

The Priming Effect of Family Obligation on Filipino Students' Academic Performance

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The aim of the present study is to determine the effect of family obligation on Filipino students' academic performance. This study is specifically concerned with family obligation as a motivational factor that would outweigh other motivational factors such as mastery goal and performance goal in influencing academic performance. Since Filipinos value their family, their sense of obligation (Fulgini, Tseng, & Lam, 1999) might cause them to perform well in school. This study was conducted using a single factorial design. Participants (n=163) were randomly assigned conditions with different motivational factors (Family Obligation, Mastery Goal orientation, Performance Goal orientation, Control). Priming was used to activate the different motivations. The results show that students exposed to family obligation had higher scores in academic performance. The findings of the study will contribute to the developing literature on Filipino behavior in schools. The study also highlights the importance of families on the academic lives of Filipino students.

Keywords: Academic performance, family obligation, Filipino students, goal orientation

Filipinos value education. In a survey of Filipino youth, 98% rated "having a good education" as being "very or rather important." However, despite this valuing of education, it does not manifest in their academic performance (Mullis et al., 2000). This could be because academic performance is influenced by other factors aside from the perception of the value of education. Specifically, motivational factors might influence their academic performance. In Philippine literature, it was found that Filipinos view education as an instrument in achieving goals like helping the family (Bernardo, Salanga & Aguas, 2008). Guided by this idea, the current paper highlights the role of family as a motivational factor that strongly influences the academic performance of Filipino students.

In school, students thrive to perform well, comply with requirements such as exams, quizzes, and homework. All these are reflected in their academic performance (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Academic performance has been found to be influenced by a student's goal orientation (Johnson, 2012; Roebken, 2007). Goal orientation refers to how an individual desires to show or create skill in a specific achievement context. It can either be a mastery-oriented or performance-oriented goal (Ames & Archer, 1988). Interestingly, goal orientation is said to generate a different notion among Filipinos (Bernardo et al., 2008).

Filipino students were found to predominantly think of learning not in the context of competence but rather as an instrument to be used in achieving a greater goal such as socioeconomic prosperity, helping one's family and appreciation of parents (Bernardo et al., 2008). This suggests that the motivation to learn might be driven by parental expectation. According to Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) for students in collectivist countries, performing well in school is considered to be a way to fulfill duties in the family. Indeed, families play a significant role in Filipino students' academic performance. This could possibly be due to family obligations.

Filipinos are family-oriented (Sanchez & Gaw, 2007). This characteristic leads to the development of family obligation (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). Filipinos are known for their close family-ties. They have a tendency to always put the family first when it comes to decision making. This occurs to the extent of their staying with their parents after marriage in order to take care of them—it is one way of repaying their parents for the sacrifices they have made for them (Triandis, 1990). Not only in the context of caregiving does family obligation create an impact, but also in academic performance. For Filipino students, finishing their studies would pave the way in accomplishing their duties in the family (Fuligni et al., 1999). This is why they strive hard in school. The current study argues that for Filipinos, family obligation outweighs the individualistic goal orientation as a motivation to perform well in school.

Goal Orientation

Goal orientation is a well-studied motivational factor in academic performance (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Elliott, 1984). Goal orientation represents the desire to create, achieve, or show skill in a specific context (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984). It influences the way students approach and perform their coursework (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Maehr & Braskamp, 1986). It is divided into mastery goal and performance goal. Mastery goal focuses on the mastering of skills while performance goal focuses on outperforming others. (Ames & Archer, 1988). In an experiment conducted by Johnson (2012), results indicated that goal orientation had an impact on students' note taking and academic performance. In another experiment conducted by Jagacinski and Strickland (2000), mastery goal orientation was confirmed to have a positive influence on academic performance. Students are more inspired to do better in their studies because they enjoy the task. In contrast, performance goal orientation was not found to be significant in predicting the outstanding performance of students.

Most studies see goal orientation to be stable within an individual. However, it could also depend upon circumstances. In a study by Ames and Archer (1988), students' perception of the emphasis on goal orientation affected their adaptation of it. In classrooms where mastery goal is emphasized, students adapted mastery goal orientation. Similarly, students adapted performance goal orientation in classrooms that put emphasis on performance goal. This means that one's motivation to do well in school is in part determined by contextual factors.

Filipino Students' Motivation

Since most studies about goal orientation are conducted in western settings, researchers have proposed that goal orientation might be different for Filipino students. Bernardo et al. (2008) discovered that Filipino students view learning differently. For Filipino students, learning is not only about aiming for competence; rather, it is a gateway toward achieving greater ends such as helping the family. Some of their respondents mentioned that they are motivated to study well because of what their families hope and aspire for them. Similarly, Bernardo's (2008) study found that for Filipinos, the motivation for achievement is social in nature. Parents have a great influence on students' motivation. He explained that both mastery goal and performance goal are guided by a set of personal performance standards, which are determined by parents. This implies a possibility that academic performance is driven by parent-related factors. However, it could also be that performance in school is due to family obligation.

Family Obligation

It is known that Filipinos center their lives on their families (Miralao, 1997). Families are an important part of their daily doings and decision-making. It is said that collectivist countries such as Philippines have an interdependent self-construal. Thus, Filipinos are inclined to consider family obligation (King & Ganotice, 2015). Family obligation is the feeling of being responsible enough to respect, help and contribute to the family (Fulgini et al., 1999). Filipinos feel obligated to help their families

and this influences them to study harder. It persuades them to dedicate their efforts to succeeding in their educational endeavors for the sake of their family, most particularly their parents. King and Ganotice (2015) found that family obligation positively predicted motivation and engagement. In a study by Bernardo et al. (2008), students reported being motivated for their family; another said good academic performance is an act of gratitude for the family's support. This highly suggests that there is a possibility for Filipino students to do well in school because of family obligations.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study aims to add to the existing literature emphasizing the motivating effect of families. Specifically, the study looks into family obligation as a motivational factor for Filipino students' academic performance. To do this, the effect of family obligation is compared to the traditional or western conceptualization of goal orientation.

METHODS

The current study used an experimental design for the purpose of identifying the effect of motivation on academic performance. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three priming conditions that activated the different motivations: Family Obligation, Mastery Goal and Performance Goal. A control group was also included. Specifically, the study argues that family obligation leads to a higher level of academic performance than mastery and performance goal orientation.

Participants

A sample of 163 (63 males and 100 females) undergraduate students who are currently taking a General Psychology course at the University of San Carlos were the participants of the study. The age of the participants ranged from 17 to 23 ($M=19.21$; $SD=1.10$). There were a total of 43 (19 males, 24 females) participants for mastery goal, 37 (10 males, 27 females) participants for performance goal, 44 (16 males, 28

females) participants for family obligation and 39 (18 males, 21 females) for the control group.

Materials

Test scores. Academic performance has been assessed in a variety of measures across several studies such as through continued tests, final examinations, and even interviews with parents regarding the child's academic performance (e.g. Chew, Zain & Hassan, 2013; Holgado et al., 2014). To arrive at a measure of academic performance, the researchers created several questionnaires. Each questionnaire contained 10 items that are related to the topic that is currently being discussed in the participants' General Psychology class. To ensure validity, the items were assessed by the teacher in charge of the respective classes. Each participant answered two questionnaires during two separate assessment periods. The average score for the two periods serves as the measure of academic performance. This is based on the assumption that academic performance could not be measured in one instance because it is an aggregate of performance over a period of time (Conard, 2006). Furthermore, past studies have also used scores from tests as a measure of academic performance (Radel, Sarrazin, Legrain & Gobance, 2009; Conard, 2006).

For ethical considerations, the researchers opted not to use the actual grades of the participants as the participants might be significantly influenced by the manipulations they will be exposed to. For example, participants in the control group might have a lower grade than those in other groups and thus be disadvantaged in their class standing.

Priming tools. To ensure that the different motivations are activated, priming tools were used throughout the experiment. Priming has been used previously in studying the effects of goal orientation on training outcomes (e.g. Kozlowski et al., 2001).

The participants were primed using two different sets of materials. These priming techniques have been proven to be effective in past studies (e.g. Stajkovic, Blair & Locke, 2006; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007; Ikegami, 1993). Each participant is exposed to different priming materials across two assessment periods. This was done to ensure that the participants are not familiarized with the priming materials and for the primes to be effective.

The first priming tool that was used is sentence completion. The participants were given a set of sentences that they have to complete. (e.g. for mastery goal, I'm trying hard to learn new things because _____; for performance goal, I am the only one who can perform well in _____; for family obligation, I want to repay my parents for their hard work by _____).

For the second assessment, jumbled words were used to prime the participants. They were asked to form a sentence out of the jumbled words that primed them in accordance with three conditions (e.g. for mastery goal, I / in / achieve / focus / goal / a / my / in / task / order / on / to; for performance goal, I / better / friends / do / than / can / my; for family obligation, I / family / make / my / sacrifices / for). There is a control group in each assessment period and members were given another set of materials that were completely unrelated to the experiment and that did not prime the participants.

All priming tools were subjected to pilot testing and were found to be effective. For instance, participants who were primed with family obligation had a higher score in a measure of family obligation than in mastery and performance goals.

Covariate. Since academic performance is linked with one's academic abilities, the grade point average (GPA) of the participants was taken into account (Rice, Ray, Davis, DeBlaere & Ashby, 2015). The GPA of the participants for the current semester was retrieved from the University Registrar. GPA ranged from 1.0 to 5.0, with 5.0 as the lowest possible grade. It is important to note that the usage of GPA was permitted by the University Registrar.

Procedure

To gather participants, the researchers asked permission from General Psychology teachers for students in their classes to take part in an experiment. Upon the agreement of the teachers, the topic in which a test would be created was identified. A date (one day per assessment period) for the administration of the test was then set.

Prior to the conduct of the study, all participants signed an informed consent form indicating their voluntary participation in the study. After this, the participants were randomly assigned to their respective conditions. The teacher was not made aware of the assignment of the students. At the start of the class, the students were asked by an experimenter to answer the tests (priming tools). All the priming tools were handed out at once and instructions were given. The participants were made to believe that these tools were simply being used for "testing". This ensured that the participants were blinded from the actual intent of the tools and of the study. Once all the students had answered the priming tools, these were collected by the experimenter, who then exited the classroom. The teacher then administered the test. Answer sheets were later collected by the teacher.

The same procedure was followed for both assessment periods. At the end of the second assessment period, the participants were debriefed and given incentives for their participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were observed throughout the conduct of the study.

RESULTS

The study looked into the effect of motivation on academic performance. The contributions of Family Obligation, Mastery Goal and Performance Goal to the academic performance of students was the focus of the study.

To control for the differences in the intellectual capability of the participants, their grade point average (GPA) for the current semester was included in the analysis. An analysis of

covariance (see Table 1) revealed that GPA does not have an effect on the academic performance scores of the participants, $F(1, 158) = .042$, $p = .839$. There was a main effect for the type of motivation, $F(3, 158) = 7.341$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .122$.

Table 1. Analysis of Covariance Summary of Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
GPA (covariate)	.066	1	.066	.042
Motivation	34.866	3	11.629	7.34***
Within Groups	250.294	158	1.584	
Total	8842.000	163		

Note. *** $p < .001$

A post-hoc comparison using Tukey's HSD revealed that participants under family obligation had the highest academic performance score ($M=7.97$; $SD=1.12$). This is followed by the control group ($M=7.18$; $SD=1.33$) and performance goal ($M=7.01$; $SD=1.28$). Mastery Goal led to the lowest scores ($M=6.77$; $SD=1.29$) (see Table 2). Mastery Goal, Performance Goal, and control group did not lead to academic performance scores that are different from other conditions.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Comparison Between Conditions

Condition	N	M	SD	95% Confidence Interval		Mean Difference (Family Obligation – Condition)
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Family Obligation	44	7.97	1.12	7.59	8.34	-
Mastery Goal	43	6.77	1.29	6.39	7.15	1.20***
Performance Goal	37	7.01	1.28	6.60	7.42	.95**
Control Group	39	7.18	1.33	6.78	7.58	.79*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

The result of this study shows that indeed, among the motivational factors primed, family obligation leads to higher academic performance. This is in line with studies that suggest family to be a strong motivation for students (e.g. Bernardo et al. 2008; Bernardo, 2008). This motivation could be due to family obligation. Family obligation is the feeling of being responsible enough to respect, help and contribute to the family (Fulgini et al., 1999). Filipinos value their families, which is why they might view their performance in school as a way of fulfilling their responsibilities to their parents and family. When reminded of their family obligation, they might exert more effort in their academics as a way of contributing to their family. This concern could have led to the effectiveness of family obligation in improving the academic performance of Filipino students.

The study was also able to demonstrate the relative effectiveness of goal orientations. It can be observed that mastery and performance goal orientation lead to the lowest scores. In the Filipino educational context, these motivations might not lead to the best student outcomes. Since these motivations are individualistic in nature, they do not reflect Filipino students' concerns. Students with interdependent self-construal are more inclined to think about family obligations and be motivated by it (King & Ganotice, 2015). Thus, the effectiveness of family obligation causes students to perform well.

This study conveys several implications. It informs educational institutions that the current methods of motivating students, which emphasize individual success, might not lead to the best outcomes. Due to students' sensitivity to family obligation, it might be best to emphasize this within the school. As demonstrated, it would encourage students to perform better. Also, this study serves as a cue for families to involve themselves more in the educational lives of students. Their involvement will eventually be reciprocated in the form of better performance in school.

Limitations and Future Research

The study was able to demonstrate the effectiveness of family obligation as a motivation for better academic performance. However, despite these results, the study does not explain the mechanism behind such relationships. Thus, there is a need to conduct studies exploring possible mediating variables.

The study measured academic performance through exam scores. It would be beneficial for future studies to look at other measures of academic performance such as actual grades, and persistence in a task. Academic performance as measured through exam scores could be influenced by several factors that were not accounted for in the study.

Lastly, the variables related to the family of the participants such as family size, birth order, and socio-economic status were not considered in this study. Future analysis might include these as these might play a role in the relationship between family obligation and academic performance.

CONCLUSION

The present study shows that in comparison to individualistic goal orientation, family obligation leads to a better academic performance among Filipino students. For them, fulfilling their education is a way of accomplishing their duties for the family. Perhaps for Filipino students, success in their educational endeavors is not purely their own achievement but is an achievement for the family as well.

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