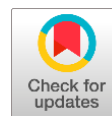


Pursuit And Burnout: How Goal Orientation Influences Academic Pressure in Students



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Abstract This study investigated the relationship between students' goal orientation and their experience of academic pressure, emphasizing how motivation impacts stress within academic settings. Recognizing that goal-driven behavior can both inspire achievement and heighten emotional strain, the research aimed to shed light on how students' motivational orientations align with their perceived academic demands. A descriptive correlational research design was employed, involving 225 college students selected through simple random sampling. Two standardized and reliable instruments were used: the Academic Stress Scale and the Achievement Goal Questionnaire–Revised (AGQ-R). Descriptive statistics were utilized to examine the general trends in students' goal orientation and stress levels, while Spearman's rank-order correlation determined the nature of the relationship between the two variables. Findings revealed that students generally demonstrated a high level of goal orientation, especially mastery-oriented goals. They also reported notable academic pressure stemming from high personal expectations and the perceived importance of success. A significant positive correlation emerged between goal orientation and academic pressure, suggesting that increased motivation is often accompanied by greater stress. These results indicate that while goal orientation contributes positively to students' engagement and drive, it may also lead to emotional strain if not properly managed. Understanding this dynamic is essential in creating supportive academic environments. The study contributes to the development of educational strategies that balance motivation with mental well-being. It offers insights for educators, counselors, and policymakers aiming to cultivate a learning climate that encourages achievement without compromising student health.

Keywords: Academic Motivation; College Students; Learning Behavior; Psychological Stress; Student Engagement

1. Introduction

Academic pressure refers to the emotional and psychological stress students experience due to high expectations in their academic performance. It often stems from personal goals, parental demands, school standards, and societal competition (Talley, 2024). This pressure may manifest in anxiety, loss of motivation, and even burnout when students are unable to meet academic demands (Cahyadewi et al., 2024). As education systems continue to value grades and performance, students increasingly struggle to cope with these expectations (Eyler, 2024a). When unmanaged, academic pressure can negatively impact students' mental well-being, performance, and overall educational experience (Chemagosi, 2024).

Goal orientation refers to an individual's approach to learning and achievement, particularly the reasons behind striving for academic success. It is typically categorized into two types: mastery orientation, which focuses on learning and understanding; and performance orientation, which emphasizes demonstrating ability and outperforming others (Nazarieh et al., 2023). Students with different goal orientations exhibit varied learning behaviors, stress responses, and motivation levels (yi Li & Shieh, 2016). Those with mastery goals are generally more resilient and engaged, while performance-oriented students



may be more vulnerable to pressure and failure (Randall et al., 2019). Understanding goal orientation is crucial because it shapes how students perceive challenges and measure success (Senko & Tropiano, 2016).

Today's students face mounting academic demands that lead to chronic stress and anxiety, often affecting their health, motivation, and engagement (Cvetković & Ružičić, 2024). Increased competition, standardized testing, and unrealistic expectations exacerbate academic pressure across all levels of education (Senevirathne, 2025). Meanwhile, many students adopt maladaptive goal orientations, driven by the need for recognition or avoidance of failure, which can hinder learning and increase vulnerability to burnout (de la Fuente et al., 2020). Performance-oriented students are particularly affected, as their self-worth becomes dependent on external validation (Cano et al., 2018). Additionally, the lack of institutional support and excessive focus on achievement metrics can distort students' goals and motivations (Schneider & Preckel, 2017). These issues highlight the need to explore how goal orientation interacts with academic pressure in shaping students' educational experiences (Miller et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, particularly among tertiary-level students in South Central Mindanao, academic pressure and goal orientation are highly relevant concerns. The region is home to diverse state universities and colleges where students often face limited resources but high expectations from both families and institutions. Cultural values that emphasize family honor, coupled with competitive academic environments, make students more vulnerable to stress and burnout. Situating this study in South Central Mindanao thus provides important insights into how goal orientation influences academic pressure within a distinct socio-cultural and educational context.

Numerous studies have documented the adverse effects of academic pressure on student well-being and academic outcomes. Research has shown that high levels of academic stress are linked to anxiety, depression, and decreased academic performance (Deng et al., 2022). In particular, students in highly competitive environments report more psychological distress and less satisfaction with their academic life (Franzen et al., 2021). Studies also point to the role of external expectations—such as parental and institutional demands—as key contributors to this pressure (Xu et al., 2024). These findings underscore the persistent challenges students face in balancing academic demands with mental health.

Research on goal orientation has established its significant role in academic motivation, engagement, and performance. Studies reveal that mastery goal orientation is positively associated with deeper learning strategies and emotional well-being (Wang et al., 2022). In contrast, performance-avoidance goals often lead to fear of failure, self-handicapping behaviors, and increased stress (Molenaar et al., 2021). Goal orientation has also been linked to students' perseverance and response to academic challenges, affecting their long-term academic success (Li et al., 2019). These insights emphasize the importance of understanding how students' internal goals shape their educational experiences.

Despite the existing research on academic pressure and goal orientation as separate constructs, there remains insufficient data on how these two variables relate to each other in influencing students' academic experiences. Few studies have examined the direct connection between goal orientation and the experience of academic pressure, particularly among diverse student populations. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the question: How does goal orientation influence students' academic pressure?

The general purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between students' goal orientation types and their experiences of academic pressure, with a focus on tertiary schools students in South Central Mindanao. The findings aim to inform strategies that better support student well-being and academic motivation. This research is important as it provides insights that can benefit students, educators, and institutions in addressing academic stress through more personalized and goal-informed support systems. For the respondents, the study promotes self-awareness and adaptive goal-setting. For the body of knowledge, it contributes to a deeper understanding of motivational psychology in academic settings. And for the wider academic community, it opens new avenues for interventions that reduce pressure while nurturing meaningful learning.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research design

This research employed a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive correlational approach. Quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to explain, predict, or control variables of interest in a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Esto et al., 2025). Descriptive correlation, on the other hand, is a type of quantitative design used to determine whether and to what degree a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables without manipulating them (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019; Jovita et al., 2025a; Rahman et al., 2022a). The descriptive correlational design

is most appropriate for this study because it aims to examine the natural relationship between students' goal orientation and their academic pressure. Since the study does not intend to manipulate any variables but rather to describe the degree of association between them, this approach provides a valid and ethical framework. It also allows the researcher to quantify the strength and direction of the relationship, which is essential in understanding how one variable may influence the other. Furthermore, this design supports generalization of the findings to similar educational contexts, thereby increasing the relevance and applicability of the results.

2.2. Respondents and sampling

A total of 225 student respondents participated in this study. They were tertiary school students enrolled in various state universities and colleges in South Central Mindanao, Philippines. Respondents were selected through simple random sampling, a probability technique where every individual in the population has an equal chance of being chosen, ensuring fairness and representation (Rahman et al., 2022b). This method was deemed most appropriate for the study to avoid bias in respondent selection and to capture a diverse range of student experiences. By focusing on South Central Mindanao, the research contextualizes how cultural, institutional, and socio-economic factors in the region shape students' academic pressures and goal orientations.

2.3. Research instrument

This study utilized standardized questionnaires to measure both variables. To measure academic stress, the study employed the Questionnaire of Academic Stress in Secondary Education developed by (García-Ros et al., 2018) which demonstrated strong psychometric properties, including a reliability index of 0.87. For goal orientation, the study used the Achievement Goal Questionnaire-Revised (AGQ-R) (Sánchez Rosas, 2015), which reported a Cronbach's alpha reliability ranging from 0.74 to 0.88 across its subscales. These instruments are widely recognized for their validity and reliability in measuring academic stress and goal orientation among students. Adopting these tools ensures consistency with existing literature and allows for meaningful comparison of results.

2.4. Statistical analysis

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, (Dollente & Esto, 2025). Measures such as mean and composite mean were used to describe students' levels of academic pressure and types of goal orientation. For inferential analysis, Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to determine the relationship between the two variables. This non-parametric test is most appropriate because it measures the strength and direction of association between ordinal variables or data that do not meet the assumptions of normality. Spearman correlation also provides a robust analysis of monotonic relationships, which fits the nature of the data in this study (Jovita et al., 2025b). Through this method, the research aims to establish whether higher levels of a particular goal orientation correspond with higher or lower academic pressure.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents based on their goal orientation, highlighting the levels of mastery and performance goals among students. The data provide insights into the predominant motivational tendencies influencing their academic behaviors.

Table 1. Respondents' Goal Orientation

Statements	Mean	Verbal Description
4. For me, development of my ability is important enough to take risks.	3.18	Agree
2. I often look for opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge.	3.14	Agree
3. I enjoy challenging tasks at work where I will learn new skills.	3.11	Agree
8. I enjoy it when others at work know how well I do.	2.93	Agree
1. I am willing to select a challenging work assignment from which I can learn much.	2.92	Agree
5. I prefer to work in situations that require a high level of ability and talent.	2.90	Agree
9. I prefer to work on projects where I can prove my ability to others.	2.86	Agree

7. I try to figure out what it takes to prove my ability to others at work.	2.77	Agree
12. I'm concerned about taking on a task at work if my performance reveals that I have a low ability.	2.76	Agree
13. I prefer to avoid situations at work where I might perform poorly.	2.71	Agree
10. I would avoid taking on a new task if there was a chance that I would appear rather incompetent to others.	2.68	Agree
6. I'm concerned with showing that I can perform better than my coworkers.	2.64	Agree
11. Avoiding a show of low ability is more important than learning a new skill.	2.46	Disagree
Grand Mean	2.85	High Goal Orientation

Legend:

Scale:	Verbal Description	Interpretation
4.00-3.50	Strongly Agree	Very High Emotional Intelligence
3.49-2.50	Agree	High Emotional Intelligence
2.49-1.50	Disagree	Low Emotional Intelligence
1.49-1.00	Strongly Disagree	Very Low Emotional Intelligence

Table 2 shows the levels of academic pressure experienced by the respondents across various indicators. It highlights the extent to which students feel stressed or challenged by academic demands and expectations.

Table 2. Academic Pressure among the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Verbal Description
6. I believe academic results are crucial for my future.	3.09	Agree
9. I feel stressed when I fail to live up to my expectations.	3.08	Agree
16. I fear that I will forget the content during the exams.	3.02	Agree
14. I feel nervous before any exam.	2.97	Agree
2. There is too much homework.	2.91	Agree
11. I feel stressed when my assignments are not completed on time.	2.90	Agree
10. I cannot sleep because of the worry that I will not be able to meet the goals I have set for myself.	2.84	Agree
12. I feel I lack the time to complete all the activities I am required to do.	2.84	Agree
5. I feel stressed due to work-related issues and daily study.	2.81	Agree
3. I feel there are too many tests and exams.	2.77	Agree
1. I find it challenging to concentrate during classes.	2.75	Agree
13. Discussions and conflicts in the family related to my study give me stress.	2.64	Agree
4. Competition among classmates brings a lot of academic pressure on me.	2.60	Agree
7. I am dissatisfied with my current grades.	2.58	Agree
15. My classmates getting more marks than I gives me stress.	2.36	Agree
8. My parents care too much about my academic results, which gives me stress.	2.31	Agree
Grand Mean	2.78	High Academic Pressure

Legend:

4.24 – 5.00	All of the Time	Very High Mental Well-being
3.43 – 4.23	Often	High Mental Well-being
2.62 – 3.42	Some of the Time	Average Well-being
1.81 – 2.61	Rarely	Low Mental Well-being
1.00 – 1.80	None of the Time	Very Low Mental Well-being

Table 3 presents the results of the test examining the relationship between the respondents’ goal orientation and their level of academic pressure. It shows whether a significant association exists between the students’ motivational goals and the stress they experience in their academic pursuits.

Table 3. Test of the Relationship between the Respondents' Goal Orientation and Academic Pressure			
Paired Variables	Pearson Coefficient	Correlation p-value	Interpretation $\alpha=0.05$
Goal Orientation and Academic Pressure	.263**	.001	Significant

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. Discussion

4.1 Respondents’ Goal Orientation

The statement “For me, development of my ability is important enough to take risks” received the highest mean of 3.18, verbally interpreted as “agree.” This means that many students are willing to engage in challenges if it contributes to improving their academic competence. It reflects a mindset that prioritizes growth and learning over fear of failure. This implies that students exhibit a mastery-oriented goal, where they view effort and risk-taking as essential elements of personal and academic development.

The findings align with previous studies emphasizing that students with mastery goal orientation tend to embrace learning tasks and take academic risks for the sake of competence development. Such students are more likely to demonstrate persistence and deep learning strategies when facing difficult tasks (Ross et al., 2022). Moreover, they are intrinsically motivated and driven by a desire for self-improvement rather than external validation (Maralov et al., 2023). These results suggest that a strong mastery orientation supports healthy academic engagement and motivation (Datu et al., 2022).

On the contrary, the statement “Avoiding a show of low ability is more important than learning a new skill” garnered the lowest mean of 2.46, with a verbal interpretation of “agree.” This means that fewer students prioritize protecting their image over acquiring new competencies. It indicates a relatively lower endorsement of performance-avoidance goals, which are often linked to fear of judgment. This implies that while concern about failure still exists, it is not the dominant motivation for most students in this group.

This result is supported by research suggesting that students who endorse fewer performance-avoidance goals are less likely to experience debilitating academic anxiety or disengagement (Putwain et al., 2016). Performance-avoidance has been associated with surface-level learning and low academic resilience, making its low presence a positive indicator (Nakhla, 2019). Additional, students with reduced focus on image preservation tend to be more open to constructive feedback and challenge (Chew & Cerbin, 2021).

The grand mean for respondents’ goal orientation was 2.85, which corresponds to a “High Goal Orientation.” This means that, on average, students demonstrated strong motivational drives in their academic pursuits. Their responses suggest a general tendency to engage in learning with purpose, effort, and goal clarity. This implies that most of the respondents are likely to adopt productive academic behaviors and strategies that support academic growth.

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that high goal orientation, particularly when it includes mastery goals, correlates with academic engagement and adaptive learning behaviors (Sánchez-Cardona et al., 2021). Students with high goal orientation are more inclined to set meaningful learning objectives and maintain motivation even when facing challenges 39. Furthermore, high goal orientation is often linked with greater satisfaction and well-being in the learning environment (Brown, 2017).

4.2 Academic Pressure among the Respondents

Based on the responses, the item “I believe academic results are crucial for my future” received the highest mean score of 3.09, with a verbal interpretation of “agree.” This indicates that many students view their academic achievements as a significant determinant of their future success. It suggests that students closely associate their performance in school with personal ambition, future career prospects, and a sense of self-fulfillment. The data reflect a belief system where academic excellence is perceived as a gateway to greater life opportunities. Consequently, the pressure to excel may not necessarily come from external forces but rather from internalized aspirations and long-term goals.

This perception resonates with findings from previous research which show that students often equate academic success with favorable life outcomes such as job security, financial stability, and social mobility (Brown, 2017). The internal pressure to perform well academically tends to intensify when students believe their entire future hinges on their grades (Eyler, 2024b). This belief system has been shown to increase anxiety, particularly in competitive academic settings where performance is constantly evaluated (Espeland et al., 2016). Therefore, the connection between academic achievement and perceived future security remains a key driver of academic stress.

In contrast, the item “My parents care too much about my academic results, which gives me stress” registered the lowest mean score of 2.31, but still with a verbal description of “agree.” This suggests that while some students acknowledge stress linked to parental expectations, it is not perceived as a dominant factor among the group. The responses indicate that many students may interpret their parents’ concern as genuine support rather than undue pressure. This also implies that students are possibly learning to manage their academic responsibilities independently, without overly attributing stress to external expectations. Such perspectives may highlight the evolving nature of parent-child dynamics during the college years.

This result supports studies showing that parental involvement does not always translate into stress, as students may see it as a form of care and encouragement (Lowe & Dotterer, 2018). The quality of communication between parents and students plays a major role in whether such involvement is experienced as pressure or support (Lowe & Dotterer, 2018). When communication is open and understanding is mutual, parental concern can contribute positively to students’ emotional well-being. In some cases, moderate parental engagement has even been linked to lower stress levels and better academic coping strategies (Ahmad et al., 2017).

The overall mean for academic stress among the respondents was 2.78, which corresponds to a verbal interpretation of “High Academic Stress.” This reveals that a substantial number of students consistently encounter stress in their academic life. It indicates that academic stress is not limited to a few students but is a widespread experience, shaped by rigorous academic requirements, internal expectations, and social pressures. This also implies that managing stress is a recurring challenge for students as they navigate college demands. If this level of stress remains unaddressed, it may influence students’ ability to sustain academic engagement and emotional balance.

These results align with a growing body of research showing that academic stress is prevalent among college students due to the demands of coursework, limited time, and the fear of underachievement (Khadka, 2024). High levels of academic stress are frequently linked to decreased motivation, poor concentration, and challenges in academic performance (Pascoe et al., 2024). In extreme cases, ongoing stress may also affect students’ mental health and ability to reach long-term educational goals (Tus, 2020). Thus, academic stress remains a central issue in student life and learning.

4.3 Relationship between the Respondents’ Goal Orientation and Academic Pressure

The analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of 0.263 and a p-value of 0.001, indicating a significant positive relationship between students’ goal orientation and academic pressure. Since the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), the result confirms a statistically meaningful association between the two variables. The positive correlation suggests that as students’ goal orientation increases, their experience of academic pressure also tends to rise. Although the strength of the correlation is moderate, it highlights an important connection between students’ academic motivations and the stress they perceive. This finding emphasizes that students’ internal drive for achievement is related to the amount of academic stress they encounter.

This means that students who are highly goal-oriented are also more likely to experience greater academic pressure. Their desire to achieve, whether driven by mastery or performance goals, may heighten their sensitivity to academic demands. This implies that students with strong achievement motivations may place greater weight on academic success, thereby increasing their stress levels. It also indicates that the way students define success and approach goals can significantly influence their emotional and cognitive responses to academic tasks. The relationship suggests that goal orientation is not only a motivational factor but also a potential contributor to academic stress.

This result is consistent with studies that link goal-driven behaviors to elevated academic pressure, especially when students internalize high expectations and competitive mindsets (Laurell et al., 2022). Research shows that goal orientation, particularly performance-oriented goals, often correlates with increased anxiety and perceived academic strain (Tuominen et al., 2020). Similarly, students with strong academic goals may develop perfectionist tendencies, which further intensify stress

under high-stakes conditions (Shin et al., 2023). These studies support the present findings and underscore the complexity of how motivation and stress interact in academic environments.

The findings of this study carry significant implications for educational policy and institutional practices, particularly in supporting students' academic well-being. The established relationship between goal orientation and academic pressure suggests that while goal-driven behaviors can foster motivation, they may also increase vulnerability to stress if not managed appropriately. This calls for academic institutions to develop environments that promote mastery-oriented goals rather than performance-based competition, thereby encouraging meaningful learning without excessive pressure. Educational policies may also benefit from integrating mental health awareness, academic advising, and stress management programs that align with students' motivational profiles (Gueldner et al., 2020). By recognizing how students' achievement goals influence their academic experiences, educators and administrators can design more balanced and supportive systems that enhance learning outcomes while safeguarding students' mental health (Lüftenegger et al., 2016).

5. Conclusions

The results demonstrate that students generally exhibit a strong and purposeful goal orientation, reflecting a mindset that values academic growth and achievement. Their motivational tendencies indicate a willingness to embrace challenges and take ownership of their learning. This suggests that students are driven not only by external rewards but also by an intrinsic desire for improvement and success. Such orientation plays a key role in shaping how they engage with academic tasks and navigate their educational journey. Overall, their goal orientation reflects a positive disposition toward learning and achievement. The findings highlight that academic pressure is a significant and shared experience among students. It emerges as a complex phenomenon shaped by personal expectations, institutional demands, and broader societal standards. Despite varying sources of pressure, students appear to internalize the need to perform well, often tying their academic success to their future aspirations. This condition reflects the demanding nature of academic life, where students strive to meet both internal and external benchmarks. Academic pressure, therefore, remains a central factor influencing students' educational experiences and psychological well-being. The relationship between goal orientation and academic pressure underscores the intricate connection between students' motivations and the stress they experience. While goal orientation can drive academic engagement, it can also heighten sensitivity to performance expectations. This dynamic reveals how deeply students' aspirations can influence their emotional responses to academic challenges. Understanding this relationship is essential in creating learning environments that promote healthy motivation without contributing to excessive stress. It also points to the importance of balancing ambition with well-being in educational settings.

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Ethical considerations

This research adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were safeguarded by securely storing the data and reporting findings in aggregate form, without identifying individual responses. Additionally, the study was conducted in full compliance with ethical standards, ensuring that no harm or distress was caused to the participants and that the research adhered to the moral principles of respect, integrity, and fairness.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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