

## CORRELATION BETWEEN GOAL SETTING AND L2 LEARNING STRATEGIES: THE CASE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

*Goal setting is considered as an integral part in foreign language learning. Goal setting is directly related to success in competitions with some standard of achieving excellence. Highly motivated L2 learners tend to use various types of strategies. Apart from this, goal setting is such cognitive mediator variable between motivation and L2 learning behaviour which also influences learners' use of strategies. Hence, present study reveals the influence of goal setting on learners' use of strategy dealing with (1) typical styles of learning strategies held by EFL students; (2) impact of various levels of goal setting on students' use strategies of learning; (3) the relationship of goal-setting with language learning strategies. The findings of the current study reveal that compensation and meta-cognitive strategies are used more frequently as compare to cognitive and affective strategies. Besides, three least frequently applied individual strategies are "using multiple words", "involving in L2 speaking", and "listening native speakers' conversations". So for the relationship between goal setting and strategy use is concerned with motives to achieve success which is positive and significantly correlates with other language learning strategies such as metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective strategies. Conversely, motive to get away from failure (Mf) has negative impact but not valuably correlates with all other strategies. The study also proves that learning strategies under investigated are significantly correlated with goal-setting excluding affective strategies. Statistical results reveal that for relationship between goal-setting and motive of acquiring success (Ms) has significant and positive relations.*

**Key Words:** Goal setting; Strategies; Achievement; University Students; Pakistan

### 1. Introduction

With the advent of 21<sup>st</sup> century, Teacher centred approach in foreign language teaching gradually seems to be transferred to "student-centred approach. In order to make the EFL students autonomous and independent learners, students are being trained to use language learning strategies which has become one of major targets in EFL context. Students are prepared to have the sense of responsibility for their own language learning purpose. Without any stimulus and sufficient goal setting al achievement, even an individual having remarkable ability cannot obtain long-term goals. Hence, it is inevitably useful to create integration between the "will" and "skill" in language learning environment. In order to fill up the gap, the current study aims to investigate the relationship between the use of language learning strategy and two personal adaptable factors --- goal setting and goal-setting.

### 1.2. Concept of goal setting

Goal setting is indicated towards progress whereby goal-directive behaviour is prompted and constant. Goal setting works as driving force to the learners' behaviour while goal setting works as governing the behaviour related to achievement and output of learning. Goal setting is also referred to as foundation for the achievement and may be defined now as concerning with success in a competition with some standard of quality. People having strong spirit of achievement show high level of goal setting to do hard work so that they may reach their goal

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(Tella, 2007). According to Singh (2011) the people get goal setting to persistently bring change in themselves just like one climbs up the ladder of age and maturity.

The theory of goal setting was given by Atkinson (1996) which is still one of the classic theories attributing to a potent tendency of undertaking some kind of activity related to the cognitive expectation or belief that the activity produces a positive consequence and attraction (or value) of the consequence to the individual learner. In the parallel theme, Atkinson (1996) classifies it into the positive goal setting which drives for success (Ms) and the negative refraining tendency to avoid failure (Mf). As one learner's achievement behaviour not only related to their goal setting achievement, but also to his expectations leading to success or failure, which is mentioned above as goal setting to provide driving force for success or refraining tendency to avoid failure (Tella, 2007).

### **1.3 The goal-setting**

In goal setting theory put forward by Locke and Latham (1989), a goal is just like an 'engine' which fires up the action and provides a direction in which action is to be done. From 1990 to 2002, researchers already conducted round about 400 studies to reveal that the more challenging and higher the goals are, the higher level of achievement is obtained. But there is a linear relationship between goal difficulty and higher level of achievement (Locke & Latham 2006). Dornyei and Otto (2001) resume an intermediary position and consider setting of goals as the primary solid mental representations of a desired end state; setting goals according to them, is an obligatory step in the motivated behavioural sequence. Research scholars have identified various forms of goal orientations which have been differentiated as mastery of setting goal and performance goal. Regarding a performance oriented goals, there is a possibility of being judged, and one can display one's ability by obtaining success, by showing better performance than others, or by succeeding with a little effort. In a mastery of setting goal, the significance of goal is to cultivate new skills. Obtaining mastery is chiefly related to learners' efforts put in the process of learning. Setting goal theory proposes that human actions are stimulated by purpose, and for actions to occur, goals need to be set first and followed by choice of learners.

### **1.4 Learning strategies**

The terms which are used to define strategies such as "cognitive processes" (Rubin, 1981), "learning behaviours" (Wesche, 1977; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985), and "tactics" (Seliger, 1984; Ellis, 1994) and to account for their object of acquiring knowledge, regulating learning, making learning process more effective are varied, but they have lot of things in common. Oxford Dictionary defines the word "strategies" in general terms as "steps taken by learners to improve learning ability" (Oxford, 1990). Cohen (2014) narrated three factors which influence the use of learning strategies: language skills, self-identity, and robust repertoire of learning strategies. In the current study, learning strategies are demarcated as "specific actions which a learner takes to make the learning procedure more effective, faster, easier, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more exchangeable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990:8). Much popularity has gained by the instrument Strategy Inventory for Language learning (SILL) to stimulate levels of strategy use by administering in a various forms of learning environment. Thus it calls for to have comparisons in strategy use in different cultures. There are two classes: direct and indirect

learning strategies which are generally subdivided into a total of six groups. Direct learning strategies consist of cognitive, memory and compensation strategies while Indirect learning strategies include metacognitive, social strategies and affective.

### **1.5 Theories of goal setting and learning strategies**

Research Scholars demonstrate that goal setting for foreign language learning plays a pivotal role in use of strategy. R. Oxford and M. Nyikos (1989), provided deep insights about variables which influenced the choice of language learning strategies by EFL students in conventional classroom settings. Findings of this study revealed that goal setting was the factor which played pivotal role in influencing the use of language learning strategy. Results of this study also showed that highly motivated learners were more prone to using number of strategies during language learning. These findings also supported Gardner's (1985) study on attitudes and goal setting which are very important and determine the boundary to which the individuals would enthusiastically involve themselves in L2 learning. Here major determining factor is also goal setting". Meece, Anderman and Anderman (2006) explored the impacts of environment in EFL classroom setting and school to see students' goal setting to be based on framework of achievement goal-setting. Results from this research indicated that environment of school which emphasized the high ability and competition for high scores would enhance the performance of some learners, while some other learners revealed low goal setting under this situation. In China, Wen (2001) did a study on "relationship developmental patterns of amendable learners' variables (i.e. strategies, goal setting and beliefs) based on data collected through longitudinal questionnaire. Goal setting explored in this study was intrinsic and extrinsic type of goal setting made on Biggs' (1979) clarification, whereas, language learning strategies based on the framework of Wen's own classification indicated that the relationship among the variables such as strategies of goal setting and learning were fairly stable. Bernaus and Gardner (2008) investigated effects of the strategies of language learning which influenced on the students' goal setting and L2 achievement from teacher and students' perspective. This study research concluded that there were no effects of strategies on goal setting from teachers' view, while there existed positive impacts on goal setting and achievement of students from students' point of view.

Research on the relationship between goal setting and learners' strategy use has been an increasing amount in second and L2 learning which have been reviewed above. Now the aspects of goal setting will be discussed as complicated goal setting al components in EFL context. However, about the relationship between strategy use and goal setting al achievement, has not been much investigated by the researchers which needs to be investigated both in FLL context and educational settings.

### **1.6 Researches about goal-setting and learning strategies**

In the LISREL (Linear Structural Relation) which is model of the internal structure to measure EFL Goal setting (Qin & Wen, 2002) and goal-setting, was applied to find out direct effects on

Goal setting and Behaviour, this revealed that when L2 learners set high level goals, they worked hard to achieve their targets. Dweck and Legget (1988), and Lee, Locke and Latham (1989) investigated more and found that having mastery of achieving goals is thought to guide towards adaptive behavioural reactions such as doing more efforts or strategy shifts. But performance goals on the other hand, increase maladaptive reactions. As a result, Setting of goals influences performance by accumulative persistence, attention and intensity. Lee, Palmer and Wehmeyer (2009) investigated to provide teachers some the methods of applying strategies and helping students to set their goals to learn and evaluate them.

## **2. Problem statement**

EFL students have been in dire need of learning English from secondary to the higher education. In this connection, EFL teachers constantly struggle to find out which learning strategies should be tested to make the students achieve their goal. In this regard, in order, goal setting to achieve target in learning foreign language is very important which may be helpful for the EFL students because students having goal setting are more likely to take up various strategies of learning to develop their competence and performance. It is due to lack of goal setting among language learners that they are unable to grow up psychologically. Having no goal setting keeps them away from success in accomplishing their learning task.

## **3. Research Questions**

The present study attempts to find out the answer to the following questions:

- I. What learning strategies are taken by the Graduate students in EFL class room?
- II. Do diverse levels of goal setting have an effect on using the learning strategies?
- III. What is the correlation among L2 learning strategies and goal setting?

## **4. Methodology**

245 EFL third year students from Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering & IT Rahim yar Khan, Pakistan were asked to give their point of view through questionnaire. 45 copies of questionnaire were invalid and hence eliminated as students either did not respond or responded to the questionnaire incorrectly. So, only 200 students' data were included for statistical analysis, among which 110 were males and 80 were female students. Students had studied English as compulsory subject formally for 5 years in primary schools and for 5 years in high schools and finally studying English in College as graduate students for three years.

### **4.1 Instruments**

Three questionnaire was developed in this study based on Achievement Scale (AMS) of T. Gjesme & R.Nygaard (1970), a self-made goal-setting scale and Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The SILL was translated into Urdu in order to guarantee a better comprehension of the questions to the students and to receive more spontaneous responses. According to Oxford and Nyikos (1989) both the SILL and AMS have been found to have good content validity by "using classificatory agreement between two independent raters". The Pakistani SILL had a Cronbach alpha of .85; the Pakistani AMS had a Cronbach alpha of .72.

### **4.2 Achievement motivation scale (AMS)**

The instrument to measure the motive for success and failure (AMS) which we used with adaptation in the survey was primarily formulated by Gjesme and Nygard (1970). It covers 15 items separately, wherein contents of affective experience are connected with certain probability of success. The scales of both motives are correlated together negatively and each item contains 4 response alternatives which are following: (1) Does not apply to me; (2) Applies to me only partly; (3) Applies to me to a large extent. (4) Applies to me accurately. *Ms* ( $n=15$ ;  $\alpha=.84$ ). *This scale calculates the motive towards approaching the success, which characterizes the aptitude to anticipate the pride or pleasure, such as "I love the task which I try to achieve with hard work"*. *Mf* ( $n=15$ ;  $\alpha=.86$ ). This measure evaluates the motive to avoid failure by characterizing the ability to anticipate embarrassment or pain, such as "I get confused about the problem which I am unable to solve it".

### 4.3 Goal-setting Questionnaire

Classification of properties of goal-setting by former researches were used to design questionnaire. Each property characterises specific items. The questionnaire is consisted of 20 items based on five points Likert scale to assess students' goal-setting. The options in the scale to respond are following: (1) never true of me; (2) Generally not true of me; (3) somewhat true of me; (4) generally true of me; and (5) always true of me. The categories of goal-setting are presented as follows: Goal source ( $n=2$ ). This measures where do the students' goal-setting come from. Goal specificity ( $n=2$ ). This measures how much clear and elaborated the students' specifications of goal are. Goal difficulty ( $n=5$ ). This measures the general problems in attaining the student's respective goal. Goal proximity ( $n=2$ ). This measures the time span or range of attaining students' goal. Level of aspirations in attaining goal ( $n=2$ ). This measures whether the learners set a mastery of goal. Conflict or harmony of Goal ( $n=4$ ). This measures how the students treat with various learning goals in L2 learning. Commitment of Goal ( $n=2$ ). This measures what decisions the learner makes in the learning of target.

### 4.4 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

The SILL was primarily constructed by Rebecca Oxford (1990) which is translated into Urdu in order to ensure more comprehension of the questions and to receive spontaneous response. Students' frequency of learning strategies has been assessed with 50-items questionnaire. This questionnaire contains strategy descriptions to collect data on five points Likert scale which are: (1) never true of me; (2) Generally not true of me; (3) somewhat true of me; (4) generally true of me; and (5) always true of me. The SILL has been founded on six categories of strategies which are following:

The internal reliability coefficient of the Urdu Version SILL ( $n=50$ ), which is acquired by means of Cronbach  $\alpha$ , 0.90. Other the six subscales are ranging from .56 to .84. Cronbach  $\alpha$  is dependent upon the number of items included in a scale" (Backhouse, et al. 1982, cited from Dorney, 1990: 51). Values of coefficients are acceptable. Strategies of memory have 9 items which measure how often students use them to memorize to acquire new knowledge. Cognitive strategies are comprised of 14 items which determine to what extent the learners use them to understand and create new knowledge. Compensation strategies contain 6 items see to what extent learners use pieces of information available to either have comprehension or producing



even though limitations in knowledge. Metacognitive strategies are covered with 9 items to assess the frequency with which learners use them to get over their own cognition. Affective strategies cover 6 items to observe to what extent learners' use them to govern self- goal setting s, feelings, and attitudes toward new knowledge. Social strategies are comprised of 6 items to measure how often students use them to learn from interacting with others.

## 5. Data Collection and Analysis

Table 1

*General tendencies in choosing strategies & Mean score of strategy groups*

Strategy Use	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Order of usage
A memory	2.81	0.36	5
B cognitive	2.92	0.39	3
C compensation	3.11	0.51	1
D metacognitive	2.95	0.59	2
E affective	2.90	0.45	4
F social	2.61	0.47	6

Table 1 shows the mean score about the six strategies used by college EFL students, wherein highest mean is 3.11 of compensation category, second comes the metacognitive 2.95, third is cognitive 2.92, fourth stands affective 2.90 and fifth is memory with 2.81mean and finally the lowest strategy used is the social strategy with lowest mean 2.61. All these strategies are used in using the target language interactively, communicative conversations in English, and reading English books of their course or interest etc.

The reason behind using compensation strategies is that the mostly these are related to the strategies that the language learners tend to use to keep their communications run smoothly because they have inadequate knowledge of the target language. In the present study, the lowest frequency is in social strategies which the reason is that face-to-face communication with native English speakers in EFL context of Pakistan is yet largely confined. Hence, social strategies which demand 'asking questions in L2' and 'asking native to correct me' or 'conversation with native speakers', are employed very rarely by the EFL students in Pakistan. This is because of English teaching occurs on traditional pattern, in which teacher oriented approach is used and students tend to be tested with written skill. Their learning English is confined to examination rather than communicative.

Table 2

*Correlation between goal setting and learning strategies*

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social Strategy	Mf	Ms
Ms	.138	.225**	.78	.341*	.327*	2.19**	-.150*	1.000

Mf	-.05	-.07	-.013	-.015	-.082	-.44
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Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The statistical results of correlation between goal setting and strategy show that motive to achieve success (Ms) has positive correlation with four categories, i.e. cognitive .225, metacognitive .341, affective .327, and social strategies .219 and each of correlations have significant value at .01 level; motive for avoiding failure (Mf) has negative correlation with all strategies use as value is below 0.01, hence it does not have significant relationships with these strategies.

Table 3

*Step-wise regression analysis of goal setting and learning strategy*

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable				
Ms	Cognitive	0.042	8.886	0.211	2.783**
	Metacognitive	0.10	22.372	0.324	4.542***
	Affective	0.083	21.9	0.313	4.471***
	Social	0.05	7.842	0.211	2.80**

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

\*.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In the above table stepwise regression analysis has been used to find out effect of goal setting on strategies use. Here, dependent variables are six related to learning strategies, while independent variables are two aspects of goal setting al achievement, i.e. motive for achieving success (Ms) and motive for avoiding failure (Mf).

In step -wise regression method, coefficient (Beta) contains two probabilities: first, positive which means the strategies are frequently used and second is negative which means the strategies are not frequently used.

As revealed in the above Table 3, motive to achieve success exercises regressive effects directly on four learning strategies, i.e. cognitive, affective, metacognitive and social strategies, and path coefficients (Beta) are positive while motive for avoiding failure does not have direct effect on learning strategies.

## 5.1 Findings

The findings of this study are briefed as follows:

- In terms of various learning strategies, compensation and metacognitive strategies have been investigated and proven to be used most frequently while use of social strategies is appeared to be least.

- Regarding relationship between goal setting and learning strategies, the study finds out that motive to achieve success (Ms) has positive correlation with four of the six learning strategies, i.e. metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective strategies. Contrary to this, motive to avoid failure (Mf) has negative and insignificant correlation with all the strategies.
- Regarding goal setting and strategy use, the study reveals that all six types of learning strategies have significant correlation with 'specific goals', and 'higher goals' setting has significant relation with entire six learning strategies with exception of affective strategy while EFL learners with a 'mastery goal' make use of learning strategies more frequently than those who have a 'performance goal'.
- Concerning the relationship of goal-setting and goal setting al achievement, learners who set definite goals and mastery goals having strong commitment to achieve targets strive well to have higher motives to get success. In addition to this, learners with higher motive to achieve success do not struggle to set short-term goals.

## **6. Discussion**

### **Section 1**

Language learners extensively anticipate their success having little concerns about their failure. These characteristics are to be found in graduate students' psychology and personality. It is because it is the time during which their psychology tends to become mature while stronger sense of growing-up and independence is emerging in their self-consciousness. Hence, motive to achieve success in them seems stronger in order to attempt for reliance, recognition and independence.

Moreover, as findings reveal that people who are in dire need of achievement make use of all these six learning strategies more frequently as compare to those having lower achievement goal setting. These findings support Oxford and Nyikos' (1989) study that the more goal setting the learners have, the more they use higher-frequency of learning strategies.

Besides, some researchers relate individual personality with goal setting al achievement. Atkinson (1966) proposes that people who have stability in personality, take risks because they have goal setting al achievement. As a result, they tend to engage more likely in the collective activities and apply numerous strategies to reach their targets. The role of risk-taking is important in the Foreign Language Learning field as given by Skehan (1989) e.g., learners get involved in situations where there is maximum possibility of social interaction to hear language (obtain input), and to actively participate in conversations (use output). Second, risk-taking is significant in a sense that in language learning, the development of language is involved in restructuring learner's existing language system. This only goes on with hypotheses formation and testing, then the successful learners are more likely to be ones who take their existing language system to the limit, and try out risky hypotheses (Skehan,1989). Therefore, good L2 learners having high goal setting for achievement are more likely to develop their language competence by taking risks and make use of numerous language learning strategies.



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## **Section II**

The objective in goal of achievement activity is to strive for success and to give better performance in keeping with the standard of excellence or outperform others competitors. In the meantime, language learning strategies are to achieve communicative competence by and large (Oxford, 1990); L2 learning strategies also contribute to students' language development. By metacognitive strategies, students are able to pre-assess themselves. By this, they are also able to pre-plan, proceed with on-line plan and evaluate, and post-evaluate learning activities and events in using target language. Besides, cognitive strategies help students in grouping, understanding and recollecting new information while affective learning strategies contribute to reduce anxiety level and to give self-encouragement. Moreover, social strategies help EFL students having in interaction with other learners and native speakers. Consequently, in order to develop communicative competence in target language, students with highest motive of achieving success take much interest for using variety of learning strategies more and more to achieve their learning goals.

## **Section III**

Findings of this study reveal that the learners having ability in 'mastery of goal' make use of learning strategies more frequently as compare to those having 'performance goal'. This finding further verifies the propositions put forward by Dweck and Kegget (1988) and Lee, Locke and Latham (1989) that mastery of goals leads to flexible behavioural responses i.e., much effort or strategy shifts, while performance goal creates faulty adaptive responses. For instance, 'mastery goal' reveals positive correlation with social strategies and 'performance goal' shows negative relations with the same level of category. The students having a goal of best mastery of English tend to follow effective ways of communication in L2. However, those having 'performance goal' tend to perform well according examinations point of view. As result, they try to avoid consuming time on communicative activities.

## **Section IV**

Qin Xiaoqing (2002) proposed in her model of goal setting that goal-setting is effective cognitive mediator between Goal setting al Antecedents and Goal setting al Behaviour. The finding also indicates that students with high level of motive to get success set specific goals having mastery of goal with strong commitment. Moreover, learners with highest motives to achieve success do not want to set short-term goals policy.

This finding supports Qin Xiaoqing (2002)'s results that the learners who aim at passing the examinations prefer to set a mastery goal, but looks somewhat different from results by Ames and Archer's (1988) research that the students who focus on examinations have preference for performance goal. This finding suits to the context of college English learners Pakistan. Where students work hard to outperform others participating in the examinations. That is why their communicative competence is ignored.

## **5.2 Implications**

Strategies play pivotal role in foreign language learning. But the significance of goal setting and goal-setting on learning strategies cannot be denied anyway. Hence, the teachers should have insight into relationship between goal setting al achievement, learning strategies and goal-setting. Only then, teachers may guide EFL students and give them awareness about the wide

range of strategies available to them. Along with this, it is also important to understand the individual distinction in making use of strategies. Keeping in views these key points, the present study suggests some implications and suggestions for the EFL classroom.

- First of all, EFL teachers must have creative and flexible strategy to satisfy the students' various needs. In this regard, Oxford (1990) states that new teaching skills also have capacity to identify students' learning strategies, conducting trainings on learning strategies, and helping students become independent learners. Some practical guidelines to promote strategy use are very helpful to develop learners' autonomy.
- Secondly, to stimulate more efficient learnings and better outcomes, teachers must help students develop goal setting and use learning oriented strategies.
- Last but not the least, owing to the significance of goal-setting to learners' goal setting and using learning strategies, teachers should guide college students to set their goals based on their ability to satisfy their needs. And more importantly, the teachers can help students to develop their own intrinsic incentives by stressing on the mastery of goals.

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