



Toward an Interpersonal Theory of Academic Motivation: Rethinking Student Agency Through an Interdependent-Self Lens

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Abstract

Student achievement motivation has traditionally been examined through an intrapersonal lens, emphasizing self-related processes and constructs such as self-efficacy, task interest and values, achievement goals, and attributional beliefs. Although these approaches have substantially advanced understanding of student motivation, they are largely grounded in an independent conception of the self, assuming that motivation originates from internal attributes and is enacted through personal agency. Accumulating evidence, however, points to the need for an interpersonal framework that more fully foregrounds the sociocultural origins of motivation. This paper advances an interdependent-self perspective, positioning interpersonal relationships, role obligations, and cultural norms as central motivational forces. Drawing on contemporary theorizing about independent and interdependent self-construals, the paper synthesizes research that examines how social influences shape student motivation. From an independent-self standpoint, parents, teachers, and peers are conceptualized as external to the student and are typically viewed as either (a) *socializing agents* who shape students' beliefs, values, and goals, or (b) *supporting agents* who nurture students' competence, autonomy, and relatedness. In contrast, an interdependent-self framework views significant social agents as constitutive of the self and articulates three motivational process approaches: (a) a *parallel* approach, in which independently and interdependently oriented motivations operate simultaneously, each exerting distinct yet complementary influences on student engagement; (b) a *sequential* approach, in which interdependently oriented motivation functions as a motivational precursor, predicting engagement both directly and indirectly through independently oriented motivation; and (c) an *integrated* approach, in which self and others are fundamentally intertwined and motivation is inherently personal and social, grounded in shared agency as students act "out of our interest" to pursue collectively meaningful goals. By integrating independent- and interdependent-self perspectives, this paper advances a socially grounded, culturally inclusive, and globally relevant framework for understanding student motivation, with implications for theory, research, and practice.

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Keywords Academic motivation · Independent self · Interdependent self · Personal agency · Socially shared agency

The study of student achievement motivation examines the psychological processes that energize, direct, and sustain students' pursuit of academic goals (Elliot & Sommet, 2023; Liem & Senko, 2022). Over the past half-century, a rich array of theories has been developed to explain why students strive, persist, or disengage in achievement contexts. Among the most influential are perspectives emphasizing attributional reasoning (Weiner & Kukla, 1970), self-worth dynamics (Covington & Beery, 1976), self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977), expectancy–value processes (Eccles, 1983), achievement goals (e.g., Elliot, 1999; Nicholls, 1989), self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and ability mindsets (Dweck, 1999). Despite their conceptual diversity and distinct focal constructs, these theories converge in their emphasis on *intrapersonal* sources of motivation such as students' beliefs, goals, and values (Plaut & Markus, 2005). While primarily grounded in a social-cognitive paradigm (Bandura, 1986) and clearly acknowledging the importance of social influences in shaping students' motivation, these perspectives tend to position the self—its attributes, appraisals, and regulatory processes—as the primary locus through which achievement motivation is generated and enacted.

However, scholars have raised important concerns about the predominant focus on intrapersonal characteristics in these motivation theories. In particular, three major critiques are highlighted here. First, Wentzel and Skinner (2022) argue that intrapersonal factors represent only *one half of the story* in understanding student motivation. Although contemporary motivation theories do acknowledge the influence of parents, teachers, and peers, especially those primarily grounded in social-cognitive theory, they usually position these significant others as contextual influences that shape students' personal beliefs, goals, and values—constructs that then serve as the actual motivational forces. What is missing is recognition of others as active social forces and co-agents who, together with students, drive motivation and achievement behavior. To advance the field, Wentzel and Skinner maintain, scholars must give greater attention to *the other half*: the interpersonal forces and social dynamics that shape motivation. In this spirit, Ford and Smith (2020) propose that true thriving emerges when goals consider both personal growth with social contribution, aligning individual striving with social purpose and relational meaning. Although prior efforts—particularly within the achievement goal (e.g., Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Urdan & Maehr, 1995) and goal content (e.g., Ford, 1992; Wentzel, 2000) traditions—began to foreground social motivation in the 1990s (see also e.g., deCharms & Muir, 1978 for an earlier attempt), these contributions often remained underdeveloped. Social motives were typically treated as secondary to intrapersonal constructs or as contextual antecedents rather than as core motivational forces. This leaves a critical gap: the lack of systematic theorizing and empirical work that conceptualizes motivation as co-constructed through *both* intrapersonal *and* interpersonal forces.

Second, Leary et al. (2015) highlight psychology's longstanding bias—evident also within educational psychology—toward largely self-oriented intrapersonal motives, such as self-worth, self-enhancement, and self-protection (Alicke & Sedikides, 2011; see e.g., Covington, 1992 for these motives' prominence in student motivation theory). By contrast, interpersonal motives—such as the need for social belonging, rec-

ognition, and solidarity—have received far less attention. For instance, mastery goals were originally conceptualized as arising primarily from self-development motives, whereas performance goals were linked to self-enhancement and self-protection motives (Covington, 1992; Nicholls, 1989). Yet, research now shows that both can also serve social-utility and social-desirability motives (e.g., Dompnier et al., 2015). Thus, recent work signals a growing shift toward examining socially oriented motives within achievement contexts (see e.g., Liem & Senko, 2022, for a recent effort in educational psychology). Despite this progress, mainstream theories of student motivation—in their current state—continues to privilege self-oriented motives over relational ones as the primary drivers (see Wigfield et al., 2021). Thus, although motivation is still commonly framed in intrapersonal terms, many achievement processes are deeply interpersonal. Expanding the focus to include social motives is therefore essential for a more comprehensive and theoretically integrative understanding of student motivation.

Third, similar concerns have been echoed in cross-cultural critiques of mainstream motivation theories. Importantly, such critiques are not new and can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, when scholars such as Maehr (1974), Waterman (1981), and Spence (1985) questioned the dominance of models grounded in individualistic assumptions. For example, Spence (1985) observed that “although they are implied to have universal significance, contemporary theories of achievement and achievement motivation are rooted in individualism and may have validity primarily for American and other similar cultures” (p. 1285). This critique anticipated what is now widely recognized that much psychological research, including work on student motivation, has been constrained by sampling practices commonly described as the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) bias (Henrich, 2020; Usher, 2018). Motivation theories developed within this cultural milieu tend to reflect an independent view of the self, portraying individuals as autonomous agents whose personal interests, goals, and values serve as the primary drivers of behavior (Markus, 2016). Optimal motivation, accordingly, is often defined in terms of personal agency and self-regulation. Plaut and Markus (2005) characterize this orientation as the “inside story” in their cultural analysis of achievement motivation.

Together, these concerns—arising from educational, social, and cross-cultural psychology—converge on a central point: the need to more explicitly complement motivation theory’s traditional focus on intrapersonal and independent-self frameworks with greater attention to the sociocultural forces that shape how students think, feel, and act in academic settings. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that many major theories of student motivation have generated substantial insights and demonstrated considerable cross-cultural applicability. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) exemplifies this contribution well (see e.g., Fu et al., 2025; King et al., 2024a, b; see Reeve et al., 2022, for a review). Meta-analytic evidence consistently indicates that autonomy-supportive environments—whether provided by parents, teachers, or peers—enhance students’ need satisfaction, autonomous motivation, and well-being, whereas controlling contexts undermine these outcomes across cultures (Bradshaw et al., 2025; Bureau et al., 2022). Slemp et al. (2024) further demonstrate that support for competence, autonomy, and relatedness each uniquely predicts motivation, well-being, and performance, with autonomy and relatedness support being especially salient in collectivistic contexts. Collectively, these findings reinforce SDT’s core proposition that need-supportive relationships universally foster volitional engage-

ment and psychological well-being, even as their expression, function, and meaning may vary culturally (Ryan et al., 2022).

At the same time, students with interdependent orientations often prioritize familial expectations alongside, or even over, personal interests (Fu & Markus, 2014; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). Although such patterns are sometimes misinterpreted as indicating a lack of personal autonomy, they instead reflect culturally grounded forms of volition, in which action is self-endorsed while oriented toward social relationships, shared expectations, or collective concerns rather than being exclusively self-focused (cf. *autonomous interdependence*, Deci & Ryan, 1991; *interdependent self-determined motivation*, Liem, 2026). The issue, therefore, lies not in the theory itself but in its interpretation through an individualistic lens. Indeed, from an SDT perspective, these patterns underscore the *functional significance* of social behavior—the idea that the motivational meaning of behavior depends on its cultural interpretation (Deci & Ryan, 1987). Accordingly, parental guidance that may appear controlling in individualistic contexts can be experienced as caring and supportive when it is aligned with interdependent values (Chao, 1994; Soenens et al., 2015). To fully capture motivational dynamics in collectivistic contexts, therefore, it is necessary to consider a complementary paradigm that foregrounds sociocultural influences—one that is aligned with an interdependent view of selfhood, in which agency and motivation are grounded in interpersonal relationships, social obligations, and culturally prescribed norms (Markus, 2016; Miller et al., 2017; Plaut & Markus, 2005). Building on prior work (e.g., Boekaerts, 1998; Kumar & Maehr, 2007), this paper advances the field of student motivation by contributing to an emerging interpersonal theory of academic motivation by adopting an interdependent-self lens. In doing so, it clarifies how autonomy can be enacted in socially grounded ways while remaining fully volitional.

Importantly, the paper does not conceptualize self-conceptions as rigid dichotomies (e.g., independent vs. interdependent), nor does it stereotype students by cultural background (e.g., Western vs. Eastern). Rather, consistent with contemporary perspectives (Markus & Kitayama, 2003, 2010; Vignoles et al., 2016), independence and interdependence are treated as psychological orientations that coexist and dynamically interact within individuals across cultural contexts. The central issue, therefore, is not whether achievement motivation is shaped by either personal characteristics or social relationships, but how these self- and social motives jointly operate, as both are fundamental to human behavior. Nor does this paper deny the centrality of intrapsychic processes in cognition, emotion, and action, which underlie all psychological functioning. Even behaviors grounded in interpersonal motives—such as seeking social approval or fulfilling obligations—are ultimately mediated by internal psychological processes (Leary et al., 2015). The core premise is that considering intrapersonal and interpersonal forces together yields a socially responsive, culturally inclusive, and globally relevant framework for understanding student motivation within and across cultures.

To advance its overarching aim, this paper is organized around four key goals. First, it clarifies contemporary perspectives on independent and interdependent self-construals and demonstrates their relevance for understanding student motivation. Second, it applies this dual-self framework to systematically synthesize theory and research on how significant others—parents, teachers, and peers—shape students' achievement motivation and behavior. Third, it uses both independent and interde-

pendent lenses to illuminate motivational processes among students with differing degrees of self-orientations. Finally, it discusses the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of adopting this dual perspective for advancing the field of student academic motivation and the broader science of human achievement motivation.

Independent and Interdependent Selves as the Foundation of Students' Personal and Social Agency and Motivation

It is first necessary to introduce the independent–interdependent framework as a conceptual foundation for understanding how views of the self and agency inform students' motivation and the role of social agents in motivational processes. In their seminal formulation, Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that the Western view of the self as a separate, dispositional entity does not adequately capture how selfhood is experienced in many non-Western cultures, where the self is predominantly defined through connectedness and relationships. To account for this variation, they propose the distinction between *independent* and *interdependent* self-construals—alternative ways of defining and experiencing the self in relation to others. These orientations give rise to distinct modes of agency, reflecting culturally patterned ways of expressing the self, acting intentionally, and pursuing valued goals. From this perspective, agency serves as a critical bridge between self and motivation, shaping why certain goals are valued and pursued and how action is enacted and sustained. Accordingly, self, agency, and motivation are conceptualized as culturally embedded processes, guided primarily by personal desires and self-endorsed goals when an independent self is salient, and by social obligations and relational expectations when an interdependent self is salient. In this early theorizing, self-construals thus represent culturally patterned orientations that shape characteristic forms of cognition, emotion, and motivation—an insight that later work has extended by highlighting meaningful variability both within and across cultures.

Independence

Markus and Kitayama (1991) propose that independent cultural contexts tend to emphasize self-expression as well as personal autonomy, uniqueness, and achievement. These values, often supported by economic stability and social mobility, enable individuals to prioritize personal over communal goals (Hamamura et al., 2018). Within such environments—particularly among middle- and upper-class populations—independent self-construals are more prevalent. As illustrated in Fig. 1a, the independent self, as applied here to students, is conceived as a bounded and coherent agent defined by relatively stable personal attributes (e.g., abilities, attitudes, beliefs, interests, goals, values) that distinguish the individual from others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Agency and motivation are thus assumed to arise primarily from internal attributes, rendering action meaningful when it aligns with one's authentic self and is experienced as self-endorsed rather than externally imposed. Within this person-centered model, moral worth is closely tied to self-consistency and authenticity, such that a sense of self-fulfillment derives from the expression of individuality (Riemer et al., 2014). Figure 1a further depicts how students' personal

attributes occupy a more central role than those of others in shaping achievement behavior and outcomes when motivation is primarily regulated by an independent self and personal agency. Societies in Western Europe, North America, and Oceania—collectively referred to here as ASSERT (personally Agentic, Self-sufficient, Secularly guided, Equality-oriented, Rights-based, and Task-focused)—represent motivational ecologies that exemplify relatively independent cultural context

Interdependence

In contrast, interdependent cultural contexts emphasize interpersonal hierarchy, social harmony, and the fulfillment of role obligations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Within such settings, identities are embedded in communal networks that prioritize cohesion, continuity, and collective well-being (Hwang, 2012; Lee, 1996). As illustrated in Fig. 1b, the interdependent self, as also applied here to students, is conceived as flexible and relational, with considerable overlap between self

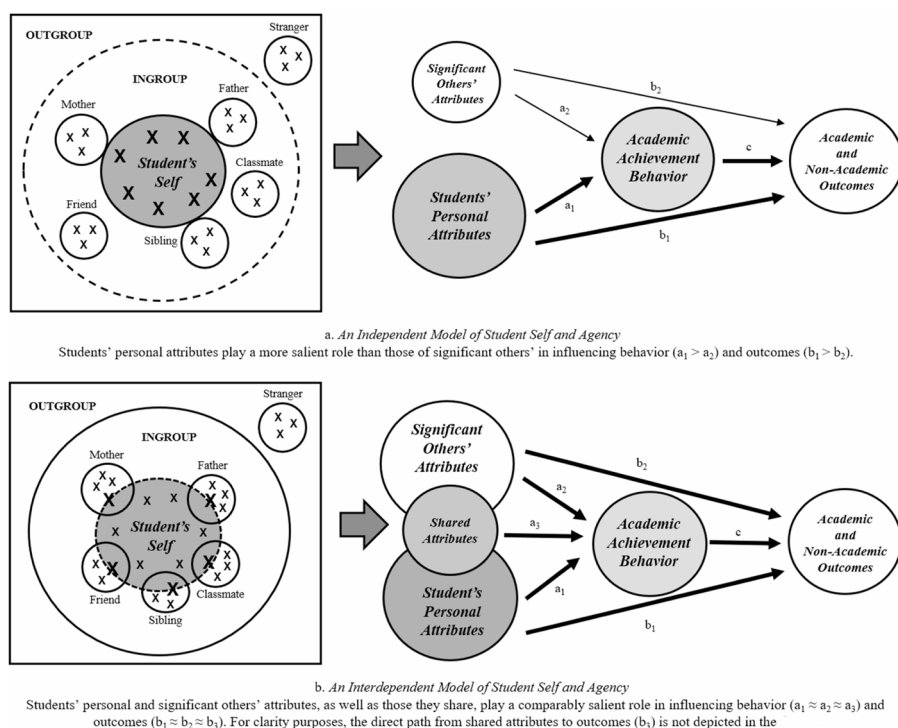


Fig. 1 Independent and interdependent models of self and agency and their role in shaping achievement behavior and outcomes. *Note:* x = less salient attributes and X = more salient attributes (e.g., needs, desires, wishes, motives, goals, values, preferences, attitudes) (adapted from Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Riemer et al., 2014; Thomas & Markus, 2023)

and others. Self-concepts are defined through social roles and shared attributes, and agency is expressed through responsiveness to social expectations, obligations, and norms particularly toward family members and elders (Helwig, 2006; Miller et al., 2017). Actions are experienced as meaningful when they sustain relational harmony and group welfare, as both personal choice and social expectations often reinforce rather than constrain autonomy (Markus, 2016). Within this *normative-contextual* model, moral worth is tied to fulfilling responsibilities, respecting hierarchy, and contributing to collective well-being, such that one's sense of fulfillment arises from social contribution rather than self-expression or personal achievement (Riemer et al., 2014). Figure 1b further shows that socially shared attributes play an equally salient—if not more salient—role than intrapersonal attributes in shaping students' achievement behavior and outcomes when motivation is guided by an interdependent self and interpersonal agency. East Asian societies such as China, Japan, South Korea, and parts of Southeast Asia—collectively referred to here as RELATE (Relationally agentic, socially Embedded, Locally guided, Ancestrally rooted, Tradition-focused, and Equilibrium-seeking)—represent motivational ecologies that exemplify relatively interdependent cultural contexts.^{1,2}

¹ Schwartz (2006) defines cultural value orientations as socially shared normative value emphases that reflect culturally preferred solutions to fundamental problems of social regulation and coordination and guide, justify, and give coherence to institutional arrangements, social practices, and collective patterns of action. Building on this definition and its underlying framework, I propose ASSERT and RELATE as broad classifications of *motivational ecologies* that translate and operationalize Schwartz's cultural value orientations into distinct motivational logics. Specifically, *personally agentic* versus *relationally agentic*, and *self-sufficient* versus *socially embedded*, echo the Autonomy versus Embeddedness dimension, contrasting motivation grounded in self-independence and personal attributes with motivation grounded in social obligations and relational ties. *Secularly guided* versus *locally guided* reflects Autonomy–Intellectual versus Embeddedness, distinguishing adherence to universal principles (e.g., law, science, individual rights) from adherence to ingroup- or community-specific traditions. *Equality-oriented* versus *ancestrally rooted* parallels Egalitarianism versus Hierarchy, differentiating commitments to fairness and moral equality from authority legitimized by lineage and seniority. *Rights-based* versus *tradition-focused* highlights tensions between individual freedoms and entitlements, on the one hand, and duties and obligations to culturally collectivistic norms, on the other. Finally, *task-focused* versus *equilibrium-seeking* maps onto Mastery versus Harmony, contrasting the pursuit of personal productivity, achievement, and control with the pursuit of interpersonal balance, coordination, and conflict avoidance. Although no society fully embodies a single motivational ecology, ASSERT and RELATE—conceived as mirror syndromes rather than rigid opposites—provide a heuristic lens for extending Schwartz's theory to understand motivational ecologies that regulate and guide human (student) behavior.

² The RELATE framework in this paper primarily focuses on East Asian societies rather than a broader “Eastern” or pan-Asian context for two reasons. First, although interdependent motivational ecologies are found worldwide, they manifest in culturally specific ways—for example, conflict avoidance and social harmony in East Asia, ingroup protection in Arab regions, and argumentation and debate in parts of South Asia (Kitayama et al., 2022). A broad Eastern classification therefore risks oversimplification, whereas a regionally and historically grounded focus on East Asia affords greater conceptual precision and interpretive clarity (Vignoles et al., 2016). Second, Markus and Kitayama's (1991) independence–interdependence framework was originally articulated through U.S.–East Asian comparisons, and subsequent research has likewise centered on East Asian contexts, particularly Japan, South Korea, and China (Krys et al., 2025). This extensive body of scholarship (e.g., Li, 2024; Tweed & Lehman, 2002) provides a strong empirical foundation for the theorizing advanced in the present paper. At the same time, future research should extend beyond East Asia to other regional traditions to further broaden cross-cultural perspectives on self, agency, and student motivation (see Kitayama & Salvador, 2024 for a similar argument).

Current Perspectives

In educational settings—where students' goals, engagement, and agency are shaped through ongoing interactions with teachers, peers, and families—understanding how independence and interdependence operate is especially critical. However, over the past three decades, scholars have identified key limitations in the original self-construal framework (see e.g., Matsumoto, 1999; Smith et al., 2013). Although these self-construals predict a range of psychosocial outcomes, including those relevant to learning and achievement (Cross et al., 2011; Oyserman & Lee, 2008), cross-cultural studies have often failed to demonstrate consistent East–West differences. For example, Levine et al.'s (2003) meta-analysis found no clear evidence that Asians score higher on interdependence than Westerners. Moreover, the two dimensions are frequently uncorrelated or even positively related, suggesting that they function as distinct orientations rather than as opposing poles. In response, scholars (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 2003, 2010; Vignoles et al., 2016) have refined this framework on several fronts, arguing that independent and interdependent selves are accessible to all individuals, vary within and across cultures, and are multidimensional, context-sensitive, and dynamically integrated.

On the Accessibility of Both Selves

In educational settings, students' motivation reflects the coexistence of independent and interdependent orientations, with cultural contexts shaping which orientation is more salient in particular learning situations. Empirical research supports this view, showing that independence and interdependence reliably coexist within individuals, even as Western contexts tend to emphasize personal choice and expression and East Asian contexts highlight collectivity and conformity (Kim & Markus, 1999). Importantly, self-construals also vary within cultures, shaped by factors such as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic class, and urban–rural background (Cross & Madson, 1997; Stephens et al., 2014). For example, Fryberg and Markus (2007) found that American Indian and Asian American students endorsed both independent (e.g., personal success) and interdependent (e.g., supporting family and community) educational aims, whereas European American students prioritized independent aims. Within-culture variation further suggests that working-class, younger, and female students may display stronger interdependence than their middle-class, older, and male peers (Cross et al., 2011). Together, the accessibility of both selves underscores students' capacity to flexibly balance personal and social motives across learning contexts and highlights that achievement motivation in schools emerges from the interplay between personal and social forms of agency.

On the Multidimensionality of the Self

Contemporary perspectives move beyond viewing independence and interdependence as opposing ends of a single dimension, an important shift for understanding student motivation across diverse educational contexts. Vignoles et al. (2016), for example, proposed a seven-dimensional model capturing distinct ways of being independent

or interdependent: (i) *self-reliance* vs. *dependence on others*, (ii) *self-containment* vs. *social connection*, (iii) *difference* vs. *similarity*, (iv) *self-interest* vs. *social commitment*, (v) *consistency* vs. *variability*, (vi) *self-direction* vs. *receptiveness to social influence*, and (vii) *self-expression* vs. *social harmony*. This multidimensional view preserves the insight that the self is both personally defined and socially embedded, while offering greater precision in linking specific self-construal dimensions to psychosocial outcomes (Cross et al., 2011; Matsumoto & Juang, 2022; Smith et al., 2013). For instance, a student may display self-direction and self-expression when pursuing an individual project, yet prioritize social commitment and harmony when working in a group assignment or responding to teacher expectations. Thus, recognizing this multidimensionality helps identify which facets of independence or interdependence are activated in particular learning situations and how they shape the balance between personal and social agency in student motivation.

On Relational and Collective Forms of Interdependence

A further refinement distinguishes relational from collective forms of interdependence (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cross et al., 2000), and this has important implications for understanding student motivation. Relational interdependence centers on close ties with specific family members, teachers, and peers, whereas collective interdependence involves identification with larger groups such as one's class, school, community, or nation. Research indicates that females tend to score higher on relational interdependence, whereas males more often emphasize collective interdependence (Cross & Madson, 1997). Collapsing these forms into a single construct obscures meaningful distinctions, as each carries unique motivational and psychosocial implications. For example, some students may be motivated primarily by maintaining close relationships with significant others (e.g., parents, teachers), whereas others are energized by contributing to group success, such as helping their class perform well or representing their school in competitions. Identifying which form of interdependence is salient—and under what conditions—can therefore help educators better harness both relational connections and collective affiliations.

On the Dynamic and Context-Sensitive Nature of the Self

The self is increasingly understood as dynamic, fluid, and context-dependent rather than fixed. Independent and interdependent orientations are not stable traits but can be situationally activated or experimentally primed through cues that highlight individuality or collectivity (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). For example, students may enact independence when pursuing individual academic goals yet emphasize interdependence when responding to family expectations or collaborating with peers, with bicultural students being particularly adept at shifting between cultural frames (Hong et al., 2000). Although cultural environments influence which self is more chronically accessible, either orientation can become the “working” self-concept in response to task demands, social expectations, or institutional norms (Markus & Cross, 1990). Recognizing this contextual flexibility underscores the importance of learning envi-

ronments that not only accommodate but also intentionally signal and support both personal and social forms of agency to promote student motivation and engagement.

On the Potential Integration of Both Selves

Of particular relevance to the present paper, a growing body of work demonstrates that independence and interdependence are not mutually exclusive but can jointly underpin agency and motivation. This integrative view is reflected in constructs such as *autonomous interdependence* (Deci & Ryan, 1991), the *autonomous-related self* (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005), *relational autonomy* (Gore & Cross 2006) ; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000), *inclusive autonomy* (Rudy et al., 2007), *endogenous social agency* (Miller, 2003), *internalized agency* (Miller & Bersoff, 1994), and *interdependent self-determined motivation* (Liem, 2026). Consistent with SDT, these perspectives conceptualize autonomy and relatedness as universal and complementary needs rather than opposing forces (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Importantly, SDT defines autonomy as volition—acting with full self-endorsement—rather than independence from others (Ryan & Lynch, 1989), thereby allowing individuals to act autonomously even when fulfilling social obligations or engaging in group practices (Chirkov et al., 2003). Supporting this integration, Chen et al. (2013) showed that Chinese adolescents' well-being depended not on making independent choices per se, but on whether both independent and relationally oriented actions were experienced as volitional and self-endorsed. In educational contexts, this implies that students may experience high-quality motivation when pursuing personal academic goals that are also meaningful to their families, teachers, or peer groups, rather than when such goals are framed as purely individual pursuits. Together, this suggests that interdependence can expand rather than constrain personal autonomy, revealing a socially shared form of agency in which personal goals and social expectations function as integrated expressions of the self. This view calls for examining how independent and interdependent processes jointly shape motivation and for recognizing forms of autonomy that may resemble social conformity yet reflect genuine volition.

Summary

Contemporary perspectives conceptualize independent and interdependent self-construals as coexisting, context-sensitive orientations that vary across situations, domains, and sociodemographic groups. As discussed, these refined perspectives offer a more precise and meaningful foundation for understanding student motivation as a dynamic interplay between distinct but interrelated forms of agency. Drawing on this current selfhood framework, the present paper distinguishes between *personally oriented* agency and *socially shared* agency (hereafter referred to as personal and social agency, respectively). As illustrated in Fig. 1a, under an independent orientation, personal agency is more salient because motivated action is driven primarily by students' personal attributes rather than by significant others' attributes. By contrast, Fig. 1b depicts an interdependent model in which students' personal attributes, significant others' attributes, and attributes shared with others exert comparable influence. In this configuration, social agency becomes central: motivated action is grounded

not only in personal attributes but also in attributes shared with others and pursued through a sense of “we.” Here, significant others’ attributes guide students’ action, with social motives such as desires to fulfill social obligations, maintain relational harmony, and gain social approval serving as the catalyst for their enactment.³ Crucially, this paper shifts attention from whether one form of self or agency is “more effective” than another to how different self-orientations are activated, expressed, and regulated within cultural and educational contexts. Table 1 distills the defining features and psychosocial tendencies of independent and interdependent orientations, as probabilistic rather than absolute patterns, providing a foundation for theory-driven research on student motivation.

Social Influences on Student Motivation

Independent and Interdependent Models of Selfhood as an Organizing Framework

The previous section examined how independent and interdependent views of selfhood shape student achievement motivation. Building on this foundation, the present section turns to the role of key social agents in student motivation, advancing a theoretically grounded interpersonal framework. Understanding others’ roles is essential because the meaning and function of social influence are shaped by how the self is construed—an insight central to this paper’s dual independent–interdependent framework. From an independent-self standpoint, others are positioned outside the self and are assumed to shape motivational orientations and support self-systems, an assumption central to many major motivation theories. In contrast, from an interdependent-self perspective, others are embedded within the self and function as integral sources of agency and motivation. Recognizing this distinction helps explain why social influence operates differently across students and cultural contexts, a theme illustrated below (see *Why It Matters*). Rather than offering an exhaustive review, this section highlights representative theories and empirical findings that demonstrate distinct yet complementary forms and functions of social influence in student motivation. Overall, it underscores that both independently and interdependently oriented motivational constructs and processes are relevant across cultures, though their salience and predictive power vary, and that a full understanding of student motivation requires considering both perspectives.

³ Here, the term agency is reserved for motivated action grounded in attributes experienced as owned by the individual (“I”) or jointly owned with others (“we”). Shared attributes reflect values, goals, and expectations students have internalized to the point of being experienced as “ours,” a process broadly consistent with identified and integrated regulation in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017). By contrast, attributes held by significant others may shape action as contextual influences without constituting agency when they are not experienced as owned; such attributes may be not internalized at all, guiding action through external contingencies (as in external regulation) or partially internalized yet remain other-referenced, guiding action through internally pressuring obligations (as in introjected regulation). In both cases, action is regulated in relation to others rather than enacted through a sense of shared or joint ownership.

An Independent-Self Perspective on the Role of Others in Student Motivation

As discussed, an independent view of selfhood orients individuals to define themselves primarily through internal attributes—such as personal values, goals, and interests—that drive motivation and behavior. Personal autonomy, authenticity, and agency are understood to emerge when actions align with these internal attributes. Within this model, others are positioned as external to the self rather than as integral components of it (Fig. 1a). Accordingly, parents, teachers, and peers are generally conceptualized as outside the student's self-systems, with primary emphasis placed on their roles in the socialization of motivational orientations and the satisfaction of psychological needs (Martin & Dowson, 2009; Wentzel, 2021). As a result, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the possibility that these significant others may also be embedded within students' cognitive representations of the self (Urdan et al., 2007). Understanding the role of others within this independent-self framework is crucial, as it has shaped many dominant theories of academic motivation and continues to inform how educators and researchers conceptualize personal autonomy and agency and situate social agents as external and contextual influences. As synthesized here, these theories highlight two distinct yet related approaches to understanding social influence: (a) *socializers* who shape students' motivational orientations, and (b) *supporters* who scaffold motivational self-systems.

Others as Socializing Agents

Primarily grounded in social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), this approach posits that students' motivated actions and engagement emerge from reciprocal interactions between individual attributes (e.g., cognitions and emotions) and environmental influences, particularly social contexts. Within this approach, motivational orientations are treated as individual attributes that guide behavior, whereas social contexts function as sources that shape and transmit these orientations. Through interactions with key socializing agents—such as teachers and classmates—students internalize motivational beliefs, goals, and values via processes of information exchange, reinforcement, and modeling. This socialization–internalization process is especially effective when students value their relationships with those who model or reinforce these orientations (Martin & Dowson, 2009; Wentzel, 2021). Once internalized, motivational orientations shape students' engagement—conceptualized as energy in action—by shaping effort, strategy use, and affective experiences during learning (Skinner & Raine, 2022). Engagement, in turn, functions as the central mechanism through which motivational orientations are translated into broader academic and non-academic outcomes (Wong et al., 2024). Figure 2a illustrates the socializing-agent approach, in which outcomes (learning and well-being) are conceptualized as internal to the student but may be reflected in observable indicators such as grades and social adjustment.

Others function as socializing agents by shaping students' expectancy and value beliefs through everyday interactions. Specifically, Situated Expectancy–Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2024) emphasizes that students' task choices and motivation are guided by their expectancies for success and the subjective values they assign to

Table 1 Independence and interdependence: defining features and their typical—not absolute—links to psychosocial tendencies

	Independent View of Self	Interdependent View of Self
View of the self	A person is an autonomous, free, bounded, and relationally independent entity, separate from others and social contexts	A person is a relationally connected entity whose self is primarily defined by relationships with close others
Defining elements of the self	The self is primarily defined by the person's unique and idiosyncratic attributes (e.g., personal needs, attitudes, goals, values)	The self is primarily defined by the person's role in social contexts (e.g., a student, a child, a family member, an ethnic community)
Social structure	More egalitarian and role-free, viewing others as equal entities with unique sets of stable characteristics	More hierarchical and role-based, emphasizing social roles, positions, and duties to maintain social harmony
Drivers of actions	Personal agency, coming from within the person, arising from internal attributes (motives, thoughts, and feelings)	Relational agency, arising from the person's responsiveness and attunement to social contexts (norms and expectations)
Goal priorities	Personal goals over collective or socially shared goals	Collective or socially-shared goals over personal goals
Key psychological processes	Self-expression, self-validation, self-clarification, self-consistency, self-enhancement	Social compliance, social concern, social contribution, social adjustment, social compromise
Source of self-worth and moral good	Being personally unique, autonomous, and authentic	Fulfilling one's social roles, obligations, and responsibilities
Types of emotions	Self-focused emotions (e.g., self-pride, self-confidence, self-evaluative shame, guilt toward oneself)	Socially focused emotions (e.g., collective pride, gratitude toward others, socially oriented shame, indebtedness, guilt toward others)
Cognitive style	Field-independent, emphasizing analytical, autonomous, and object-focused thinking processes in interpreting information	Field-dependent, emphasizing holistic, socially oriented, and context-focused thinking processes in interpreting information
Regulatory focus	Promotion, striving for growth, advancement, and the realization of aspirations attaining positive, desirable outcomes	Prevention, avoiding losses and fulfilling responsibilities to maintain security and prevent negative, undesirable outcomes
Attributional style	Dispositional attribution (e.g., ability, laziness, personal effort)	Situational attribution (e.g., test difficulty, teacher help, collective effort)
Attitude across situations	More consistent as actions arise from stable internal attributes	More flexible and situation-bound as actions arise from different social roles
Desirable behavior	Acting autonomously, feeling in control and self-determined, free from social pressure	Maintaining relationships, being responsive to and accommodative of the needs of others
Sociocultural norms	Loose, norms are not strongly endorsed and individual deviance is tolerated and even encouraged	Tight, norms are more strongly adhered to and individual deviance is less tolerated and even penalized

Sources: Choi et al. (1999); Cross et al. (2011); Gefland et al. (2011); Gudykunst & Lee, 2003; Higgins, (1987); Kitayama et al. (2004); Kitayama and Uchida (2005); Kitayama et al. (2009); Kühnen and Hannover (2010); Lee et al. (2000); Levine et al. (2003); Markus (2016); Markus and Kitayama (1991, 2003, 2010); Matsumoto and Juang (2022); Riemer et al. (2014); Smith et al. (2013); Thomas and Markus (2023)

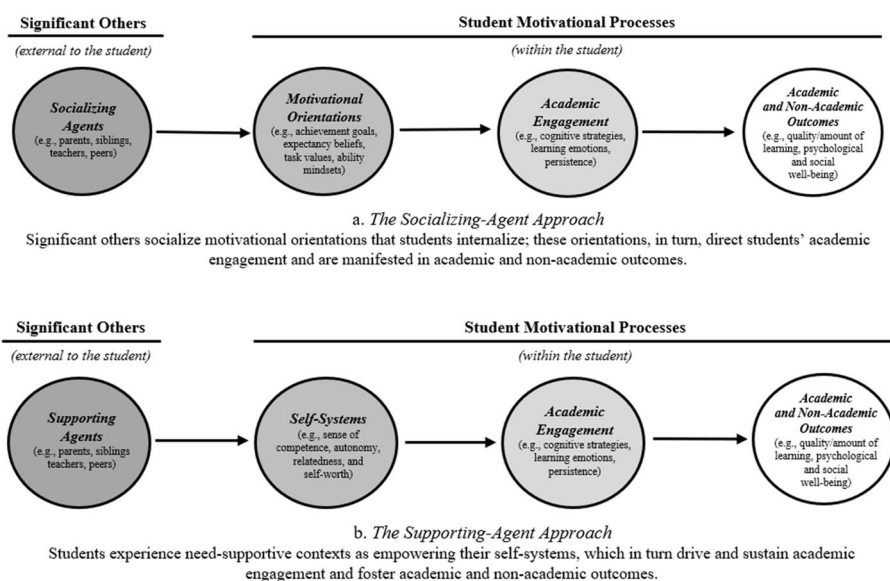


Fig. 2 The role of others in student motivational processes based on an independent model of self and agency. *Note.* In these approaches, significant others are conceptualized as external to the student's self and self-system, influencing motivation primarily through socialization and need-supportive processes. Significant others as external influences may also exert direct effects on students' engagement and academic and non-academic outcomes. In addition, components of students' internal motivational processes (i.e., motivational orientations or self-systems, engagement, and outcomes) may generate recursive (i.e., feedback) effects both within the system and on significant others. For clarity purposes, these effects are not depicted in the figures

academic tasks. Consistent with Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997), these expectancy beliefs develop partly through *vicarious experiences*—such as observing the successes and struggles of peers, especially those perceived as similar in ability or identity—and through *verbal persuasion*, including feedback and encouragement from significant others. Observing a peer persist through challenges or a teacher model confidence can reinforce expectancy beliefs and strengthen students' sense of personal control. Social agents also shape task values through explicit and implicit messages about task importance and utility. In this way, parents, teachers, and peers influence students' perceptions of the value of academic tasks or subject domains, thereby fostering engagement or, conversely, undermining it through dismissive or devaluing messages.

Achievement Goal Theory (Urdu & Kaplan, 2020) posits that students adopt achievement goals that are modeled and reinforced by key socializing agents. Parents tend to foster mastery goals—emphasizing learning, improvement, and growth—when they prioritize intellectual development, and to encourage performance goals—focused on competition and outcomes—when they emphasize ranking and achievement (Friedel et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2025). Teachers similarly shape students' goal adoption through classroom goal structures, with mastery-oriented environments promoting mastery goals and competitive environments reinforcing performance goals. Within the TARGETS framework (Task, Authority, Recognition,

Grouping, Evaluation, Time, and Support), teachers operationalize these goal structures through specific instructional practices that signal what is valued and rewarded in the classroom (Patrick & Kaplan, 2022). Students' perceptions of peers' goals further mediate these teacher influences, either amplifying or constraining classroom-level effects (Hemi et al., 2023). Thus, Achievement Goal Theory exemplifies a socializing-agent perspective in which others function as external sources of influence that shape students' motivational goals.

Students' causal attributional beliefs and ability mindsets are also shaped through socialization processes. Drawing on Weiner's (2008) Attribution Theory and Dweck's (1999) Mindset Model, students develop beliefs about performance (success or failure), perceived causes (e.g., ability, effort, task difficulty, luck), and their interrelations partly through the explanations and feedback provided by parents and teachers. When adults attribute failure to insufficient effort rather than innate ability, they foster growth-oriented attributional patterns that support resilience and sustained motivation. Similarly, when students are socialized to view ability as malleable and improvable through effort, they are more likely to adopt a growth mindset and persist in the face of challenges; conversely, framing ability as fixed and unchangeable increases the likelihood of fixed mindsets and avoidance of difficult tasks. In line with the socializing-agent model, these theories treat others as external sources of information whose influence operates by shaping students' interpretations of success, failure, and ability.

Together, major motivation theories converge in viewing others as socializing agents who shape students' beliefs, values, and goals through modeling, messages, and feedback. Students' motivational orientations thus emerge through ongoing interactions with parents, teachers, and peers, as they observe, engage with, and internalize socially communicated expectations and values. Importantly, students are not passive recipients of these influences; rather, they actively interpret, negotiate, and adapt social messages based on their prior experiences, the quality of their relationships, and the nature of the values that are made salient to them. For example, academically oriented peers may reinforce adaptive values, whereas peers who devalue schooling may promote less adaptive orientations (Kilday & Ryan, 2022). Socialization of motivational orientations is therefore best understood as a dynamic, bidirectional process through which culturally grounded beliefs are negotiated and internalized, shaping students' motivation and engagement.

Others as Supporting Agents

Beyond their role as socializing agents, significant others shape academic motivation by supporting students' self-systems through the fulfillment of basic psychological needs—particularly competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2017; White, 1959). In contrast to the socialization framework, the supporting-agents approach positions others as facilitators of self-system processes, empowering motivated action by actively nurturing need satisfaction and promoting senses of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Recent theorizing further suggests that efforts to satisfy needs provide foundation for the development of students' cognitive and emotional responses, which

in turn shape the quality and direction of motivational processes (Dweck, 2017). From this perspective, motivation theories emphasize both psychological needs (e.g., competence) and motivational orientations (e.g., goals, values) as central drivers of student behavior (Elliot & Sommet, 2023), reflecting a convergence of organismic and social-cognitive perspectives on motivation. Figure 2b illustrates this approach by emphasizing the role of social influences in sustaining self-systems, while recognizing conceptually—though not explicitly depicted—that self-systems may also shape students' cognitive and affective motivational orientations prior to influencing engagement.

This approach is central to SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In academic settings, Reeve and Cheon (2020) argue that student motivation emerges from dynamic classroom interactions in which supportive teachers nurture autonomy (e.g., offering choice), competence (e.g., providing feedback), and relatedness (e.g., fostering belonging). When these basic psychological needs are satisfied, students experience higher-quality, more autonomous forms of motivation. A closely related framework, the Self-System Model (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner et al., 2009), similarly explains how contextual factors shape motivation through a “Context → Self → Action → Outcome” pathway. From this perspective, social, pedagogical, and curricular contexts influence academic motivation primarily through interpersonal relationships with key social agents (teachers, classmates) who support and sustain students' self-systems (e.g., autonomy). Once activated, these self-systems generate motivational energy that drives engagement and, in turn, promotes learning and well-being.

The supporting-agent approach is also exemplified in Covington's (1992) Self-Worth Theory, which conceptualizes self-worth as a socially learned need underlying students' motivation to maintain and demonstrate competence. Because self-worth is closely tied to how effort and ability are interpreted, significant others play a critical role in supporting or undermining the self-worth system through the ways they frame and respond to students' effort. Importantly, effort functions as a double-edged construct: when framed as a controllable pathway to growth, it can protect self-worth and promote mastery-oriented goals, persistence, and adaptive coping with failure; when treated as diagnostic of low ability or emphasized mainly in failure contexts, it can threaten self-worth and elicit defensive strategies such as failure avoidance and self-handicapping. In this sense, teachers, parents, and peers function as self-worth-supporting agents to the extent that their evaluative practices buffer students' sense of competence and sustain engagement in learning.

Recent work extends this approach by highlighting that supporting agents themselves—especially teachers—are motivated actors whose own beliefs and capacities determine the quality of support they provide. Robinson's (2022) Framework for Motivating Teacher–Student Relationships (MTSR) conceptualizes teachers as relational agents whose motivation to build and sustain high-quality relationships depends on their relational role beliefs (seeing relationship-building as integral to one's teaching role), valuation of teacher-student relationships (recognizing their importance and impact), and relational self-efficacy (confidence in one's ability to form positive relationships). These beliefs energize teachers' relational behaviors (e.g., warmth, responsiveness, encouragement), which in turn nurture students' needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Robinson's framework thus comple-

ments SDT, the Self-System Model, and Self-Worth Theory by situating supporting agents within their own motivational ecology—underscoring that students’ need satisfaction depends on the motivation of those who support them.

Together, contemporary motivation theories recognize that others function not only as socializing agents but also as supporting agents who sustain students’ self-systems by meeting their basic psychological needs. Across major perspectives, including SDT, Self-Worth Theory, and the MTSR framework, effective support extends beyond the setting of expectations to relational engagement grounded in mutual connection and care, fostering growth in both students and their supporters. When such support is provided, students are more likely to take ownership of learning, persist through challenges, and develop a positive sense of self. By contrast, overcontrol, social comparison, and exclusion can undermine autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Ultimately, the motivational impact of social support depends on its quality, consistency, and responsiveness to students’ needs: motivation flourishes in relationships characterized by genuine care, mutual connection, and need-supportive reciprocity.

Summary

From an independent model of selfhood and agency, the influence of others on student motivation can be understood through two distinct yet complementary roles: *socializing agents* and *supporting agents*, both of which position parents, teacher, and peers as external to students’ self-concepts and self-systems. As socializing agents, significant others shape motivation by transmitting values, beliefs, and goals through modeling, reinforcement, and communication. As supporting agents, they sustain students’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness by offering choice, scaffolding learning, and fostering belonging. When enacted in supportive ways, these influences enhance motivation and engagement; however, overcontrol, excessive pressure, or negative interpersonal dynamics can undermine autonomy and competence, resulting in more controlled forms of regulation or diminished motivation.

An Interdependent-Self Perspective on the Role of Others in Student Motivation

In contrast to independent selfhood, an interdependent view of the self emphasizes defining oneself through relationships and social roles, with connections to others (e.g., family, community, and society) serving as primary motivational drivers (Cross et al., 2011; Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 2003). Significant others (e.g., family members) are thus understood as integral components of the self, shaping motivation through ongoing relational dynamics rather than functioning solely as external influences (Helwig, 2006; Miller et al., 2017). From this perspective, agency is interpersonal in nature, enacted when individuals align their actions with social expectations and collective needs (Helwig, 2006; Plaut & Markus, 2005). As a result, agency reflects responsiveness to obligations and commitments toward others who are embedded within students’ self-concepts.

Empirical evidence supports the conceptualization of interdependent selfhood. Studies using the Twenty Statements Test (e.g., Kanagawa et al., 2001) show that interdependently oriented students are more likely to describe themselves in relational or group-referenced terms (e.g., “I am a daughter”; “I am a student in Class 3A”), whereas independently oriented students tend to emphasize personal attributes (e.g., “I am intelligent”; “I am confident”). Importantly, this perspective does not deny that significant others also operate as external actors—that is, as socializing and supporting agents. Rather, for interdependently oriented students, significant others may simultaneously constitute integral aspects of the self, with their goals and desires overlapping with students’ own and shaping how agency and motivation are construed. Understanding the role of others from this perspective is therefore crucial, as it reveals how others function not merely as socializing or supporting agents, but as constitutive elements of students’ self, agency, and motivation. This contrasts with many mainstream motivation theories, which conceptualize significant others primarily as external contextual influences, underscoring the value of the interdependent-self perspective as a complementary framework.

Over recent decades, research on the interdependent nature of students’ motivation has expanded considerably. This growing body of work has examined constructs such as family obligation, filial piety, and indebtedness as central drivers of achievement behavior, alongside more traditionally studied independently oriented motivational constructs such as self-efficacy, achievement goals, and autonomous motivation (Kim & Park, 2006). Together, these lines of research underscore that students’ achievement behaviors are shaped by both self-oriented and socially oriented motives. Yet, relatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how these two motivational orientations operate in relation to one another.

To address this gap, the present review synthesizes existing findings to illuminate how interdependent and independent motives are interconnected. Specifically, the research evidence reviewed here can be organized into three approaches: (a) the *parallel* approach, which conceptualizes independent and interdependent motivation orientations as co-occurring forces that jointly shape student engagement, either through additive contributions or interactive effects; (b) the *sequential* approach, which implicitly suggests temporal ordering, proposing that interdependently oriented motives serve as a motivational starting point that subsequently gives rise to, or channels into, independently oriented motivation; and (c) the *integrated* approach, in which the self and significant others are understood as partially overlapping rather than separate, and which explicitly operationalizes interdependent orientations by incorporating self–other linkages directly into both the research design and the conceptualization of motivational constructs and processes. Together, these approaches provide a conceptual framework for clarifying how students navigate, coordinate, and integrate interdependent and independent motivational forces (cf. Liem & Senko, 2022).

The Parallel Approach

The parallel approach conceptualizes interdependent and independent motivational orientations as distinct yet simultaneously operating forces. Although these orientations may at times overlap or conflict, they are treated as functioning independently.

Within this framework, researchers examine their concurrent effects on outcomes such as student engagement, achievement, or well-being, asking which orientation predicts which outcomes and with what relative strength. Studies adopting this approach typically identify two patterns: (a) additive effects, in which each orientation uniquely contributes to the same outcome, and (b) interactive effects, in which particular combinations of interdependent and independent motives jointly optimize outcomes. In both cases, the parallel approach conceptualizes interdependent and independent motivational orientations as separate but co-occurring sources of achievement behavior (see Fig. 3a).

The available evidence demonstrates additive effects, underscoring the distinct and incremental contributions of independent and interdependent forms of motivation. For example, King and McInerney (2019) found that Filipino high school students' family support goals—an interdependent motive to succeed for family—uniquely predicted higher engagement and lower disengagement, even after accounting for independent motivational orientations in the form of mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance goals. Importantly, their longitudinal analyses further revealed that family support goals predicted year-end achievement both directly and indirectly—via mid-year engagement and disengagement—highlighting their explanatory power beyond traditional achievement goals. Similarly, King (2017) showed that Filipino adolescents' performance-approach goals and social concern goals (e.g., “I try to do well at school so that I can help my friends with their schoolwork”) each made unique contributions to students' well-being, including higher self-esteem, life satisfaction, and positive affect, illustrating how independent and interdependent motives can operate in tandem to support positive developmental outcomes.

In a large-scale study of more than 8,000 Hong Kong adolescents, King et al. (2024a, b) reported that students' future societal motivation (e.g., “I want to help my society in future”) uniquely predicted self-regulated learning and deep learning above and beyond mastery-approach goals, even after controlling for autoregressive effects and other covariates. Converging evidence from U.S. samples reinforces the presence of distinct motivational pathways. Specifically, Yeager et al. (2014) found that among U.S. high school students, self-transcendence motives (e.g., “I want to become an educated citizen that can contribute to society”) and self-oriented motives (e.g., “I want to learn more about my interests”) independently predicted greater perceived meaningfulness of schoolwork, grit, self-control, and the number of boring tasks solved, over and above extrinsic motives (e.g., “I want to earn more money”). Taken together, these findings illustrate that independent and interdependent forms of motivation not only operate in parallel but also exert differentiated and complementary influences on students' engagement and well-being.

Evidence for interactive effects, although more limited, is nevertheless noteworthy. Wentzel (1993), for example, reported that U.S. students' mastery goals (i.e., striving to learn) predicted higher GPAs only when accompanied by social responsibility goals (i.e., meeting teachers' expectations). Similarly, Levontin and Bardi (2018) showed that Israeli students' mastery goals enhanced persistence and task performance specifically when paired with amity goals emphasizing social cohesion with classmates. Taken together, these findings indicate that independent and interdependent forms of motivation can function not only additively but also synergistically,

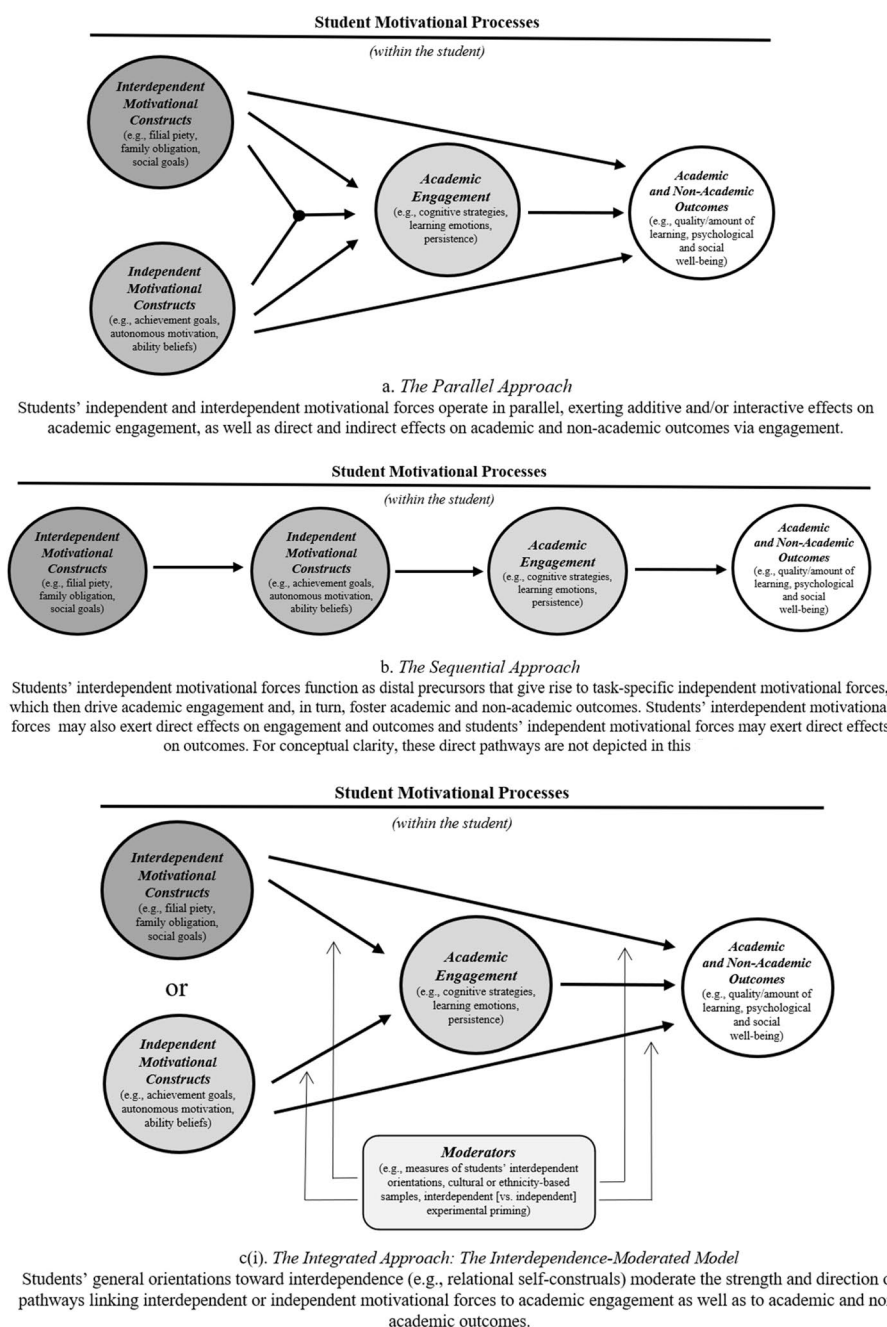


Fig. 3 The role of others in student motivation based on an Interdependent model of self and agency
Note. Students' engagement and outcomes may exert recursive (feedback) effects on motivational forces. For conceptual clarity, these reciprocal pathways are not depicted in the figures

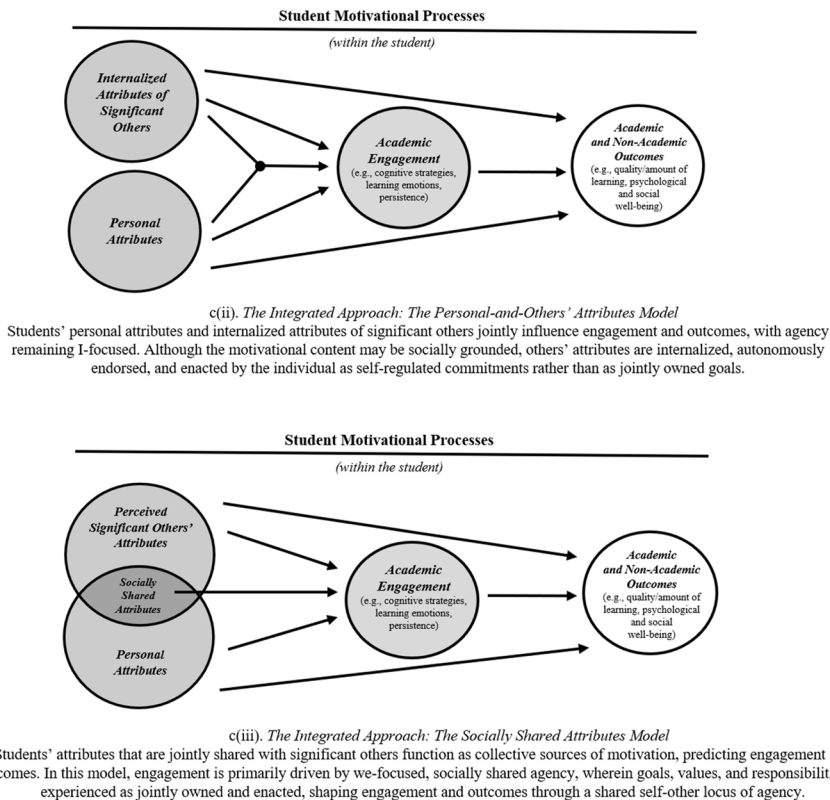


Fig. 3 (continued)

such that the motivational impact of one orientation depends on the presence of the other (see Fig. 3a). At the same time, the relatively small number of studies that have explicitly tested such interactive (i.e., multiplicative) effects suggests that this parallel approach remains underdeveloped, despite its considerable promise for advancing understanding of how independent and interdependent motivational orientations jointly shape achievement-relevant processes and outcomes.

The Sequential Approach

The sequential approach adopts a different lens by proposing that one motivational orientation—typically the interdependent one—precedes and gives rise to the other. Within this model, broad, interdependently oriented motivational forces (e.g., filial piety, family obligation) are conceptualized as distal antecedents of academic behavior and achievement, whereas task-specific, independently oriented constructs (e.g., achievement goals, ability mindsets) function as proximal mechanisms that partially mediate these relationships (see Fig. 3b). Put differently, independently oriented motivational factors and processes serve as the means and mechanisms through which students translate distal interdependent motives into concrete academic action. From this perspective, interdependently oriented motivation operates as a superordi-

nate motivational source, generating independently oriented motivational forms—expressed as more specific end states (e.g., achievement goals) or meaning systems (e.g., ability mindsets)—which, in turn, structure, direct, and confer interpretive significance on students' achievement-related behaviors and outcomes.

Relative to the parallel approach, the sequential approach has been more widely adopted in the field, with growing attention to filial piety as a key interdependent form of motivation. Research conducted primarily with Chinese samples from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan has frequently drawn on the Dual-Component Model (Yeh & Bedford, 2003), which distinguishes reciprocal filial piety, grounded in mutual respect and emotional connection, from authoritarian filial piety, which emphasizes obedience and duty. From an SDT standpoint, the former reflects a volitional, self-endorsed motive, whereby students fulfill family expectations out of genuine care and internalized values, whereas the latter embodies a controlling motive, driven by external pressure or poorly internalized obligation. Indeed, these two forms have divergent motivational consequences. For instance, Chen and Wong (2014) found that reciprocal filial piety enhanced achievement both directly and indirectly via a growth mindset, whereas authoritarian filial piety undermined achievement by weakening this mindset. Similarly, Chen (2016) found that reciprocal filial piety predicted mastery-approach goals, whereas authoritarian filial piety predicted performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals. While mastery-approach and performance-approach goals positively predicted achievement, performance-avoidance goals exerted a negative influence. Further supporting the adaptive role of reciprocal filial piety, Zhou et al. (2020) found that it predicted achievement both directly and indirectly through personal autonomy, whereas authoritarian filial piety had minimal effects.

However, interdependently oriented motivation is not uniformly beneficial, even for students from collectivistic backgrounds. Socially oriented achievement motivation (SOAM) illustrates this complexity by emphasizing how significant others shape students' academic goals, emotions, and behaviors, whereas individually oriented achievement motivation (IOAM) highlights personal interests and abilities as primary motivational drivers (Yu & Yang, 1994). Accordingly, SOAM reflects an interdependent form of motivation, while IOAM represents its independent counterpart. From an SDT perspective, SOAM can encompass both autonomous and controlled regulation: it is autonomous when students internalize social expectations out of genuine care or identification with family values, but controlled when driven by guilt, fear of disapproval, or the pursuit of external approval—a distinction not made explicit in the original conceptualization. Empirical findings are consistent with this duality. Among Hong Kong students, SOAM predicted academic performance and effortful learning, but also negative emotions (e.g., agitation, test anxiety), both directly and indirectly through its associations with achievement goals (Tao & Hong, 2014). Similarly, among Indonesian adolescents, SOAM predicted both approach- and avoidance-oriented mastery and performance goals, resulting in mixed effects on achievement (Liem et al., 2012). Moreover, the quality of students' relationships with parents appears to shape these motivational dynamics. In a study with Korean students, Jiang et al. (2015) found that guilt toward parents fostered mastery- and performance-approach goals, whereas parent-child conflict predicted

performance-avoidance goals. Likewise, a desire to conform to social norms promoted achievement both directly and indirectly by fostering guilt-based motivation and mastery-approach goals (see Guo et al., 2022, for converging evidence).

Qualitative studies also support the sequential approach, showing that students often pursue academic goals as a means of fulfilling social motives tied to parents, teachers, or peers. For instance, M. Lee and Bong (2016) found that Korean high school students' interdependently oriented motives—such as pleasing parents, fulfilling social duties, making friends, fitting into society, or avoiding societal pressure—served as precursors to their pursuit of academic success. Similarly, Urdan et al. (2007) identified family pleasing (e.g., wanting to make parents proud) and family obligation (e.g., aspiring to a high-paying job to repay one's mother) as interdependently oriented motives that motivated academic effort among first- and second-generation immigrant students in the United States. Dowson and McInerney (2003) likewise reported that Australian students' desire for teacher approval (e.g., working hard to show they are good students) motivated academic striving. Together, these findings indicate that interdependently oriented motives precede and shape students' personal academic goals, framing school achievement as a means of fulfilling broader social obligations and expectations.

A key development in Achievement Goal Theory that is particularly relevant to the sequential approach is the goal complex model (Liem & Senko, 2022). This model captures the union between an achievement goal (e.g., mastery-approach) and its underlying motivational reason (e.g., an autonomous motive). Here, reasons serve as the psychological starting point for action, encompassing superordinate motives and desires. Conceptually structured as “I am pursuing [goal] BECAUSE [reason],” goal complexes shape achievement experiences differently than goals or reasons alone (Liem & Elliot, 2018). Responding to Liem and Senko's (2022) call to examine socially oriented motivational reasons underlying achievement goal pursuit, Meurlin and Senko (2025) found that students pursuing performance-approach goals to impress teachers reported more adaptive learning experiences (e.g., higher self-efficacy, greater help-seeking) than those aiming to impress parents, who reported lower academic interest and buoyancy but higher self-handicapping and worry. Similarly, Dompnier et al. (2015) showed that students pursuing mastery-approach goals for social desirability performed worse than those motivated by social utility. Together, these findings indicate that the goal complex model aligns closely with the sequential approach by illustrating how interdependent motives shape the meaning and function of students' independent goals in achievement contexts.

The Integrated Approach

As discussed, the parallel and sequential approaches implicitly acknowledge students' interdependent selfhood by examining interdependent motivational constructs (e.g., filial piety, family obligation) alongside independent motivational constructs (e.g., achievement goals, autonomous motivation). In contrast, the integrated approach makes this assumption explicit by conceptualizing motivation as rooted within the interdependent self, such that significant others are understood as constitutive elements of students' sense of self and identity (see Fig. 1b; cf. Gray et al., 2022).

Studies adopting this approach therefore foreground students' interdependence by incorporating it directly into research designs and study conceptualizations. Within this approach, three conceptually and analytically distinct models can be identified: (i) the *interdependence-moderated* model, (ii) the *personal-and-others' attributes* model, and (iii) the *socially shared attributes* model.⁴

The Interdependence-Moderated Model

As depicted in Fig. 3c(i), this model posits that students' general interdependent orientations—whether directly measured (e.g., relational self-construals), conceptually inferred through sampling, or experimentally primed—moderate the strength and direction of the links between motivational constructs (independently or interdependently oriented) and engagement and outcomes by shaping the meaning and function of these self- and other-related motives—that is, how such motives are interpreted, experienced, and enacted by certain groups of students. It should be noted that although the interdependence-moderated model depicted in Fig. 3c(i) appears similar to the parallel approach shown in Fig. 3a, most studies classified under this model examine only a single motivational construct (either independent or interdependent). In these studies, interaction analyses typically involve a general interdependent orientation (e.g., relational self-construal) as a moderator rather than interactions between independently and interdependently oriented motivational constructs like in the parallel approach studies.

Several studies illustrate this model. For example, King and Ganotice (2015) found that Filipino students' family-support-oriented achievement striving predicted academic and well-being outcomes more strongly among students with a salient relational self (e.g., "My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am"). This pattern indicates that achievement striving was experienced as relationally grounded, such that academic effort functioned as an enactment of students' identity as family members. Similarly, King (2016) reported that Filipino students high in interdependence (e.g., "I sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my group") maintained intrinsic motivation and adaptive learning strategies even when endorsing performance-avoidance goals, suggesting that an interdependent self-construal transformed the functional meaning of these goals from defensiveness into relationally grounded striving. In Hong Kong, Cheng and Lam (2013) showed that social goals (e.g., being a good child, impressing teachers) reduced avoidance and enhanced academic persistence only among students with high interdependent self-construals, whereas the same goals were maladaptive for students with high independent self-construals. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that interdependent orientations moderate how goals are construed, enacted, and translated into engagement and well-being, thereby shaping the social meaning of academic striving.

⁴ In this review, "approaches" denote higher-level, integrative conceptual lenses that organize and interpret motivational phenomena, including assumptions about the self, agency, and social context, and that often span multiple theories. By contrast, "models" refer to more specific representations of motivational processes—typically articulating pathways, mechanisms, or relations among constructs—that are developed within these approaches and guide the conceptualization and operationalization of empirical studies.

Another line of research advances the interdependence-moderation model by leveraging cross-national comparisons and cross-ethnic contrasts within shared cultural contexts to examine motivational processes. Although self-construals are not always directly measured in these studies, they remain conceptually central, operating as implicit moderators that shape how motivational forces are interpreted, regulated, and translated into outcomes. For example, Oh et al. (2020) found that family-support-oriented achievement striving was associated with higher self-determined motivation, more positive self-esteem, and lower depression among Korean students, but negatively related to self-determined motivation and unrelated to well-being among European American students. These divergent patterns suggest that identical motivational forces carry distinct meanings and consequences as a function of self-views.

Similarly, A. S. Fu and Markus (2014) showed that Asian American adolescents were motivated when reminded of their mothers—consistent with culturally grounded emphases on relational connectedness and filial obligation—whereas European American adolescents, whose motivation is more strongly anchored in personal autonomy, exhibited reduced motivation under the same prime. Extending this pattern cross-nationally, Li et al. (2021) found that in more individualistic societies, personal passion (interest, enjoyment, and efficacy) was a stronger predictor of achievement, whereas in more collectivistic societies, parental support contributed uniquely beyond passion. Together, these findings indicate that interdependence conditions the psychological meaning and motivational force of both social and personal motives across cultural contexts, with implicitly operative self-construals shaping how academic goals are interpreted and enacted in relation to social roles and obligations.

Finally, consistent with the view that independent and interdependent selves coexist within individuals, experimental priming studies show that situational cues can moderate motivational forces and processes by activating different self-construals as working self-concepts (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Relative to independence primes, interdependence primes systematically reshape the meaning, salience, and functional impact of motivational forces—strengthening the pursuit of socially endorsed goals, amplifying affective reactions tied to ingroup performance, and shifting ability self-evaluations toward relational and peer-based standards (Cheng & Lam, 2007; Morrison et al., 2007; White et al., 2006). Interdependence primes also recalibrate motivational regulation by elevating avoidance alongside approach motivation (Hamamura & Heine, 2008; Kim & Lawrie, 2019), favoring prevention over promotion focus (Kühnen & Hannover, 2010), increasing reliance on social norms rather than personal values (Verplanken et al., 2009), and encouraging situational over dispositional attributions (Kühnen et al., 2013). Collectively, these findings support a *culture-as-situated-cognition* perspective by demonstrating that situationally activated self-construals moderate how independent and interdependent regulatory forces are endorsed, interpreted, and enacted, dynamically shaping motivation and behavior in the moment (Oyserman & Lee, 2008).

The Personal-and-Others' Attributes Model

Another line of research within the integrated approach adopts a personal-and-others' attributes model. This is exemplified by the research that distinguishes between per-

sonally autonomous reasons (PARs) and relationally autonomous reasons (RARs) for goal pursuit (Gore & Cross, 2006; cf. Oishi & Diener, 2001). When regulated by PARs, individuals pursue goals grounded in their own interests, values, and priorities, such that action is experienced as self-chosen and personally meaningful—reflecting a clearly personal locus of agency. In contrast, when regulated by RARs, individuals pursue goals whose motivational content is derived from significant others' values or expectations, which are internalized as personally endorsed reasons but not experienced as jointly held or shared attributes. Research shows that RARs (e.g., "I am pursuing this goal because it is important to my parents or family") predict the effort individuals invest in their goals, whereas PARs (e.g., "I am pursuing this goal because I really believe it is an important goal to have") predict the sense of purpose they derive from owning their goals—findings observed among students in both the United States (Gore & Cross, 2006) and Japan (Gore et al., 2009). Moreover, while both PARs and RARs are beneficial for well-being across cultures, evidence indicates that RARs predict self-esteem, life satisfaction, positive interpersonal relations, and collective esteem over and above PARs among collectivist students in Japan and China (Jiang & Gore, 2015; Yi et al., 2014). Thus, this model, shown in Fig. 3c(ii), captures the motivational dynamics across cultural contexts, although certain pathways (e.g., internalized attributes → behavior/outcomes) may be moderated by cultures or students' interdependent orientations.

Crucially, the personal-and-others' attributes model allows the contents of significant others' goals, values, and expectations to differ from or partially overlap with those of the individual at the level of behavioral aims, while diverging in motivational meaning (e.g., "I want to do well academically because I value learning" vs. "I want to do well academically because my parents want me to be successful"). Although the academic aim is shared, its source, justification, and experienced meaning differ. These others' attributes are experienced as originating outside the self and are internalized primarily at the level of identification—recognized as personally important and autonomously endorsed—thereby enabling volitional action without requiring full integration into the self (cf. *internalized agency*; Miller & Bersoff, 1994). Importantly, overlap in goal content (e.g., "doing well academically") does not imply shared ownership or a fused self–other locus of agency. Motivation remains I-focused: socially grounded reasons are taken up, regulated, and enacted by the individual as self-endorsed relational commitments rather than as jointly owned or collectively constituted aims. Despite the model's conceptual importance, existing studies are limited and have yet to test the interactive effects specified in Fig. 3c(ii), highlighting a key direction for future research.

The Socially Shared Attributes Model

A less frequently examined but conceptually important line of work focuses on motivational forces rooted in attributes that students share with significant others—the socially shared attributes model. This model is implicit in the work of Gore and colleagues in its recognition of others' attributes as a source of agency; however, their distinction between PARs ("I am pursuing this goal because it is important to me") and RARs ("I am pursuing this goal because it is important to someone close to

me”) ultimately retains a personal locus of agency, centered on “I” rather than “we.” In contrast, the socially shared attributes model conceptualizes goal pursuit as an inherently shared endeavor with relational partners, in which goals are collectively owned and pursued as joint projects. In this sense, agency shifts from “I” to “we,” from “my” to “our,” and from “me” to “us.” Motivational processes are therefore understood as collective pursuits, enacted through socially shared agency, in which personal volition and relational commitment are integrated and mutually reinforcing (cf. *interdependent self-determined motivation*, Liem, 2026).

Rudy et al.’s (2007) work provides an instantiation of the socially shared attributes model by operationalizing *inclusive autonomy*—a construct that directly embodies the notion of shared motivational attributes. Whereas individual autonomy reflects personally autonomous reasons for action (e.g., “because I enjoy my schoolwork”), inclusive autonomy captures motivation grounded in attributes jointly held with significant others (e.g., “because my family and I enjoy academic activities”), thereby shifting the locus of agency from an exclusively personal “I” to a collectively inclusive “we.” Their findings showed that while individual autonomy predicted well-being across cultural groups, inclusive autonomy uniquely predicted well-being among Chinese Canadian and Singaporean students, but not among European Canadians. Together, this pattern underscores the socially shared attributes model by demonstrating that motivation and agency can emerge from collectively owned values and goals, rather than merely being internalized from others, particularly in contexts where interdependence is culturally normative. It should be noted, however, that personal and inclusive autonomy share overlapping motivational content (enjoyment), which—together with the involvement of the individual “I” in both measures—may have attenuated or obscured clearer differentiation effects.

As depicted in Fig. 3c(iii), the socially shared attributes model posits that personal attributes, perceived others’ attributes, and socially shared attributes are conceptually distinct in content. Personal attributes are experienced as mine and enacted through personal agency. Perceived others’ attributes are socially grounded in origin and individually enacted, and may be autonomously endorsed or experienced as controlling, depending on how others’ expectations are internalized (e.g., identified vs. introjected regulation). In contrast, socially shared attributes are internalized and integrated at the relational level and experienced as ours. They are not reducible to the individual’s own values or to partially internalized representations of significant others’ expectations, as in the personal-and-others’ attributes model, but are constituted through shared practices, mutual endorsement, and joint responsibility as collectively owned goals, values, and commitments. Accordingly, agency in this model is we-focused, with motivation enacted as a shared undertaking rather than as individually regulated action.

Summary

Student motivation research grounded in an interdependent-self perspective shows that interdependent and independent motivational constructs are systematically related through three broad patterns: operating in parallel, unfolding sequentially, or through distinct self–other integrated motivational processes. Specifically, the lit-

erature reflects (a) a *parallel* approach, in which interdependent and independent motives jointly shape engagement; (b) a *sequential* approach, in which interdependent motives function as antecedents to independent motivation; and (c) a *self-and-other integrated* approach, encompassing *interdependence-moderated*, *personal-and-others' attributes*, and *socially shared attributes* models, all of which foreground overlap between self and others in motivational processes. This body of work aligns with shifts in thinking about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation—from *versus*, to *or*, to *and* (Lepper & Henderlong, 2000)—and emphasizes synergy rather than opposition between independent and interdependent motives.

Why it Matters: Understanding Student Motivational Processes Through Independent- and Interdependent-Self Perspectives

As noted, contemporary motivation theories have demonstrated impressive international reach (e.g., Bradshaw et al., 2025; Slemp et al., 2024). For instance, consistent with SDT's claim that conditional regard undermines autonomy, Fu et al. (2025) showed that perceiving teachers' regard as contingent on achievement predicted greater resentment and poorer performance across cultural contexts. However, the strength and expression of this universality vary across sociocultural contexts. A growing body of evidence reveals systematic departures from the motivational patterns assumed by mainstream theories, particularly in sociocultural contexts where agency is socially embedded rather than individually centered. For instance, classic work by Iyengar and Lepper (1999) demonstrated that Asian American children were motivated by both self- and mother-chosen tasks, whereas European American children benefited only from personal choice. More recently, Senko et al. (2023) found that socially oriented introjection—striving to elicit others' pride and avoid others' shame—was nearly as adaptive as autonomous motivation among Thai students but not among U.S. students. Complementing these findings, East Asian students consistently report lower self-efficacy and higher fear of failure than their Western peers (Klassen, 2004; Lee, 2009; Stankov, 2010), and their parents' emphasis on familial obligation and reliance on close monitoring—often interpreted as controlling through autonomy-oriented frameworks (Fu & Markus, 2014; Soenens et al., 2015)—coexists with strong academic effort and achievement. Moreover, in collectivistic—but not individualistic—contexts, parental support predicts achievement beyond personal passion (Li et al., 2021), and instrumental values compensate for low intrinsic interest more effectively (Liu et al., 2023). Together, these findings suggest that motivational processes or social contexts that are sometimes interpreted as maladaptive or autonomy-thwarting may be experienced and function differently—and, in some cases, adaptively—depending on how agency is understood and enacted.

What specific mechanisms, then, account for these dynamics? I argue that existing motivation theories not only offer valuable insights but also gain greater explanatory power when interpreted through the complementary lens of the interdependent self. To illustrate, consider two Year-12 classmates, Tom and Tim, as they prepare for their final examinations.

Tom studies with a strong sense of personal conviction. High marks affirm his competence and sense of direction, whereas setbacks prompt doubts about both his ability and self-worth. When he falls short of his own standards, he feels not only disappointed but also ashamed, questioning his adequacy. Yet, he frames challenges as opportunities to prove himself, drawing motivation from the belief that effort and persistence can unlock his potential. Fascinated by human physiology and medicine, he commits himself to Biology and Chemistry, valuing not only conceptual mastery but also the pride derived from personal progress. Although his parents propose alternative pathways, Tom insists on deciding for himself, determined to become a doctor and convinced that passion and perseverance will secure success.

Tim, by contrast, applies himself with the understanding that his performance reflects on his family as much as on himself. He is less confident than many of his peers, yet he believes that sustained effort can compensate for limitations and honor his family's sacrifices. Strong results in Biology and Chemistry reassure him that he is fulfilling both familial and personal expectations, whereas weak outcomes evoke guilt and shame for disappointing those who believe in him. His aspiration to become a doctor is shaped as much by his parents' hopes as by his own, and he works diligently because his success carries meaning beyond the self. For Tim, achievement is assessed not only by knowledge acquired but also by the pride it brings to his family and the sense of purpose derived from their approval.

Although Tom and Tim appear outwardly similar in their diligence and shared aspiration to study medicine, the psychological meanings they assign to achievement diverge in fundamental ways. For Tom, effort and accomplishment function as expressions of personal autonomy and competence: success affirms ability and self-worth, whereas challenge is appraised as a test of growth and self-development. For Tim, achievement carries social significance: effort sustains family honor, success validates shared sacrifice, and setbacks evoke guilt and moral concern about failing others. Thus, even when observable behaviors and goals converge, the *functional significance* of achievement—and the motivational processes it activates—differs. This section explicates these meanings through independent and interdependent selfhood, showing how self-views provide a framework for organizing and interpreting autonomy, attributions, values, efficacy beliefs, and achievement experience.

The Case of Tom

As illustrated in Fig. 4a, Tom's academic striving is anchored in personally meaningful and self-endorsed goals—doing well in school and realizing his aspiration to study medicine. He experiences these goals as self-chosen and interest-congruent, reflecting a strong sense of autonomous motivation and personal agency (Ryan & Deci, 2017). His engagement is energized by intrinsic fascination with science as well as identified values that connect present effort to future aspirations. Persistence is sustained by strong expectancies for success—the belief that he is likely to per-

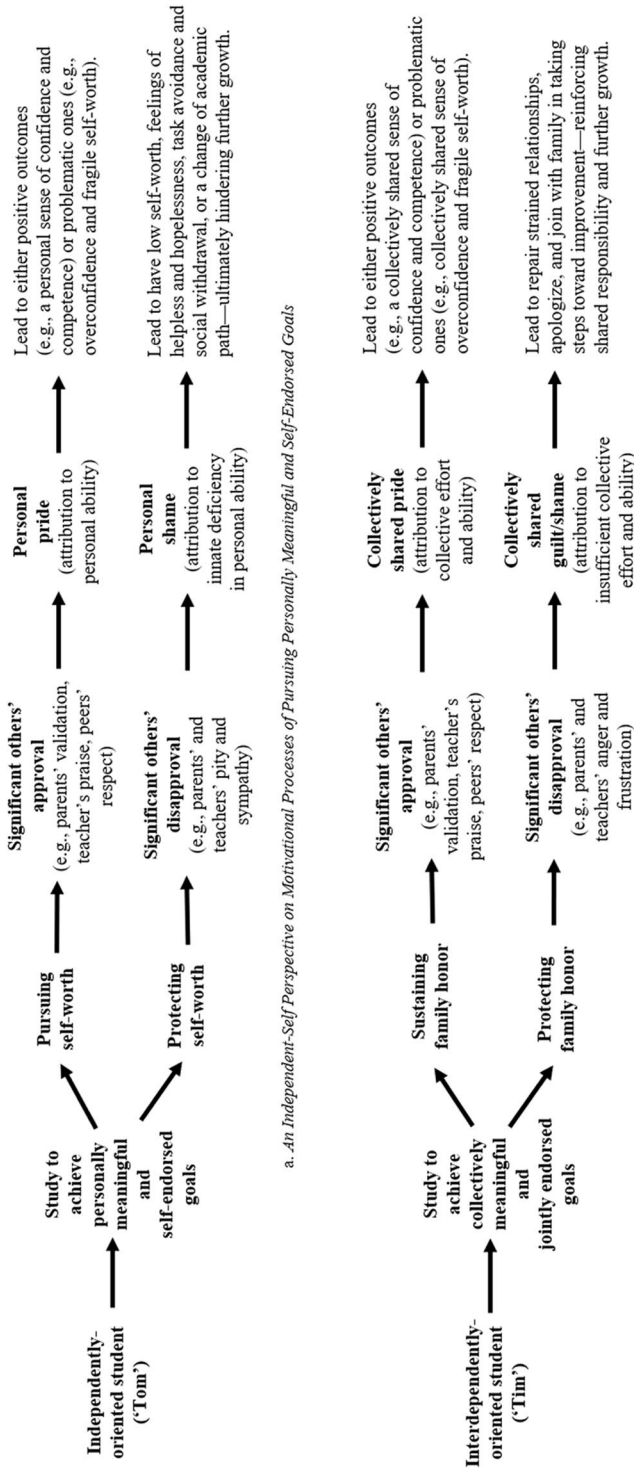


Fig. 4 Schematic representations of student motivational processes through the lenses of the independent self (Tom) and interdependent self (Tim)

form well—and by the high intrinsic, attainment, and instrumental values he assigns to Biology and Chemistry as preparation for a medical career (Eccles & Wigfield, 2024). Immersed in these subjects, Tom displays mastery-oriented engagement in service of self-development (Nicholls, 1989), allowing him to persist and deepen understanding even in the face of challenges. Achievement thus becomes self-affirming: each success reinforces competence and consolidates his academic identity.

Still, Tom's goal pursuit is not entirely free from concerns about self-worth. Alongside his mastery-oriented engagement, academic success also carries self-evaluative significance, such that grades can serve as cues about competence, personal adequacy, and, by extension, self-worth (Covington, 1992). Importantly, however, these self-worth concerns do not displace his interest in learning; rather, they coexist with—and are often buffered by—his mastery orientation, allowing achievement to function both as a context for growth and as a source of self-affirmation.

When Tom succeeds and receives approval from significant others (e.g., teacher praise, parental validation), both he and they attribute this success to internal causes—effort and, more particularly, ability (Weiner, 2008; Choi et al., 1999; Plaut & Markus, 2005; Zell et al., 2020). Such attributions elicit personal pride, an achievement emotion that arises when valued outcomes are perceived as self-caused (Weiner, 2008; see also Pekrun, 2024). Pride, in turn, strengthens Tom's self-efficacy beliefs, reinforcing his expectation that mastery is attainable and consolidating his sense of competence through success (Bandura, 1997).

However, Tom's motivational cycle becomes precarious when he fails to meet his own standards and encounters disapproval from significant others. In Tom's case, shame and guilt—both experienced as predominantly self-oriented rather than socially oriented—may arise following failure, but they differ in their attributional roots: shame is linked to attributing failure to low ability, whereas guilt stems from attributing failure to insufficient effort (Weiner, 2008). Just as Tom largely credits success to his ability, he interprets failure as a lack of it—rendering shame his potentially dominant emotional response. This pattern reflects an independent orientation in which personal ability anchors one's sense of achievement and worth (Covington, 1992). Consistent with this orientation, parents and teachers in independent contexts often emphasize dispositional attributions (e.g., low ability) over situational ones (e.g., insufficient effort or task difficulty) (Choi et al., 1999; Plaut & Markus, 2005), and may respond to failure with sympathy or pity rather than urging renewed effort (Weiner, 2008). Consequently, students like Tom, who interpret failure as evidence of innate limitation, may withdraw from challenges or rely on existing strengths, thereby constraining opportunities for growth in weaker areas.

The Case of Tim

As illustrated in Fig. 4b, Tim's academic striving is anchored in collectively meaningful and jointly endorsed goals—doing well in school and realizing a shared aspiration between himself and his family that he will become a doctor. He experiences these goals as fundamentally shared rather than purely personal, pursuing them both for himself and for his parents, whose sacrifices inform and give meaning to his educational aims (Chao, 1994; Chua, 2011). Viewed through an interdependent-

self lens, such socially grounded goals help explain how students may experience motivation as subjectively autonomous yet relationally inclusive, even when it is rooted in family expectations or social obligation (Rudy et al., 2007). When these goals are internalized and integrated into the self, pursuing them reflects autonomous interdependence (Deci & Ryan, 1991) or interdependent self-determined motivation (Liem, 2026), rather than mere compliance. Tim's goal pursuit thus remains agentic, though his agency is social in form—family-referenced rather than merely individually derived—and collective in orientation, insofar as the goals he pursues are shared and grounded in internalized family commitments.

Tim's persistence reflects collectively grounded success expectancies—the belief that success is attainable through sustained effort, bolstered by family support, even in the face of self-doubt. This helps explain why, in interdependent contexts, parental support predicts achievement beyond personal passion (Li et al., 2021): family involvement is experienced not as external pressure but as an internalized source of efficacy and moral commitment. Mastery of Biology and Chemistry therefore carries high utility and attainment value, tied to Tim's identity as both student and son—it prepares him for medicine while honoring family commitments and bringing them pride, exemplifying social utility motives (Dompmnier et al., 2015). Such values remain motivating even when intrinsic interest is modest (Liu et al., 2023), because their functional significance lies in fulfilling relational and moral obligations rather than purely self-expressive aims. Consequently, sustained effort becomes worthwhile as achievement acquires shared social meaning, reinforcing Tim's familial role and sense of collective identity.

Tim's case helps explain why socially oriented introjection—such as striving for others' pride or avoiding others' shame—can be nearly as adaptive as autonomous motivation (Senko et al., 2023). His goal pursuit is directed not only toward learning per se but also toward preserving family honor and affirming personal worth. Self-worth is thus grounded simultaneously in demonstrated competence and the fulfillment of relational duties, reflecting an interdependent form of worth (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 2003). Strong results affirm Tim as a worthy son who honors his parents' sacrifices, whereas setbacks threaten both personal adequacy and collective standing, rendering failure morally consequential. This pattern helps clarify why East Asian students often report lower self-efficacy and heightened fear of failure yet persist at high levels (Stankov, 2010): their persistence is sustained by social obligation and moral responsibility, rather than by self-confidence alone.

When Tim succeeds and receives approval from significant others (e.g., teacher praise, parental validation), and when his family gains recognition as a result, he foregrounds ingroup rather than individual factors. Success is interpreted as evidence of collective capability and the shared effort invested by his family (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Zell et al., 2020). Accordingly, achievement is attributed less to innate talent than to controllable, situational factors such as sustained effort and family support (Choi et al., 1999; Plaut & Markus, 2005; Weiner, 2008). These attributions elicit collectively shared pride—a we-referenced emotion that affirms belonging and strengthens family bonds. This pride, in turn, reinforces collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997),

enhancing not only Tim's confidence in future success but also his family's belief in him and their continued investment in his efforts (Li et al., 2021). This attributional–emotional pattern helps explain why close parental monitoring may be experienced not as controlling but as motivating and caring in interdependent contexts (Soenens et al., 2015).

However, Tim's motivational cycle becomes strained when he falls short of expectations and encounters disapproval from significant others. Unlike Tom, Tim and his family attribute failure primarily to insufficient effort rather than low ability (Choi et al., 1999; Heine et al., 2001; Plaut & Markus, 2005), reflecting the belief that ability is cultivable and that effort signals moral commitment to shared obligations. In interdependent contexts, parents and teachers similarly emphasize effort-based attributions, responding to failure with encouragement to work harder, often accompanied by disappointment, frustration, or anger (Chao, 1994; Choi et al., 1999; Chua, 2011). When collectively endorsed goals are not met, guilt and shame emerge with distinct causes and regulatory meanings: guilt reflects perceived insufficient exertion in meeting relationally grounded obligations, whereas shame signals failure to fulfill one's role as a diligent student and son—and, for parents, a sense of having fallen short in guidance (Weiner, 2008). These socially oriented emotions serve adaptive functions to repairing strained relationships and restore relational harmony by motivating renewed effort. Consequently, students like Tim—who construe failure as a lapse of effort and duty—often persist, intensify engagement, and continue striving for improvement even when confidence in ability remains fragile.

Summary

Contemporary perspectives emphasize that independence and interdependence are coexisting rather than mutually exclusive orientations, with elements of both often present within the same student, classroom, or culture, even if one predominates. Against this backdrop, the contrasting cases of Tom and Tim are heuristic rather than literal, illustrating how differing self-construal emphases shape the functional significance and psychological meaning of achievement behavior. Recognizing both orientations highlights that similar behaviors may be regulated by distinct motivational processes and cultural logics of agency, underscoring the need for culturally responsive, integrative research and interventions rather than a single, culture-bound model of motivation.

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

The present paper advances an interdependent-self perspective as a theoretical foundation for an interpersonal theory of student motivation that complements the more traditionally researched independent-self perspective. This section outlines the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of considering interdependent and independent perspectives together, offering a more holistic account of motivation across student orientations and cultural contexts.

Advancing an Interpersonal Theory of Student Motivation

A comprehensive account of student motivation requires the theoretical consideration of both intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives, given that motivation emerges through the dynamic co-constitution of individual attributes and social influences (Weiner, 1992). Although most motivation theories acknowledge the role of others—whether in shaping motivational beliefs (e.g., Situated Expectancy–Value Theory) or activating self-systems (e.g., SDT)—they typically conceptualize social influence as contextual input acting on the individual, rather than as a constitutive element of agency itself. The present paper advances a potentially unifying approach by proposing independent–interdependent models as a parsimonious yet inclusive framework for conceptualizing social influences across motivation theories and empirical traditions. Rather than locating agency exclusively within the individual or the social context, this framework centers self-construals as organizing orientations through which intrapersonal processes (e.g., personal values, goals, beliefs) and interpersonal dynamics (e.g., social expectations, obligations, meanings) are jointly structured and simultaneously experienced. Because self-construals represent universal orientations of the self, this framework applies broadly across students and societies, while allowing independent or interdependent orientations to predominate for particular individuals, groups, or contexts. As explicated and illustrated throughout this paper, conceptualizing motivation as both self-directed and socially constituted yields a more comprehensive and compelling account of how motivation develops and operates across diverse educational and sociocultural settings.

Integrating an Interdependent-Self Perspective into Motivation Theories

The interdependent-self perspective offers critical insight into student motivation by foregrounding forms of agency grounded in social connectedness and shared purpose—forms that are often underrepresented in the assumptions of dominant motivation theories. Although SDT acknowledges that fulfilling social obligations can be experienced as autonomous when such actions are personally valued and volitionally endorsed (Ryan & Deci, 2017), extending this relational understanding of agency beyond SDT to other major motivation frameworks opens important theoretical possibilities. For example, Situated Expectancy–Value Theory conceptualizes expectancy, interest, identity relevance, and perceived utility as key drivers of academic choice and achievement (Eccles & Wigfield, 2024). However, motivation does not have to be understood only as something that happens within an individual student. Expectancies may be shared or family-referenced, interests may be socially embedded, and perceived utility may derive from collective benefit, rather than from personal utility alone. Recognizing these relational and collective construals does not challenge the core architecture of expectancy–value models; instead, it broadens their conceptual scope by specifying how motivational constructs may be organized differently depending on students’ self-views. More broadly, integrating an interdependent-self perspective into motivation theories invites a reconceptualization of agency itself—from an exclusively individual property to one that can be relationally constituted and socially embedded. Such integration yields a more inclusive theoretical account of motivation, one that accommodates variability in how students

experience choice, value, efficacy, and purpose across diverse self-orientations and sociocultural contexts.

Juxtaposing Independent and Interdependent Motivation

Research would benefit from moving beyond single-perspective explanations to examine how intrapersonal (independent) and interpersonal (interdependent) processes jointly shape students' motivation (e.g., Gore & Cross, 2006). The emphasis on individual agency can obscure how social obligations and collectively shared goals meaningfully organize action for many students. Importantly, similar outcomes—such as engagement and achievement—may arise from qualitatively different motivational pathways: some students are primarily driven by personal mastery and self-expression, whereas others are primarily motivated by fulfilling familial or communal expectations. Focusing on only one pathway risks overlooking how personal and social motives may co-occur, interact, or compensate for one another within individuals and contexts. Notably, students with interdependent orientations may pursue goals volitionally when aligned with relational commitments, underscoring that personal autonomy and social connectedness can be mutually reinforcing. Future research should therefore examine the relative salience, interaction, and functional significance of independent and interdependent motives, as well as the conditions under which they converge, diverge, or amplify one another. Studies that test multiple motivational pathways within a common analytic framework, or that compare alternative motivational explanations for similar outcomes, will foster a more integrative understanding of motivation and agency across learners with differing predominant or situationally activated self-orientations (e.g., independent and interdependent), and across contrasting motivational ecologies (e.g., ASSERT and RELATE contexts). In this regard, the independent–interdependent framework presented in Table 1 can be used to conceptualize research questions and guide hypothesis development.

Distinguishing Sources of Agency

Building on work recognizing multiple social sources of agency (e.g., Rudy et al., 2007), future research should develop more fine-grained measures that capture how socially shared agency operates across distinct social referents and relational contexts. A key priority is distinguishing relational interdependence, rooted in close, dyadic ties (e.g., with a parent or a teacher), from collective interdependence, grounded in identification with broader social groups or cultural collectives (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cross et al., 2000). These orientations are qualitatively distinct: relational interdependence emphasizes emotional closeness and reciprocal obligation, whereas collective interdependence centers on shared identity and group-based commitment. Accordingly, measurement approaches should differentiate sources of agency at the personal (e.g., “because it is important to me”), relational (e.g., “because it is important to my mother”), and collective (e.g., “because it is important to us as a community”) levels, thereby capturing how motivation is grounded in I-, you-, and we-based forms of agency. Extending this measurement logic to other motivation frameworks (e.g., Situated Expectancy–Value Theory, Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Worth Theory) would further advance understanding of how sources of agency jointly shape motivation across students and contexts.

Focusing on Intersubjective Culture

Although social norms are widely recognized as shaping agency and motivation, particularly in interdependent contexts, a critical gap remains in explicitly incorporating *intersubjective culture*—that is, individuals' shared beliefs about the values, norms, and practices perceived to be widely endorsed within their culture (Chiu et al., 2010). These intersubjective perceptions can shape behavior because they capture what individuals believe most others in the same social role (e.g., as students) expect, value, and enact (Riemer et al., 2014). Empirical work illustrates this influence. For example, Bossert et al. (2025) showed that peers' achievement goals, operating as descriptive social norms, predicted changes in students' own achievement goals over time. Converging evidence from SDT further supports this view. Chirkov et al. (2003) demonstrated that experiences of autonomy are culturally grounded, such that what feels volitional depends on shared cultural meanings. Accordingly, actions aligned with collectively shared expectations and norms may still be experienced as autonomous when they are personally endorsed and valued. Together, these findings point to the need for future research to incorporate measures of intersubjective perceptions in order to better capture how agency and motivation are culturally embedded, normatively guided, and collectively constructed.

Including Social Processes and Outcomes

Research on student motivation should broaden its scope to encompass processes and outcomes that reflect motivation's inherently interpersonal nature. Traditional models have primarily emphasized individual-centered constructs such as self-set goals, self-efficacy, self-regulated learning, and personal achievement (Zimmerman, 2008). Yet, motivation also unfolds through relational and collective dynamics, including joint goals, collective efficacy, and socially shared or co-regulated learning (Vauras & Volet, 2013). Such processes may be particularly salient for interdependently oriented students, whose engagement often involves collaborative problem-solving, seeking guidance from teachers, and learning through role modeling and mentorship (Fredricks, 2024), alongside—and in some cases more prominently than—personally agentic forms of engagement (Jang & Reeve, 2025). Correspondingly, outcome indicators should extend beyond individual achievement to capture contributions to group success, family well-being, and community advancement (Utz, 2004). Expanding motivation research in this way enables a more culturally inclusive account of motivational processes—one that recognizes individual and relational striving as complementary rather than competing pathways (Liem, 2026).

Designing Interventions Through Independent and Interdependent Lenses

Designing motivational interventions that consider both independent and interdependent lenses together provides a more comprehensive basis for supporting student motivation and reduces the risk of misaligned or ineffective practices (Markus & Conner, 2014). Notably, SDT already accommodates this dual consideration by defining autonomy as acting with volition while taking others' perspectives into

account—that is, making choices that are personally endorsed yet responsive to the values and expectations of significant others (Ryan & Deci, 2017). From this standpoint, autonomy and relatedness are not competing principles but mutually reinforcing. Consistent with this view, SDT-based interventions in East Asian contexts (e.g., South Korea, Singapore) have demonstrated effectiveness when autonomy-supportive practices are designed in ways that acknowledge relational goals and culturally endorsed values (Su & Reeve, 2011). Motivational interventions that are informed by both independent and interdependent principles, and aligned with students' self-view-based sources of meaning, are therefore well positioned to enhance student motivation across diverse educational and sociocultural contexts.

Helping Students Understand What Drives Them

Fostering students' awareness of their motivational sources—whether independent (e.g., personal goals, self-expression) or interdependent (e.g., family honor, collective success)—is essential for sustaining healthy motivation. Without such awareness, students may come to rely on maladaptive motives, such as fear of disappointing family members or excessive self-sacrifice. This risk is especially salient because socially oriented motives can be a double-edged sword: while they often promote persistence and engagement, they may also heighten anxiety, fear of failure, and guilt when driven by social pressure (Liem et al., 2012; Tao & Hong, 2014). Developing meta-motivation—the capacity to reflect on and regulate one's motivational processes (Miele & Scholer, 2018)—can help students recognize the benefits and costs of different motives and adopt more adaptive strategies. For example, interdependently motivated students may learn to balance social expectations with personal well-being, whereas independently motivated students may come to value shared responsibility in group learning. Cultivating meta-motivation thus potentially supports adaptive motivation, reduced stress, and sustained well-being.

Conclusion

Most major theories of student motivation foreground intrapersonal attributes and treat personal agency as the primary driver of motivated behavior. Although this emphasis on self-agency—historically rooted in individualistic values—has yielded a robust intrapersonal account of motivation, it is less well suited to explaining students whose agency is also constituted through social relationships and obligations. Addressing this limitation, the independent–interdependent self framework offers a more comprehensive account of student motivation by highlighting how achievement behavior emerges from the dynamic interplay between personal attributes and social relationships. By clarifying how personal and social agency jointly shape academic goals and behavior, this perspective extends existing theories toward a more socially grounded, culturally inclusive, and globally relevant understanding of student motivation—one capable of explaining diverse pathways to engagement, achievement, and well-being.

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