Achievement Goal Orientations of Iranian EFL Teachers in Postmethod Pedagogy Expertise

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A R T I C L E   I n f o

A B S T R A C T

Purpose: The efficacy of postmethod pedagogy (PMP) in Iran remains undetermined despite the growing attention being paid to it. A multitude of factors may contribute to differing levels of motivation among teachers in effectively implementing postmethod principles. The Achievement Goal Theory (AGT), rooted in a socio-cognitive perspective, provides a framework for understanding the types of goals individuals tend to pursue in achievement situations. Hence, this study aims to investigate the goal orientations of experienced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers who are practicing postmethod tenets.

Methodology: The current study employed an applied qualitative approach to explore the goal orientations of 18 experienced EFL teachers from various language institutes in Kermanshah, Iran. Participants were selected in two phases: first, a postmethod questionnaire was administered to identify respondents familiar with Postmethod Pedagogy (PMP) principles. Next, a semi-structured interview was conducted to elicit their goal orientations while adopting PMP conditions. Field notes were also used to document the researcher's reflections and opinions, facilitating data analysis. The researchers utilized a three-stage approach for data analysis, following the inductive data coding method of open, axial, and selective coding.

Findings: After analyzing the interview transcripts, it became apparent that the implementation of postmethod pedagogy tenets in teachers' teaching practice was influenced by their achievement goal orientations. This included learning, relational, and performance-approach goal orientations. The findings revealed that expert teachers predominantly exhibited learning goal orientations. In contrast, performance-approach goal orientations were the least prevalent among these educators.

Conclusion: Examining teachers' goal orientations through the socio-cognitive lens of postmethod language teaching can benefit the growth and development of teacher training programs, curriculum planning, and policymakers.

Keywords: *Socio-cognitive Theory, Achievement Goal Orientation, Postmethod Pedagogy, Experienced EFL Teachers, Qualitative Study.*

1. Introduction

The implementation of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian EFL context is a topic that has been widely discussed due to its potential to revolutionize language teaching. However, despite its promising nature, significant challenges need to be addressed to make it a reality (Jamalvandi, 2020).

One of the noteworthy issues is the competence of novice teachers and the demands of postmethod. Postmethod principles are innovative, requiring teachers to go beyond traditional methodologies and navigate social, critical, and learner-centered approaches. However, novice teachers often struggle with these requirements due to their limited awareness of postmethod principles and the additional responsibilities they entail (Akbari, 2008). As such, developing such postmethod teaching expertise is especially a challenging effort for EFL teachers.

Many factors may be essential in determining the reason behind the tendency and expertise of some teachers in the successful implementation of postmethod principles in their classrooms. One of these factors is motivation. The research in educational psychology has predominantly concentrated on the role of motivation in students' learning outcomes (Butler & Shibaz, 2008), while according to Watt et al. (2021), the pivotal role of teacher motivation in shaping the motivation levels of students and their overall learning experiences cannot be overlooked.

Therefore, some scholars like Stockinger et al. (2021) have recently conducted studies exploring teachers' motivation using approaches underpinned by socio-cognitive theories. Of these theories, the Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) presents a valuable perspective to understand the teacher's motivation. Elliot and Hulleman (2017) noted that AGT explains which types of goals individuals tend to pursue in achievement situations. This theory focuses on qualitative variations in motivation within an achievement-oriented environment, prioritizing differences in quality rather than quantity. Initially developed to elucidate motivations for achievement and competence-related actions, Nitsche et al. (2011) underscore its significance in comprehending teachers' motivations. Similarly, according to Daumiller et al. (2019), AGT effectively describes teacher motivations and their correlation with professional behaviors.

2. Literature Review

AGT has been studied both empirically and theoretically since the 1970s-80s. According to Dweck and Leggett (1988) , an achievement goal is a self-regulatory, future-focused cognitive representation that directs a person's behavior toward a desired degree of competence. It stands for the goals that a person has for their personal, professional, or academic development. In essence, achievement goals help individuals focus on their desired outcomes and motivate them to achieve them.

Early contributions by theorists such as Ames (1992) delineated this theory, classifying it into two primary goal categories: mastery and performance. However, the literature on teacher achievement goal orientations dates back to 2007, when Butler (2007) asserted that competition and learning motivations are mutually shared between teachers and learners in the educational context. Butler and Shabiz (2014) developed a 20-item scale to evaluate teachers' motivation, which was improved and revised to a 36-item measure by Nitsche et al. (2011) .

On the whole, five general classes of teachers' achievement goals were identified. Mastery/learning/task goal which aims at expanding professional competence or learning (Hein et al., 2019; Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015); performance/ability/ego/self-involvement goals aiming at displaying competence (Butler, 2007) and performance-approach goals striving to outperform others performance-avoidance goals trying to hide inferior competence compared to others (Dickhäuser et al., 2021); work-avoidance goal is associated with accomplishing work with minimal effort; and relational goal striving to build amicable relationships with students (George & Richardson, 2019). However, researchers extended these classifications of teachers' achievement goal orientations. For instance, Rinas (2020) identified six-dimensional teachers' achievement goal orientations as learning-approach, learning-avoidance, appearance-approach, appearance-avoidance, work-avoidance, and relational. In the same vein, Daumiller (2019) categorized them into 'learning, appearance-approach, appearance-avoidance, normative-approach, normative-avoidance, work-avoidance, relational goals were identified'.

2.1. Empirical Studies on Achievement Goal Orientations

Research on teacher achievement goal orientation has revealed significant findings. Bulter's 2007 study aimed to

identify goal orientations for teaching and validate teacher goal orientation measures. The research involved 320 teachers and identified four goal orientations: mastery, ability-approach, ability-avoidance, and work-avoidance. Data from 212 teachers showed that mastery goals predicted positive perceptions and frequency of help-seeking. Ability-avoidance goals predicted negative perceptions and help avoidance, while work-avoidance goals predicted expedient help-seeking (Butler, 2007).

On the other hand, Malmberg (2008) aimed to investigate the changes in student teachers' achievement goal orientations during their studies and the extent to which these changes are related to various antecedents and outcomes. The study employed a longitudinal design, following 170 participants throughout two to five time points, using individual growth models to analyze changes in achievement goal orientations, and examining the relationship between various factors and goal orientations/performance outcomes. The study's findings indicate that achievement goal orientations increase over time, peaking during the third year of studies. Moreover, the study found several factors, such as secondary school grades, reflective thinking, teacher intrinsic motivation, and task-irrelevant behavior, are related to different achievement goal orientations.

Additionally, George and Richardson (2019) conducted a study among 257 teachers in Australia. The study investigated the correlation between teachers' goal orientations and self-reported classroom behaviors. The study employed structural equation modeling for data analysis. The results indicated that teachers with mastery and relational goal orientations positively perceived their expectations, structure, and relatedness with their students. Conversely, teachers who had work-avoidance goal orientations had a negative perception regarding supporting student autonomy. The study underscores the importance of teachers' goal orientations in shaping their perceptions of their role in the classroom and how they interact with their students.

Moreover, Wang et al. (2018) validated an achievement goal instrument for physical education teachers based on Butler's teacher achievement goal orientation. 322 Chinese physical education teachers completed the study, identifying four teacher orientation types: mastery, ability-approach, ability-avoidance, and work-avoidance goals. Confirmatory factor analysis and multi-step invariance tests confirmed the four-factor construct with acceptable reliabilities and predictive validity. These findings provide evidence to support teachers' goal orientations' conceptual structure and suggest addressing differences in construing success during teaching and learning.

As previously noted, implementing postmethod pedagogy as a newly emerged concept in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) community necessitates extensive expertise, knowledge, and experience (Akbari, 2008; Amiri & Sahragard, 2018; Jamalvandi, 2020; Maghsoudi, 2016; Safari & Rashidi, 2015). Although various studies have explored teachers' strategic competence in utilizing postmethod principles (Al-Kadi, 2020; Baytur, 2020; Hooman et al., 2021; Jahan, 2019), there has been insufficient research into the motivational goals that prompt teachers to acquire postmethodic expertise and knowledge. Doing so will enable us to develop more effective training programs and support structures to help teachers acquire the expertise and knowledge needed to implement postmethod pedagogy successfully. Therefore, this study attempts to cast light on this literature gap by addressing the following research question:

What are the various goal orientations experienced Iranian EFL teachers adopt while implementing postmethod principles in their classrooms?

3. Methods and Materials

3.1. Study Design and Participants

The current research involved the selection of Iranian EFL teachers from various institutes in Kermanshah using purposive sampling. Selection criteria included holding an MA or Ph.D. in TEFL, having a solid grasp of postmethod, being an EFL teacher, and having a minimum of five years of teaching experience. The researcher purposefully selected experienced teachers from diverse teaching contexts to participate in this qualitative study. Data saturation was achieved during the interview process, indicating that no new constructs emerged.

During the questionnaire phase, 65 experienced EFL teachers from different institutes were purposively selected, comprising 18 males and 47 females aged between 26 and 47. These participants were provided with a validated questionnaire on PMP principles (Razmjoo et al., 2013) to evaluate their familiarity with the topic. Of the 65 questionnaires, those that were incomplete or carelessly filled out (e.g., choosing responses systematically) were removed, leaving the researcher with 34 completed questionnaires. The researcher selected participants who scored over three on each item, with a total score between 88

and 110 (out of 22 items). 22 of the participants were able to reach the required threshold level.

During the interview phase, cyclically, those who demonstrated familiarity with the PMP principles, as indicated by the questionnaire results, were interviewed until

data saturation was attained. The final phase of this study yielded a total of 18 participants, as outlined in Table1. The researcher intentionally sought experienced participants from diverse contexts to ensure the qualitative nature of the study.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Demographics	Description	Number	Percentage (%)
Age	26-36	12	66.66
	37-47	6	33.34
Gender	Female	11	61.11
	Male	7	38.89
Education	BA	6	33.34
	MA	8	44.44
	Ph.D. candidate	3	16.66
Years of Experience	Ph.D.	1	5.56
	5-10	6	33.34
	11-15	9	50
	16-above	3	16.66

To address the purposive sampling objectives, a teachers' familiarity with postmethod pedagogy questionnaire was used to select teachers with expertise and familiarity with postmethod pedagogy. A semi-structured interview was conducted to capture the goals pursued by teachers while practicing PMP tenets in their classrooms. To facilitate the data collection procedure, opinions and reflections of the research were documented using field notes. These instruments are listed and described in detail below.

A questionnaire developed by Razmjoo et al. (2013) was employed to determine participants' proficiency in utilizing PMP principles. This questionnaire was composed of 22 items that gauged the respondents' familiarity with PMP principles. The participants were asked to rate their agreement level with each statement, using a scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.' Individuals who scored above three on each statement were deemed proficient in PMP principles and were subsequently selected for further analysis. The total score required for proficiency in the 22 items ranged between 88 and 110. Razmjoo et al. (2013) validated the questionnaire through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and the reliability index was estimated using Cronbach Alpha, which was found to be 0.88.

Ary et al. (2010) highlighted that interviews stand as the principal data collection method in qualitative research studies. To gather the participants' goal orientations they

inclined to that influence the acquisition of postmethod teaching expertise, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The participants were cyclically interviewed until data saturation obtained.

The researcher meticulously documented her thoughts, viewpoints, inquiries, and objectives throughout the study. Such meticulous documentation was critical in comprehending the data collected from the interviews. The researcher's detailed records facilitated the acquisition of valuable insights and a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

3.2.   Data Collection

This study utilized Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology to conduct virtual interviews with 18 participants due to the constraints imposed by the circumstances. According to Lo Iacono et al. (2016), while VoIP technologies cannot fully replace face-to-face interviews, they offer a more cost-effective and efficient means of interacting with participants.

The interview sessions were divided into three distinct parts, each with a specific objective. The interviews were conducted over four months, from December 2021 to March 2022, ensuring a comprehensive assessment of the interviews.

The first session was a virtual briefing session that explained the interview process and purpose. This helped to

ensure that all participants understood the study's objectives and were ready to provide valuable insights.

The second session was held on Meet, a synchronous online service that overcomes barriers such as traveling, scheduling, and distance. The interviews were scheduled according to the interviewees' preferred time, allowing them to choose the date and time that suited them best. There was no specific time limit established for the interviews; the shortest lasted 15 minutes, and the longest lasted 27 minutes. The participants were allowed to use either L1 or L2, whichever they felt least anxious about, to express and support their opinions clearly.

Finally, the transcriptions were emailed to the interviewees, who were requested to review and verify their viewpoints and make any desired modifications within one week. According to Ary et al. (2010), this process would enhance the quality of interview transcripts and consequently increase the credibility of the study. All the interviews recorded were transcribed before data analysis. Afterwards, the researcher added complementary notes to each interview.

3.3. Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data was analyzed using the 3-stage-inductive data coding procedure developed by Ary et al. (2010) . Inductive coding is a qualitative data analysis method that allows the researcher to develop a theory or framework from the raw data. This approach involves identifying themes that emerge from the data by using codes to identify concepts and themes in the data. It allows for the development of a theory grounded in the data rather than being driven by preconceived ideas. It also helps produce rich and contextually meaningful findings that can be shared with a wider external audience.

The coding process was carried out manually based on the keywords that characterized teachers' goal orientations. Each transcript was analyzed individually in the initial stage. In the open coding stage, a code was assigned to all significant words and phrases to represent each teacher's goal orientations best to identify the core concepts. Axial coding was the focus of the second stage, in which the

researcher examined the relationship between the open codes and labels to combine similar codes and subcategories into a smaller number of more manageable categories. Finally, in selective coding, the most central categories that emerged during axial coding were selected. This process often involves integrating these core themes and concepts into a coherent narrative that explains the phenomenon under study. The study was conducted within a theoretical framework that involved grouping data pieces and examples of teachers' achievement goal orientations (as the most emerged factor). This approach enabled the creation of more significant categories of teachers' achievement goals, which were informed by key findings from relevant literature.

To refine the emerging categories, the researcher regularly compared the data with codes and jot notes. Moreover, the member check technique was employed to retain consistency with the given codes. Two additional coders analyzed the given codes to eliminate the inconsistencies within the coding.

In order to ensure the credibility of the qualitative phase of the study, triangulation and member check techniques were used. Additionally, various data sources, such as interviews and field notes, were employed to investigate different aspects of the qualitative phase. The participants were allowed to review their comments to ensure accuracy.

4.   Findings and Results

Analyzing the transcribed interviews and existing literature revealed three emergent categories of teachers' achievement goal orientations: learning goals, performance-approach goals, and relational goals. Following Ary et al.'s three stages of inductive analysis and bottom-up approach, these goal categories emerged.

Table 2 summarizes the frequencies of each goal category observed in the study. The number of observed goals is greater than the number of participants (18) due to the presence of multiple goals among participants. This indicates that participants had different goal orientations, which were all identified and recorded.

Table 2

Frequencies of Teachers' Achievement Goal Orientations

Goals	Frequency of observed cases	Frequency of Observed Cases	Percentage
1	Learning	28	43.75
2	Relational	21	32.81
3	Performance-approach	15	23.44
	64	64	100

According to the data in Table 2, the learning goal orientation goal category is the most commonly used in teaching practices, whereas the performance-approach goal category is the least popular. It is important to note that the findings support earlier studies that found teachers frequently prefer learning-oriented goals over performance-oriented ones (Elliot & Dweck, 2005) .

Ames (1992) states that mastery and learning goals are closely related and can be used interchangeably. Both objectives seek to increase and build competence (Daumiller et al., 2019) ; however, mastery goals emphasize gaining new information and abilities, whereas learning goals concentrate on the actual learning process (Pintrich, 2000). Some teachers' comments regarding their goal orientation in using postmethod macrostrategies are presented as follows:

An experienced teacher said:

During my teaching experiences, I have always tried to keep up with the latest trends in the EFL field, particularly in language education, because it allows me to incorporate new methods, strategies, and techniques into my teaching...

Other teachers stated that:

...One of my priorities is to be proficient in presenting language concepts in an accessible manner for my students.

I want to enhance my pedagogical knowledge and proficiency because I like to become a successful English teacher...

...I must promote my expertise in the subject matter I teach...

Learning goal orientations can be considered as the intrinsically driven type of goal that characterizes teachers who tend to improve their teaching skills. This orientation is internally oriented intentionally by expert teachers. As it is apparent from teachers' comments, teachers' goals are professional development-directed.

Development of pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge are categorized as the required competencies for teachers' professional growth and success.

Relational goal orientations are founded as the second direction of teachers' goals. Teachers follow them to develop macrostrategies, resulting in postmethod pedagogy expertise. Analyzing the interviews revealed that making a friendly atmosphere among students, between teacher and students, and decreasing affective filters are significant for language teachers to practice postmethod pedagogy principles. As Bulter (2012) and Daumiller (2019) put it, they are considered social and achievement contexts in which building friendly relationships is linked to individual achievement behaviors. Some samples of interviewees' comments are presented below:

I try to promote a sense of belonging, inclusivity, and active engagement among my students...

I strive to create a classroom atmosphere where mutual respect prevails, helps reduce students' emotional barriers, and enhances their learning experience...

My goal is to establish a friendly teacher-student relationship in a learning environment...

I aim at encouraging collaboration and facilitating interaction among students, which are aspects of my teaching philosophy...

The final category identified was performance-approach goal orientation. The findings revealed that teachers with performance-driven goal orientations demonstrate less proficiency in cultivating expertise in postmethod pedagogy. According to Putri and Saleh (2020), individuals with performance-approach goals tend to become more engaged in their tasks because they consider them opportunities to demonstrate their high competence. Moreover, some studies have failed to find any adverse effects of performance goals on performance (Yates, 2000). However, Dweck (1988) argues that performance goals can hinder learning and performance.

In the current study, teachers with performance-approach goal orientations practice postmethod principles to gain recognition and outperform other teachers, demonstrate teaching skills and knowledge, and obtain positive judgment. In this regard, a Ph.D. candidate EFL teacher said:

To me, demonstrating knowledge and teaching effectiveness compared to teachers is essential for gaining recognition from colleagues, students, and school administration...

Another experienced teacher commented:

In this aspect, I aim to demonstrate my proficiency in handling challenging lessons, showing that I can excel compared to teachers.

Another teacher stated that:

My main objective is to receive positive feedback from my students, colleagues, and administrators. In my opinion, this feedback reflects our collective commitment to excellence and improvement.

Ultimately, the obtained information in this study is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Codification Results

Theme	Category	Sample
Learning	Developing professional skills	*During the years of my teaching experiences, I have always tried to keep up with the latest trends in the EFL field and particularly in language education, because it allows me to incorporate new methods, strategies, and techniques into my teaching.*
	Intrinsically motivated activities	*I want to enhance my pedagogical knowledge and proficiency because I like to become a successful English teacher.*
	Enhancing teaching proficiency and promoting competence	*I must promote my expertise in the subject matter I teach.*
	Reducing students' affective filters	*I strive to create a classroom atmosphere where mutual respect prevails helps reduce students' emotional barriers and enhances their learning experience.*
Relational	Establishing positive learning atmosphere	*I try to promote a sense of belonging, inclusivity, and active engagement among my students*
	Facilitating collaborative interaction	*I aim at encouraging collaboration and facilitating interaction among students are aspects of my teaching philosophy*
	Gaining recognition and outperforming other teachers	*To me demonstrating knowledge and teaching effectiveness compared to teachers is important for gaining recognition, from colleagues, students, and school administration.*
Performance-approach	Demonstrating teaching skills and knowledge	*I aim to demonstrate my proficiency in handling challenging lessons showing that I can excel compared to teachers, in this aspect.*
	Obtaining positive judgment	*My main objective is to receive positive feedback from my students, colleagues, and administrators. In my opinion, this feedback is a reflection of our collective commitment to excellence and improvement.*

On the whole, the most influential factors in implementing postmethod pedagogy tenets in teachers' teaching practice emerged as teachers' achievement goal orientations. Three categories of goals emerged from the thorough analysis of interviews: learning, relational, and performance-approach goal orientations.

The learning goal orientation goal category is the one that teachers most commonly follow, whereas the performance-approach goal category is the least popular.

5.   Conclusion and Discussion

The current study was conducted as part of a broader project done by authors that aimed to explore the expertise of postmethod pedagogy and the factors that contribute to its development. One of the key factors identified was the goal orientation of EFL teachers who adopt postmethod tenets in their classrooms. To further investigate this from a socio-

cognitive perspective, the study delved deeper into the goal orientations of EFL postmethodic teaching contexts.

During the interviews, teachers often mentioned three distinct goal orientations: learning, relational, and performance-approach. After analyzing the qualitative data, it became evident that learning goal orientations were the most common among expert teachers, while performance-approach goal orientations were the least common. Additionally, teachers with a learning orientation had a greater impact on all macrostrategy categories as compared to those with relational and performance-driven goals. This suggests that teachers who are oriented towards learning goals are more effective in developing various domains of postmethod pedagogy knowledge, while those with performance-driven goals may struggle to cultivate expertise across all knowledge domains within postmethod pedagogy.

Butler (2007) asserted that teachers' achievement goal orientations, particularly mastery/learning goals, significantly influence their behavior and perceptions in the classroom. These goals, which focus on learning and effort, are associated with positive perceptions of help-seeking, preferences for autonomous help, and frequency of help-seeking (Butler, 2007). This was further supported by Retelsdorf et al. (2010), who found that mastery orientation was associated with adaptive instructional practices and high interest in teaching, while work avoidance was linked to burnout. Butler (2012) expanded on this by introducing relational goals for teaching, which were found to predict teacher social support and mastery instruction. The role of perceived school goal structure and teachers' sense of efficacy in predicting these mastery goals has also been highlighted (Cho & Shim, 2013). Moreover, O'Keefe et al. (2013) showed that a mastery-structured academic program increased mastery goal orientations and decreased performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals.

According to Yin's (2017) study, Chinese tertiary teachers who emphasized mastery goals used student-focused teaching approaches more frequently, while those with ability-approach and work-avoidance goals preferred teacher-focused approaches. This indicates that there is a connection between goal orientation and teaching style. Thomson and McIntyre (2013) identified three groups of prospective teachers based on their goal orientations, shaped by their motivations, beliefs, and strategies. Collins and Stevens (1980) further explored the goals and strategies of effective teachers, providing a theoretical framework for comprehending their decision-making processes. Finally, Kunst et al. (2018) discovered that teachers with a success-

oriented profile were more likely to participate in professional development activities, while those with a high-avoidance profile were less likely to do so.

It is important to note that the findings above support earlier studies that found teachers frequently prefer learning-oriented goals over performance-oriented ones (Elliot & Dweck, 2005). This finding contributes to the previous literature by its focus on the classification of goals of teachers who follow postmethod pedagogy tenets in their instructional objectives; however, previous studies investigated teachers' achievement goal orientations from a general perspective (Butler & Shibaz, 2008; Rinas et al., 2020; Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015). In other words, they did not categorize these goals orientation in a postmethodic fashion.

The present study endeavoured to bridge the research gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the semi-structured interviews that focused on the goal orientations of skilled EFL teachers while implementing postmethod principles in their practices. The findings of this study provide valuable insight into distinct categories that represent different positions along the intrinsic-extrinsic spectrum, which are closely related to the topic of motivation in educational psychology, commonly referred to as goal orientation. Furthermore, this research integrates the concepts of motivation and goal orientation in educational psychology with the socio-cognitive approach of postmethod pedagogy in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT).

Authors' Contributions

The authors of this study have worked collaboratively and have participated in all aspects of the research undertaken.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

Ethical Considerations

Before the interviews commenced, the informed consent of the interviewees was obtained. They were adequately informed about the purpose of the study, and their voluntary participation was emphasized. Participants were informed of their right to voluntarily participate or withdraw from the study at any given point. Their permission to record the interview for transcription and further analysis was obtained.

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