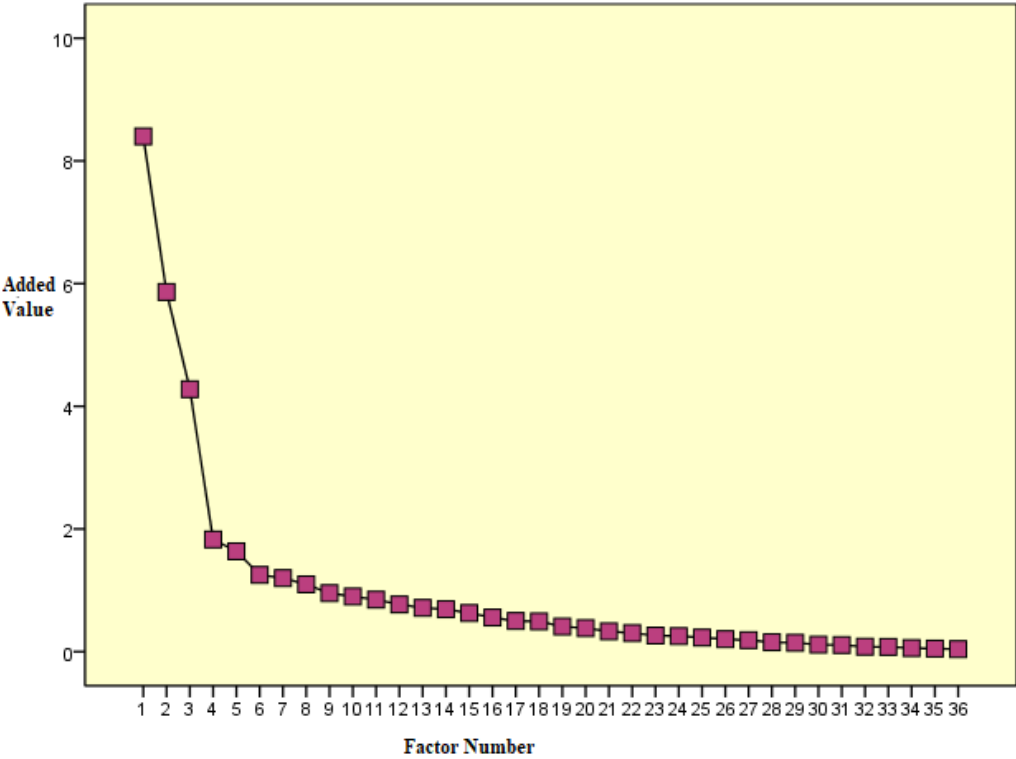


Figure 1. Scree Plot Depicting the Factors of Teachers’ Goal Orientation

exhibited higher loadings on the first three factors, the conceptual significance of these items was deemed adequately represented within the three primary factors. Accordingly, based on the scree plot (Figure 1), the analysis was continued with a three-factor solution.

Initially, the internal consistency among the factors is reported in Table 2. As shown, the correlations between the factors are relatively low, indicating a largely orthogonal structure.

Table 2. Internal Consistency Among Factors

Factors	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Factor 1	0.91	-0.26	0.32
Factor 2	0.16	0.94	0.29
Factor 3	-0.38	-0.22	0.90
Eigenvalue	7.73	5.96	4.85
Variance (%)	21.46	16.56	13.48

Cumulative Variance (%)	21.46	38.02	51.50
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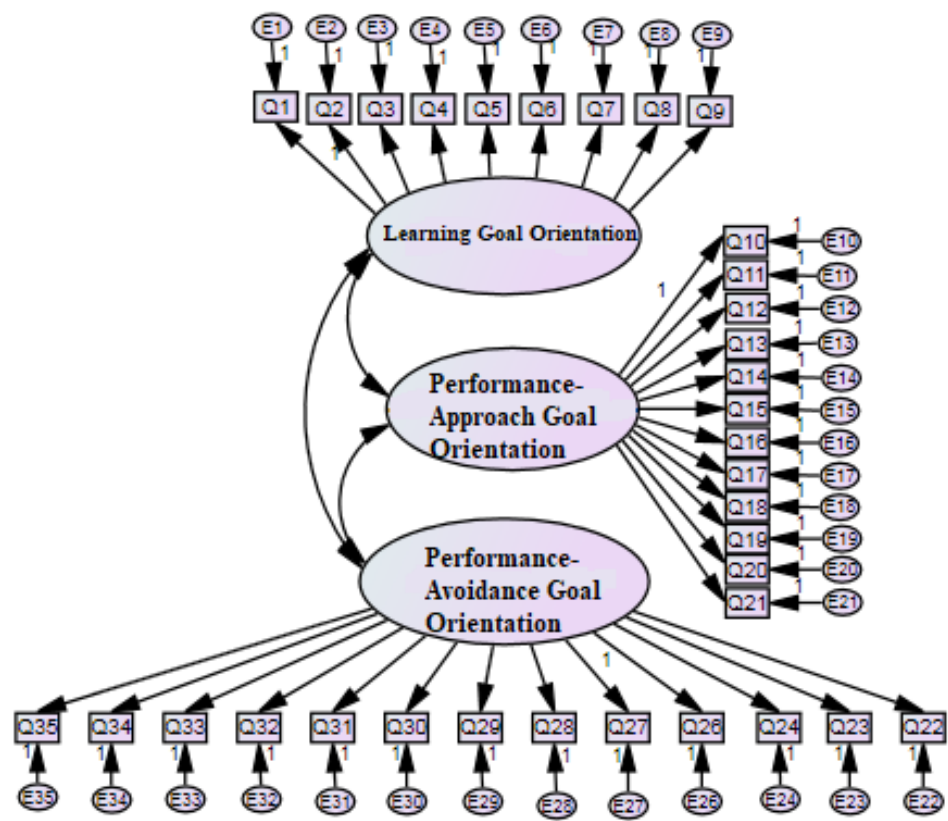


Figure 2. Visual Representation of the Proposed Model of Teachers' Goal Orientation in Education Based on Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Table 3 presents the factor loadings and eigenvalues for each item and factor, with items 25 and 36 being removed from the analysis. Subsequently, the content of items within each factor was examined, and based on this review, the three factors were labeled as Learning Goal Orientation, Performance-

Approach Goal Orientation, and Performance-Avoidance Goal Orientation.

Finally, to confirm the factors obtained from the exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. Figure 1 illustrates the model proposed in the confirmatory factor analysis.

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for the Teacher Goal Orientation in Education Questionnaire

Factor	No.	Item	Factor 1 Loading	Factor 1 Eigenvalue	Factor 2 Loading	Factor 2 Eigenvalue	Factor 3 Loading	Factor 3 Eigenvalue
Performance- Approach Goal Orientation	16	I aspire to show students that I know more than other teachers.	0.895	7.725				
	14	I aspire to show management that I perform better than others in important lessons.	0.885					
	18	I aspire to show my students that I teach better than other teachers.	0.877					
	13	I aspire to show management that I know more than other teachers.	0.871					
	15	I aspire to show management that I teach better than other teachers.	0.868					
	11	I aspire to show my colleagues that I am better than others in important lessons.	0.831					
	12	I aspire to demonstrate to other teachers that I teach better than others.	0.811					
	17	I aspire to show students that I perform better than others in important lessons.	0.810					
	10	I aspire to show my colleagues that I know more than other teachers.	0.715					
	19	I aspire to show myself that I know more than other teachers.	0.681					

	20	I aspire to show myself that I perform better than others in important lessons.	0.315					
	21	I aspire to prove to myself that I teach better than other teachers.	0.523					
Learning Goal Orientation	4	In my profession, I aspire to fully understand and be knowledgeable about my subject.			0.867	5.963		
	5	In my teaching profession, I aspire to truly comprehend the content of my subject.			0.849			
	6	I aspire to advance and improve my content knowledge and skills.			0.841			
	7	I aspire to understand the process of knowledge transfer and be able to convey it effectively.			0.835			
	3	I aspire to enhance my teaching knowledge and competence.			0.797			
	9	I aspire to improve knowledge and competence in the content area.			0.736			
	8	I aspire to receive new ideas regarding knowledge transfer methods.			0.701			
	1	I aspire to fully understand classroom conditions in my profession.			0.660			
	2	I aspire to better handle			0.639			

		critical classroom situations in my teaching profession.						
Avoidance Goal Orientation	29	I tend not to show students when I face significant difficulties in job-related tasks.					0.688	4.852
	34	I aspire not to be forced to work hard in my profession.					0.686	
	32	I aspire not to accept more challenges in my job-related tasks.					0.679	
	27	I aspire that management does not think I am less competent than other teachers.					0.678	
	33	I tend not to blame myself when I perform less effectively than other teachers.					0.639	
	30	I aspire that my students do not believe I am less competent than other teachers.					0.625	
	31	I tend not to accept doing a task less effectively than others.					0.614	
	28	I tend to hide from students when I perform unsatisfactorily.					0.612	
	24	I aspire that my colleagues do not believe I am less competent than other teachers.					0.547	
	35	I aspire for my work to be easy.					0.528	
	26	I tend not to show management when I face significant difficulties in job-related tasks.					0.439	

	23	I tend not to show colleagues when I face significant difficulties in job-related tasks.					0.412	
	22	I tend to hide from colleagues when I perform unsatisfactorily.					0.337	

Table 4. Standardized Path Coefficients in the Research Model of Teachers’ Goal Orientation in Education

Path (Avoidance Goal Orientation → Item)	β	Significance	Path (Performance- Approach Goal Orientation → Item)	β	Significance	Path (Learning Goal Orientation → Item)	β	Significance
Avoidance Goal ← Q27	0.626	P < 0.001	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q11	0.748	P < 0.001	Learning Goal ← Q4	0.841	P < 0.001
Avoidance Goal ← Q28	0.382	P < 0.001	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q12	0.822	P < 0.001	Learning Goal ← Q5	0.900	P < 0.001
Avoidance Goal ← Q29	0.543	P < 0.001	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q14	0.902	P < 0.001	Learning Goal ← Q6	0.911	P < 0.001
Avoidance Goal ← Q30	0.560	P < 0.001	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q15	0.886	P < 0.001	Learning Goal ← Q7	0.805	P < 0.001
Avoidance Goal ← Q31	0.642	P < 0.001	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q16	0.905	P < 0.001	Learning Goal ← Q1	0.524	P < 0.001
Avoidance Goal ← Q32	0.737	P < 0.001	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q21	0.384	P < 0.001	Learning Goal ← Q2	0.594	P < 0.001
Avoidance Goal ← Q33	0.681	P < 0.001	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q20	0.486	P < 0.001	Learning Goal ← Q3	0.777	P < 0.001
Avoidance Goal ← Q34	0.650	P < 0.001	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q19	0.615	P < 0.001	Learning Goal ← Q9	0.646	P < 0.001
Avoidance Goal ← Q35	0.403	P < 0.001	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q18	0.861	P < 0.001	Learning Goal ← Q8	0.755	P < 0.001
Avoidance Goal ← Q26	0.297	P = 0.002	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q17	0.826	P < 0.001			
Avoidance Goal ← Q24	0.507	P < 0.001	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q13	0.916	P < 0.001			
Avoidance Goal ← Q23	0.257	P = 0.007	Performance- Approach Goal ← Q10	0.621	P < 0.001			
Avoidance Goal ← Q22	0.258	P = 0.009						

In Table 4, the standardized coefficients in the confirmatory research model are reported. Based on this table, all paths from the exploratory factors to the items in the exploratory factor analysis stage are significant; therefore, all paths are accepted.

Table 5 reports the absolute, comparative, and parsimonious fit indices for the model presented in the confirmatory factor analysis. The fit index is also reported; values less than 5 are acceptable, and the closer the value is to 1, the better the model fit. According to this

table, the fit of the research model is confirmed.

Table 5. Examination of Absolute, Comparative (Relative), and Residual Fit Indices of the Research Model in the Domain of Teachers’ Goal Orientation

Type of Fit	Absolute				Comparative				Parsimonious			Fit Index
Index	X ²	df	Sig.	CFI	TLI	NFI	IFI	PGFI	PNFI	PCFI	RMS EA	X ² /df
Acceptable Value			Less than 0.001	Greater than 0.80	Greater than 0.80	Greater than 0.80	Greater than 0.80	Greater than 0.50	Greater than 0.50	Greater than 0.50	Less than 0.08	Between 1 and 5
Research Model	874.96	834	P<0.001	0.88	0.86	0.88	0.88	0.60	0.67	0.76	0.07	1.81

Subsequently, to examine the effects of management support on goal orientation factors in education, a stepwise regression analysis was conducted. The results were not significant for predicting performance-

approach and performance-avoidance goal orientations. Management support in the school only had the ability to predict learning goal orientation. The results of the stepwise regression analysis are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Report of Statistical Indicators from Stepwise Regression Analysis for Predicting the Criterion Variable

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Constant	Beta (β)	R ²	t-statistic	Significance (p)
Performance-Approach Goal Orientation	Management Support	0.12	33.33	0.03	0.001	0.34	<0.05
Performance-Avoidance Goal Orientation	Management Support	0.12	40.78	0.04	0.002	0.47	<0.05
Learning Goal Orientation	Management Support	1.06	24.36	0.46	0.21	5.91	>0.001

Given the significance of the effect of management support on learning goal orientation, the standardized and

unstandardized regression equations are as follows:

Regression equation based on standardized coefficients:
Predicted Learning Goal Orientation = 0.46 × Perceived Management Support

Regression equation based on unstandardized coefficients:
Predicted Learning Goal Orientation = 24.36 + (0.46 × Perceived Management Support)

Discussion & Conclusions

In the present study, the factors underlying goal orientation in teaching were identified. Based on the results of the exploratory factor analysis, the construct of goal orientation in teaching comprised three factors; these factors were examined and confirmed according to factor loadings and the eigenvalues of the items. The factors were named according to the content of the items as follows: learning goal orientation, performance-approach goal orientation, and performance-avoidance goal orientation. Two items were removed, based on exploratory factor analysis and Cronbach’s alpha if the item were deleted, as the internal consistency improved upon their removal. The goal orientation construct is highly significant and widely recognized (Duda, 2005; Kaplan & Maehr, 2007) because goal orientation represents a relatively stable motivational tendency in tasks that guides behaviors and activities toward success in specific situations (Elliot & Murayama, 2008). Given the representation of this construct in the motivational domain (Dickhaeuser et al., 2007; Malmberg, 2008; Retelsdorf et al.,

2010) and teachers’ attention to self-improvement and identifying significant factors in this domain (Borko, 2004), examining the constitutive factors of this construct reflects teachers’ effort and diligence in the educational context. Such effort may be directed either toward improvement, toward demonstrating competence, or toward concealing one’s weaknesses. Learning goal orientation refers to a teacher’s effort to enhance knowledge, skills, and competencies; performance-approach goal orientation refers to the focus on proving and demonstrating one’s competence; whereas performance-avoidance goal orientation reflects the tendency to hide weaknesses and, in short, to avoid displaying a lack of competence in the professional domain. In the present study, these factors constituted the goal orientations of teachers in the educational context. Notably, the learning goal orientation dimension carries substantial substantive value, as it directly relates to teachers’ improvement and development. A teacher pursuing knowledge and skill enhancement has reached a level of competence that does not fully satisfy them,

motivating further striving; this represents a motivational orientation toward growth and change. Subsequently, the study examined the fit of the three-factor model of goal orientation in teaching. Based on the confirmatory factor analysis results, the three-factor model demonstrated an adequate fit, and the fit indices reported acceptable values. Therefore, the three exploratory factors identified in the first phase of the study were confirmed. In the final phase, the impact of teachers' perceived managerial support on their type of goal orientation in teaching was investigated. Regression analysis results indicated that teachers' perception of managerial support only predicted learning goal orientation and had no significant effect on other types of goal orientation in teaching. This finding can be explained by the importance of managerial support and teachers' perception of it (Varrati et al., 2009). In essence, management plays a key and pivotal role within the school context. When teachers perceive support from management, they are more likely to feel committed to self-improvement and alignment with school objectives to create an optimal learning environment. This motivates teachers to invest effort and diligence in enhancing their knowledge, skills, and teaching competencies, reflecting a learning goal orientation. At the same time, the tendency to feign competence is reduced, and teachers do not fear displaying areas of lower competence; this results from their perception of support from a critical and influential

school figure, i.e., the management. In summary, the present study is the first in Iran to examine the factors of goal orientation in teaching. The three factors—learning goal orientation (9 items), performance-approach goal orientation (12 items), and performance-avoidance goal orientation (13 items)—comprise a total of 34 items derived from exploratory factor analysis. The three-factor model was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis, and model fit was verified. Finally, the study highlighted the importance of managerial support in fostering teachers' learning goal orientation, demonstrating the significance of teachers' perception of support in encouraging self-improvement. Given the confirmed validity of the goal orientation instrument in teaching, it is recommended that future researchers employ this instrument in studies on educational motivation and to identify other influential factors on goal orientation in teaching. Considering the limitation that this study focused solely on female teachers, applying the instrument to male teachers and comparing the results with the female population is also suggested. The present study underscores the value and importance of teachers' perception of managerial support in their professional development. Accordingly, it is recommended to hold training workshops for school managers on creating a supportive school climate and to facilitate the sharing of managerial experiences in this domain.

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