The Importance of Students and Teachers Having Congruent Goals for Chinese Language Learning

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Abstract

While students and teachers share the same classroom, they do not necessarily share the same goals for the class. A goal considered essential by the teacher may not be deemed as important by some students. Their divergent goals might direct them to allocate time and effort distinctively, and potentially induce negative impact on students' learning outcomes. In the present study, we compared course goals prioritized by Chinese language students ($n=48$) and their teachers ($n=2$), and investigated to what extent student-teacher goal congruence is related to student performance and motivation. The results showed that students in the high-congruent group achieved higher scores, demonstrated more on-task and less off-task behavior, and showed stronger motivation towards the course, than did students in the low-congruent group. A path analysis indicated that goal congruence had direct effects on student performance and motivation as well as an indirect effect on performance via motivation. The implications of goal congruence for foreign language teaching and learning are discussed.

Keywords: goal congruence, performance, motivation, Chinese classroom

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Introduction

Goals have been theoretically and empirically established to be related to foreign language learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Kato, 2009; Kormos, Kiddle, & Csizér, 2011; Moeller, Theiler, & Wu, 2012). The goals of a foreign language course, often specified in the syllabus, are created to guide the teaching and learning that take place in the classroom. However, teachers and students might not perceive the course goals in the same way. A goal considered essential by the teacher may be peripheral in the eye of some students, which might direct them to allocate time and effort in different ways. Previous research on goals, particularly within Chinese classroom settings, rarely discusses whether this incongruence of goals may have negative impacts on the learning outcomes. To fill the gap, we conducted a study on teacher-student goal congruence to investigate its relationship with student performance and motivation. The findings reported here should be of value to foreign language practitioners and researchers in this learner-centered era.

Literature Review

Goals

In this study, a goal is defined as the objective of an action, for example, to attain a specific standard of proficiency within a specific time (Locke & Latham, 2002). Examples of such goals include "to be able to write short essays on daily topics with newly-learned vocabulary and grammar", or "to improve reading comprehension skills, such as guessing word meaning based on the context". Despite some variations to its definition and conceptualization, goal has been shown to be a powerful predictor of student academic accomplishment such as course grades and test scores (Coutinho, 2007; Lin, Siegler, Sullivan, Preiss, & Sternberg, 2010),

aspects of motivation such as effort, persistence, and interest (Allen, 1986; Wentzel, Baker, &

Russell, 2012), and positive classroom behaviors (Wentzel, 1989, 1998).

Goals have been theoretically and empirically established to be related to foreign

language learning as they can affect learner performance and motivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Kato,

2009; Kormos et al., 2011; Moeller et al., 2012). Goals affect performance through four

mechanisms: they direct attention and effort towards goal-relevant activities and away from goal-

irrelevant activities; regulate effort expenditure; encourage persistence; and promote strategy-

searching (for detailed reviews, see Dörnyei 1998 and Locke & Latham 2002). Through a 5-year

longitudinal study, Moeller et al. (2012) examined the effects of goal setting on high schoolers'

achievements in Spanish language classes. The results showed a positive relationship between

the goal-setting process and language achievement ($p<.01$), suggesting that a learner more skilled

at goal setting achieved higher scores in a standardized proficiency test. In addition to

performance, goals have been shown to be a powerful motivator toward learning (Bandura,

1986; Dweck, 1991). Their work showed that different motivational patterns, exhibited through

behavioral, affective, and cognitive measures, could be explained by the various goals that one

pursues. Goals can be motivating because they provide benchmarks against which one can

compare his/her current proficiency, and the perceived gap between one's ideal and current

situations can stimulate continued effort until the goals are attained (Dörnyei, 1994). Learners

can also be motivated by the satisfaction derived from goal completion(Dörnyei, 1998), as well

as by the intrinsic interest developed through continued involvement in goal-related activities

(Deci & Ryan, 1985). Thus, as a powerful source of motivation, goals are widely considered to

play an important role in language learning (Boekaerts, de Koning, & Vedder, 2006; Dörnyei,

2001; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008).

Students' and teachers' goal comparison

Not only do students have goals themselves, but teachers also have goals for their students to accomplish (Lemos, 1996; Spera & Wentzel, 2003). Teacher goals are usually shaped by a combination of factors, including the requirements of academic institutions (Wentzel, 2000), national standards (Magnan, 2012) , and personal understanding about the subject through accrued experience. In classrooms, teachers' goals are manifested through their instruction, feedback, evaluation, as well as communication with students (Cothran & Ennis, 1998; Retelsdorf, Butler, Streblow, & Schiefele, 2010; Retelsdorf & Günther, 2011).

Although students and teachers spend a lot of time together, research shows that it is not uncommon for them to have different goals for the same class (Dodds & Lawrence, 1983; Harlow & Muyskens, 1994; Lemos, 1996; Spera & Wentzel, 2003). Sometimes there exists a lack of connection between the teacher's course objectives and the goals an individual student aims to pursue. The discrepancy between teacher goals and student goals can result in the student's misinterpretation of the assigned tasks, lack of ownership in learning, and loss of interest toward the course, due to "a lack of understanding on the part of the students as to how and why they are involved in the learning process" (Moeller et al., 2012). Therefore, Lemos (1996) called for more attention to the "mismatch between the direction of students' behavior and the direction that the teacher intends to impose on students' behavior. "

From the goal hierarchy perspective (Ford, 1992), even when the overarching goal of two individuals is the same, their prioritization of the more specific goals or "sub-goals" can be quite different from each other. Foreign language classes are such an example. The overarching goal of students and teachers for the class may be quite aligned, which can be, for example, to acquire the necessary skills to use the target language. However, in order to achieve this global or

overarching goal, multiple specific goals need to be prioritized and accomplished. This is where their understanding and decisions may diverge. Teachers prioritize their goals based on institutional requirements (Wentzel, 2000), experiences, preferences (Pushkin, 2001), etc. Students decide their prioritizations based on their interest, perceived task value, and other personal reasons (Ng, 2008; Valle et al., 2003). Given the variety of contributing factors, it is not difficult to presume that the ways in which students and teachers prioritize their goals can easily be incongruent. Following this are the discrepancies in their decision-making processes and the potential conflicts they could incur. For instance, the teacher might consider developing accuracy as a major goal and would therefore decide to assign more tasks and exercises for such purpose and be less tolerant of students' errors. Meanwhile, if a student's main goal is to improve fluency, he or she would be more motivated to engage in tasks that help to develop fluency and less willing to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher. Although there has been considerable research on student goals, we know little about teacher goals, the relationship between student and teacher goals, and how this relationship may impact student performance and motivation.

Goal congruence

Goal congruence in this study refers to the extent to which individuals hold similar goals (Shteynberg & Galinsky, 2011), and it has been well theorized by the theory of intersubjectivity (Jones, 2005; Tirassa & Bosco, 2008; Vygotskiĭ, 1978). Within the sociocultural framework, intersubjectivity generally refers to the degree to which partners in a communication act share the same understanding of a concept (Beck, 2006). It is about seeing another person's perspective to mutually agree on and share the same perception of the issues of their interaction. In the context of the classroom, one very important 'concept' or 'issue' on which the teacher and the students should share the same understanding is the objectives, or goals, of the course. In

other words, students and teachers need to develop "a collective state of mind" (Rommetveit & Blakar, 1979) regarding the course goals and their relative importance. Furthermore, the mechanism of intersubjectivity is believed to catalyze learning and development (Stone, Underwood, & Hotchkiss, 2012). It follows that whether the teacher and the students share the same understanding toward goals and goal prioritization, or simply referred to as teacher-student goal congruence, bears great implication for the learning and development that may materialize through the course. Empirically, goal congruence has also been shown to be important for student achievement and motivation in classroom settings. Spera and Wentzel (2003) examined student-teacher goal congruence and its relation to social and academic motivation. The findings showed that high levels of goal congruence were positively related to student interest in class and perceived social support from teachers. Wentzel (1989)'s research showed that the goals pursued by the high-achieving students (indexed by GPA) were in line with the key educational objectives set by schools, whereas those goals pursued by the low- and mid-achieving students were not. The author argued that "the motivational characteristics of students will be related to their academic success to the extent that these characteristics match the motivational requirements of the classroom."

In the foreign language field, congruence has primarily been studied between the ACTFL's National Standards (2006) and students perceptions about the Standards. The ACTFL 5C Standards represent "an unprecedented consensus" among educators, the government, and the community on the definition and role of foreign language instruction in American education (Magnan, Murphy, Sahakyan & Kim, 2012). Questions that previous studies have tried to answer include: whether students have goals consistent with the Standards, whether they expect to reach these goals during their formal language study, whether these goals and expectations differ for

students of different proficiency levels, and whether they differ for students of more and less

commonly taught languages (for a review, see Magnan et al., 2014). These studies enrich our

understanding about the learning goals in college language classes by inviting students to speak

out their voices. Teachers, however, were not included in these studies, which makes us wonder

how aligned their goals are with those of the students in these college language classes. One of

the few studies that directly compared student and teacher goals was conducted by Harlow and

Muyskens (1994). They administered a survey to "determine priority goals or objectives of

intermediate-level students and instructors". Participants were asked to indicate their perceptions

of importance for 14 goals, which were composed based on the descriptions given by the

students and instructors themselves in the pilot study. Based on the Pearson r correlation between

the overall rankings by the students and by the instructors ($r=.789$, $p<= .01$), the authors

concluded that a great deal of agreement was found between the students and the instructors.

However, if we take a closer look at the rankings, we will notice that the method adopted may

not have been able to construct an accurate picture. For instance, the way students' and teachers'

goals were compared renders us to exercise caution when interpreting the results. The 1,373

students and 59 instructors were sampled from 12 universities, and comparisons were conducted

on a group basis. It means that student rankings were pooled together and compared against

pooled teacher rankings. The results gained from such comparisons might shed some light on the

overall student-teacher congruence, but they were inadequate to identify the relationship between

goal congruence and the learning outcomes of individual students. Since goals take effect on the

individual level, we propose that the comparison of goals should be conducted on a student-

teacher dyadic basis, which will be elaborated in Method.

The Present Study

Despite the informative research on student goals in foreign language learning, few researchers have explored the relationship between student and teacher goals, and how this relationship might affect student performance and motivation, particularly within the Chinese classroom settings. In the current study, we hope to fill these gaps by answering the following questions:

(1) To what extent are students and their teachers congruent on course goals?

(2) Is student-teacher goal congruence related to student performance?

(3) Is student-teacher goal congruence related to student motivation?

(4) Does student-teacher goal congruence predict student motivation and performance?

Methods

Participants and setting

The participants in this study consisted of college students (n=48) who were studying Chinese as a second language and their teachers (n=2) from two northeastern region universities of the United States. The majority of these students were undergraduates (27.1% freshman, 45.8% sophomore, 12.5% junior, and 8.3% senior), and the rest (6.3%) were enrolled in graduate programs. Their age ranged from 18 to 28 (M=20). The gender ratio was 54%: 46% (M vs. W). The ethnicity composition was: Asian (47%), White (29%), Asian & White (14%), and Hispanic (10%). Students came from four classes of two levels: elementary (n=27) and advanced (n=21), two classes at each level. We included classes of two levels because we were interested in knowing whether levels of goal congruence differ across proficiency levels. The two classes at the same level were taught by the same instructor, who used the same instructional materials and followed the same syllabus. The two teachers were a male and a female, aged 34 and 27

respectively. Both teachers majored in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages in college and had accumulated years of experience teaching American students at the tertiary level. The contact hours for each class were five hours per week. The class size was between 8 to 15. Teachers had ample opportunities to communicate with students individually and therefore were likely to give a fairly accurate evaluation on their performance. The results from the entrance examinations, administered at the beginning of the semester, were collected for the purpose of controlling initial proficiency at the same proficiency level.

Measures

Goal congruence measure

In order to gauge the level of student-teacher goal congruence, we designed a *course goals ranking sheet* (see an example in Appendix) to assess students and teachers' respective perceptions of the course goals. Altogether four course goals ranking sheets were created, with one for each class. Teachers and students of each class only saw the goals relevant to their class. Each sheet included five statements excerpted from the corresponding class's syllabus provided by the instructor. Each statement described one specific goal of the course. Some examples are: "to produce linguistically sophisticated essays using complex structures and clear organization" or "to create a personal memorization technique for Chinese characters." Students and teachers were instructed to rank the five course goals on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the most important) based on how important each goal was to them.

Then we calculate the extent of goal congruence between students and teachers. Every student's ranking was compared against his or her teacher' ranking. We started by calculating their differences of rankings. The difference on each goal was determined by multiplying the sum of its rank numbers and the square of the difference between the teacher and student's

rankings. For example, If the goal of "Produce linguistically sophisticated essays" were ranked by teacher as the most important (assigned 5 by teacher) and ranked by student *John* as the second most important (assigned 4 by student), then their difference score on this goal was $(5+4)*(5-4)^2 = 9$. The rationale for this particular calculation is that a goal with a higher ranking should carry more weight than one with lower ranking. If the teacher and students disagree on the top two most important choices, then that should be much more significant than if they disagree on the two least important choices. The second step was to add up all the differences on five goals and obtain a total difference score for each student-teacher dyad. In the third step, the total difference score was divided by the maximum possible difference, which was 240 for the five-item ranking, to obtain a difference percentage. For example, if the teacher ranks Speaking, Spelling, Listening, Reading, Writing as 5-4-3-2-1, and John ranks them as 4-1-2-5-3. Their total difference score will be 138, and their difference percentage will be 138/240=57.5%. The last step was to subtract the difference percentage from 1 and produce a congruence percentage, which in this case will be 42.5%. Each student's congruence was calculated against his/her teacher as above. A higher percentage represents a higher overall congruence level between the student and teacher on their perceptions of the relative importance of the course goals.

Student performance measures

Three measures were used to determine student performance in this study. The first measure was the composite score that every student received at the end of the semester. The composite score or course score was an accumulation of the scores a student received from quizzes, homework assignments, projects, tests, and oral presentations. The reason why we chose course scores over standardized proficiency tests as the measure is because course scores are classroom-based evaluation that can comprehensively reflect student achievement in a certain

course. It is also more informative to teachers who are interested in how students performed in the long term. To make the scores comparable across classes, we transformed them into z-scores within each class. A z-score represents a student's academic performance in relation to the other students in the class.

To complement our understanding of student performance in the classroom, we included two more measures: students' on-task, and off-task behaviors. These two measures were based on teacher evaluation. On-task behaviors include punctual homework submission and active participation in class. Teachers rated every student and gave a single score on a scale of 5 points (1 never, 2 rarely, 3 sometimes, 4 quite a bit, 5 very often) for these on-task behaviors. The higher the rating, the more frequent did the student engage in on-task behaviors. Off-task behaviors include daydreaming, checking cellphones, and working on other assignments in the class. Teachers rated every student on a scale of 5 points (1 never, 2 rarely, 3 sometimes, 4 quite a bit, 5 very often) and gave a single score for the off-task behaviors. The lower the rating, the less frequent did the student engage in off-task behaviors.

Course scores and teacher evaluation of student behavior were used together because they can co-construct a fuller picture of how students performed during the semester than could either index used alone, with course scores measuring the learning outcome and teacher observation reflecting the learning process.

Student motivation measures

Student motivation was assessed by two measures: student self-report and teacher evaluation. In the self-report, students were asked to rate their agreement with statements adapted from AMTB (Gardner, 1985) on a 5-point scale, from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The 14 statements aggregated to four aspects of student motivation: Motivational

Intensity, Desire to Learn the Language, Attitude toward Learning the Language, and Course

Evaluation. The Motivational Intensity subscale consisted of 4 items (Cronbach's α = .702), and

an example was "My motivation to learn Chinese is strong." The Desire subscale consisted of 3

items (Cronbach's α = .712), and an example was "I have a strong desire for learning Chinese."

The Attitude subscale consisted of 3 items (Cronbach's α = .750), and an example was "I really

enjoy learning Chinese." The Evaluation subscale consisted of 4 items (Cronbach's α = .777),

and an example was "I find my Chinese classes valuable."

In the teacher evaluation, we asked teachers to rate each student on the motivation he or

she had exhibited through the semester. Teachers were asked to give a holistic rating on a 5-point

scale from (1) very low to (5) very high. We included teacher evaluation to see if it would be

consistent with students' self-reports.

Data collection

The data collection process took place during the last week of spring semester in 2014.

Students completed a set of surveys including demographic information, the *course goals*

ranking sheet, and the self-report questionnaire. The surveys were administered by a trained

member of the research team to the students without their teachers' presence. Teachers

completed the *course goals ranking sheet*, and the evaluations for students' performance and

motivation. The teachers completed the surveys in their offices before the week of the final

examination. A research team member collected the survey sheets immediately after they were

completed. We also obtained student grade reports from the teachers at the end of the semester.

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Results

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In this section, results are presented in four parts in correspondence to each research

question. First, descriptive findings concerning student-teacher goal congruence are reported.

Second, the relationship between student-teacher goal congruence and student performance is described. Third, the relationship between student-teacher goal congruence and student motivation is identified. Finally, the results of a path analysis on the relationships among goal congruence, motivation, and performance are summarized.

Students-teachers goal congruence

Descriptive statistics of student-teacher goal congruence levels were shown in Table 1. The overall mean goal congruence of all participants was 64.58%. The range of the sample was 86%, which is the difference between the maximum congruence (100%) and minimum congruence (14%). This suggests that some students' perceptions of the relative importance of the course goals were in perfect alignment with their teacher's, whereas some students held vastly different opinions from their teacher. This wide variation of goal congruence were found on both of the two proficiency levels, with the range being 62% and 73% for elementary and advanced level respectively.

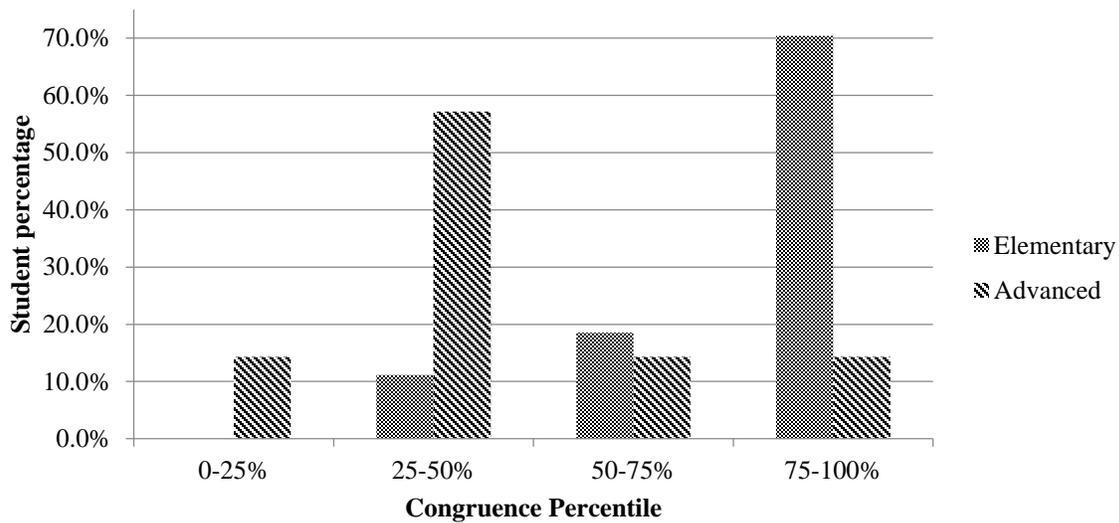Table 1

Description of student-teacher goal congruence

Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Range
Total	48	64.58%	.26	14%	100%	86%
Elementary	27	80.47%	.18	38%	100%	62%
Advanced	21	44.14%	.19	14%	87%	73%

Table 1 shows a fairly large difference between the average teacher-student goal congruence for the elementary level (*M*=80.47%, *SD*=.18) and that for the advanced level (*M*=44.14%, *SD*=.19). T-test results confirmed that the goal congruence found for the elementary

level was significantly higher than that found for the advanced level ($t(46)=6.61$, $p=.00$, $d=36\%$). It is easy to see in the percentile distribution (Figure 1) that the largest portion of elementary students were in the top quarter percentile, whereas the largest portion of advanced students were in the 25%-50% percentile. No significant differences were found between the two elementary classes ($t(25)=-.54$, $p=.59$)or between the two advanced classes ($t(19)=1.12$, $p=.23$). The results suggested that the students in the elementary level classes had more congruent goals with their teachers than did the students in the advanced level classes.

Figure 1. Goal congruence distribution by proficiency level

Goal congruence and student performance

To answer the second research question, we first computed the correlations between goal congruence levels and measures on student performance. As Table 2 shows, student-teacher goal congruence was positively correlated with students' z-scores ($r=.346$, $p<.05$), on-task behavior ($r=.46$, $p<.01$), and negatively correlated with students' off-task behavior ($r=-.349$, $p<.05$). To facilitate our understanding about these correlations, we median spilt students according to their congruence level into high-congruence group and low-congruence group.

Table 2

Correlation of goal congruence with outcome variables

Measure	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Student-teacher goal congruence	—					
2. Performance (Z-score)	.346*	—				
3. Performance (on-task behavior)	.460**	.866***	—			
4. Performance (off-task behavior)	-.349*	-.483**	-.469**	—		
5. Motivation (student self-report)	.370**	.441**	.393*	-.248	—	
6. Motivation (teacher evaluation)	.317*	.558***	.576***	-.857***	.292*	—

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

As Table 3 shows, significant group differences were found for all three measures of student performance. Students in the high-congruence group achieved higher scores, demonstrated more on-task behaviors and engaged in fewer off-task behaviors than the students in the low-congruence group.

Table 3

High-congruence vs. Low-congruence group comparison

	Group					
	High-congruence		Low-congruence			
Measure	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t test (df=46)*	*Effect size (Cohen's d)*
Performance measure						
Z-score	.41	.65	-.41	1.07	3.19**	.93
On-task behavior	4.12	.99	2.95	1.12	3.82***	1.11
Off-task behavior	1.77	.73	2.64	1.08	-3.22*	.94
Motivation measure						
Student self-report	4.36	.43	3.94	.69	2.53*	.73
Teacher evaluation	3.99	.81	3.26	.96	2.82**	.82

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

Goal congruence and student motivation

We applied the same statistical approach to answer this question. We first computed the correlations between congruence levels and student motivation measures. As Table 2 shows, student-teacher goal congruence was positively correlated with students' self-reported motivation scores ($r=.370$, $p<.01$), and teachers' evaluation of student motivation ($r=.317$, $p<.05$). Then we used T tests to compare high-congruence group and low-congruence group. As the last two lines of Table 3 shows, significant group differences were found for both of the two motivation measures. Students in the high-congruence group reported higher level of motivation toward the course than did the students in the low-congruence group, and this pattern was consistent with evaluations from their teachers.

Goal congruence predicts student motivation and performance

The last question of interest in this study was the impact of student-teacher goal congruence on student motivation and performance, which were operationalized as the course scores they received and their self-reported motivation scores, excluding the teacher evaluation measures. We decided to use path analysis because this statistical approach could provide estimates of the magnitude and significance of hypothesized causal connections between variables, such as the goal congruence to student motivation in this study. When a path analysis is performed, a prior hypothesis about the causal relations among variables is needed (Tabri & Elliott, 2012). Although there was no framework specifically addressing the role of goal congruence, the associations between goal and motivation, and between motivation and performance had been relatively well established in current literature. Therefore, we hypothesized the Path Model of Goal Congruence, as shown in **Figure 2**. A single path represents a hypothesized direct effect of one variable on another, whereas plural paths (one

variable affecting another variable, which in turn affects a third) represent indirect effects

(Nishino, 2012).

Figure 2. Path Analysis Results
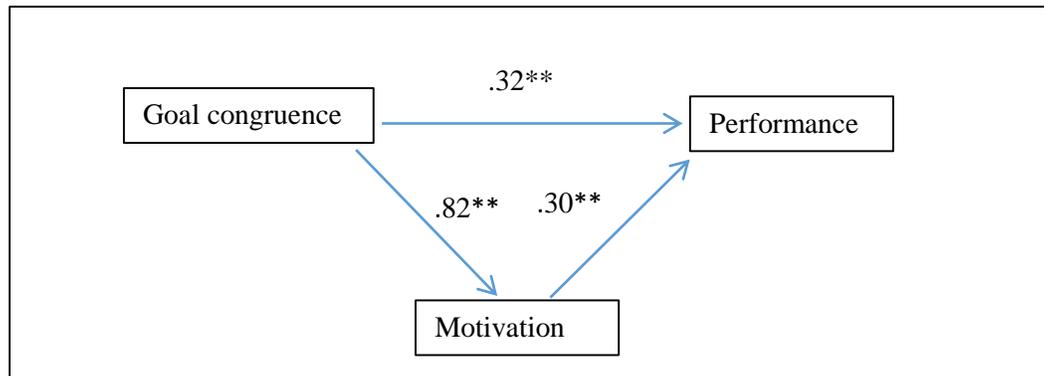
Note. *p< .05, **p< .01, *** p< .001

The statistics associated with this path model indicate that the fit to the data is good. The

chi-square (χ^2=.743, df=2, p=.69) was not significant, which denoted goodness of fit in this case.

Other goodness of it measures indicated good fit of the model to the data: The value of RMSEA

(Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) for this model is .00, less than the critical value

of .05; and CFI (Comparative Fit Index) =1.00, well above the .90 criterion.

Our path analysis included two multiple regression equations. In one equation, Goal

Congruence, Gender, and Proficiency Level are viewed as predictors of Motivation. In the other

equation, Goal Congruence, Gender, Proficiency Level, and Motivation are considered as

predictors of Performance. Gender and Proficiency Level were included in the regressions so

they could be controlled, but they were not included in the final path because they were not part

of the model.

The results of the path analysis showed that Goal Congruence and Motivation had direct

effects on Performance, combining to explain 31.3% of the variance in Performance. The effects

of Goal Congruence and Motivation on Performance were similar, with standardized regression

β=.32 and .30. Goal Congruence also had a direct effect on Motivation (β=.82), as well as an indirect impact on Performance via Motivation. The final path analysis results are shown in Figure 2.

Discussion and conclusion

An analysis of the results leads us to several tentative conclusions with regard to student-teacher goal congruence in foreign language classses.

The comparisons between the goal rankings given by the students and their teachers showed that their understandings about the relative importance of each course goals differed considerably. The findings were consistent with previous research (Lemos, 1996; Spera & Wentzel, 2003) that identified discrepencies between student and teacher goals. As previously discussed, the research that investigated student and teacher goals together in foreign language classes was scant. One possible reason is that the students and teachers in foreign language classes are presumed to have similar goals. However, our findings revealed that this assumption does not necessarily hold true. Many students viewed the course goals quite differently from their teachers.

Our findings also showed that student-teacher goal congruence differed across proficiency levels. Students in elementary classes seemed to be more congruent with their teachers in terms of their perceptions of the course goals than students in advanced classes. It could be because the relative importance of the course goals for a beginning level class tend to be more straightfoward than the goals meant to be pursued at more advanced levels. For example, it is common knowledge that learners at the beginning level must first have an adequate command of the most basic elements of a language, such as pronunciation, spelling rules, etc, before they can proceed to develop competence at the phrasal and sentential levels, and this

knowledge is probably well received by both the students and teachers in an elementary class. As students' proficiency improves, their learning becomes more individulized, and their learning focuses become more varied. For instance, some students might hope to polish their grammar whereas some students would like to spend more time improving reading skills. In other words, advanced students tend to have more diverse needs that forge into different ways to prioritize the course goals, which makes it more difficult for the students and their teachers to have aligned goals. Another possible cause for the varied goal congruence across proficiency levels might be students' varied levels of dependency on their teachers. Some researchers argued that students at the beginning stage of language study tend to be more dependent on their teachers to guide them through the learning process (Moeller et al., 2012). As students grow in their linguistic abilities, their sense of autonomy increase and their desire to pursue their personal goals might become stronger.

Our study extends previous research on goals by taking teacher goals into account and identifying the relationship between student-teacher goal congruence and student learning outcomes. First, student-teacher goal congruence levels were shown to be positively related to student performance measured by class grades and teacher observation. The high-congruence group achieved better grades than the low-congruence group, highlighting the importance of goal congruence for students' academic performance. Teacher evaluation on students' on-task and off-task behaviors provided further explanation on why students in the high-congruence group performed better. Students' learning behavior and effort expenditure are guided by their goals (Dörnyei, 1994). When students' goals are congruent with their teachers, their effort expenditure is more efficient and productive because the way they invest effort is in line with how their teachers expect them to and how their work is evaluated. This explains why students in the high-

congruence group demonstrated better concentration of attention, engaged in less distracting activities during the class, and completed assignments more frequently. On the contrary, students with low goal congruence with their teachers might ignore the more important contents and spend too much time on topics less relevant for the course. The significantly positive relationship between scores and on-task behavior, along with the negative relationship between scores and off-task behavior, showed consistency between the achievement measures (scores) and behavioral measures (teacher observation). Although the correlations do not warrant any causal relationships, they inspire us to speculate the mediating role that behaviors might play between goal congruence and student performance.

The correlation has also been found between goal congruence and student motivation, which is another noteworthy finding. While students' goals have been shown to affect their FL motivation (Dörnyei, 1994, 1998), few studies take both teachers' goals and students' goals into consideration when investigating FL students' motivation. Our study shows that student-teacher goal congruence has an impact on student motivation. Students' self-reports show that the students having higher levels of goal congruence with the teacher reported stronger motivation, more favorable attitude toward learning the target language, and felt more satisfied with the course. Their stronger motivation and desire to learn the language could be explained by the alignment of the tasks assigned by the teacher and the tasks they perceived to be helpful for achieving their goals. When a student perceived a task relevant and helpful for achieving their goals, s/he would understandably be more willing to approach and engage in the tasks. On the contrary, students in the low-congruence group appeared less motivated possibly because they often perceived that the assigned tasks were not quite relevant or helpful for attaining their goals. They were also less likely to feel satisfied with their progress because their work did not translate

into the achievements that they had expected, and as a result, they did not find the course as interesting or useful as the other group did. The varying levels of motivation were not only shown by students' self-reports, but were also reflected in teacher observation. Teachers also found that the high-congruence group was more motivated than the low-congruence group. In addition, student self-reports were significantly correlated to teacher evaluation, suggesting consistency between students' subjective experience and teachers' observation.

Consistent with our predictions, the results of path analysis showed direct paths linking goal congruence to motivation and performance. The path analysis was necessary in that it helped shed light on how student-teacher goal congruence functions. First, goal congruence was found to have direct effects on both student performance and motivation. Relatively speaking, goal congruence had a stronger direct influence on motivation than it did on performance. Goal congruence also affected student performance through the mediation of motivation. The causal relationships between goal congruence and student performance and that and motivation, albeit still tentative, were brought to the surface by the path analysis and are well worth further studying.

This study contributes to the field of foreign language (FL) teaching including Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) in that it yields implications for language teachers and teacher training. FL teachers and students oftentimes come from different countries, grew up in different cultures and educated in different systems. It is very possible that they bring to class different goals. The gap between their goals needs to be bridged to ensure effective learning processes and outcomes. In light of the indicated relationship between goal congruence, performance and motivation, it would be helpful for foreign language practitioners to explore strategies that could enhance student-teacher goal congruence. We suggest that FL students and teachers communicate their

goals to each other. One possibility is for the teachers to explain with justification to students which goals are the most important and achievable in the course. Research shows that assigned goals with convincing rationales can be well taken by the receivers and result in satisfactory outcomes (Latham, Erez, & Locke, 1988). Students can also talk about what they hope to achieve through the class and why some goals are more important to them. In this case, the teacher may as well adjust the course goals to accommodate student needs, or in other words adopt a joint goal setting practice, which will also lead to higher goal congruence between them. Research (Locke, 1996) also shows participation in the joint goal setting process tends to enhance members' commitment and motivation because allowing students to have a say in establishing the course goals or instructional priorities is a way of "imparting responsibility to the students" (Ames, 1992). Ultimately, students and teachers will find themselves working in the same direction through the goal communication.

Limitation and Conclusion

Like any study, our study has several limitations that warrant reader's attention. First, the findings were solely based on quantitative analysis, which means that we were only able to reveal the effects of student-teacher goal congruence but not able to explain further how it brought about such effects. We hope that future studies can shed light on this matter by including qualitative approaches, such as interviews or student reflective journals, which can enhance our understanding about the mechanism of goal congruence. Second, the correlational nature of this study means that our findings are only exploratory. The hypothesis about the relationship between goal congruence and performance and motivation awaits corroboration by field experiments. Third, the sample size was small for more complex data analyses like path analysis, so we must use caution when interpreting the results. The small sample size also made the

generalizability limited. Studies using larger samples in different contexts would enrich our understanding about the effects of goal congruence.

It should also be noted that the findings could only reflect an end-of-semester snapshot of student-teacher goal congruence, based on which we analyzed and discussed its role in affecting student motivation and performance. In the real classroom, it is very likely that students' goals change or fluctuate over the semester due to various reasons. For example, students and teachers may have larger discrepancy in goals at the beginning of the semester than toward the end of the semester, or vice versa. It would be of great interest for future research to document the changes of student goals in a longitude manner, to examine the impact of changing goals to students' learning and motivation, and to investigate what might cause the changes of student goals.

In closing, through a goal ranking method, the present study quantified the level of goal congruence for each student-teacher dyad, making it possible to further investigate the relationship between goal congruence and two outcome variables. Significant correlations have been found between student-teacher goal congruence and student performance and motivation in class. To our knowledge, this study is one of the few that have directly brought teachers' goals and students' goals into the same research scope. The findings suggest that goals can be investigated from an interactive perspective, which is particularly important to dialogue-based context like foreign langue classes.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX

Course Goal Ranking Sheet (for an advanced level class)

Instruction: Below are the top five goals your teacher set for this course. Now please prioritize them based on their importance to you. (5 being the most important, and 1 being the least important. Each number can be used only once.)

	Your Ranking
o Accumulate advanced vocabulary/grammar and put them into use	
o Gain confidence of speaking Chinese about societal topics	
o Gain deeper understanding about Chinese culture and concepts	
o Feel at ease writing characters and create one's own memorizing method	
o Produce more sophisticated essays using complex structures and clear organization	