The Relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' Goal-oriented and Self-regulated Learning and Their Language Proficiency

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Abstract

In this study, the Persian versions of "Goal Orientation Scale" developed by Midgley, Kaplan, Middleton, &Maehr (1998) and "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire" developed by O'Neil and Herl (1998) were piloted on 199 and 189 participants respectively. When the researchers were assured that these two instruments enjoyed satisfactory reliability and construct validity, the Persian versions of "Goal Orientation Scale" and "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire" along with a TOEFL test (1995) were administered to 127 participants.

The results of data analysis showed that there was a significant relationship between goal-oriented learning and language proficiency. Also, there was a significant relationship between task goal orientation and language proficiency. However, no significant relationship was found between ability-approach and ability-avoid goal orientation and language proficiency. In addition, there was a significant relationship between self-regulated learning and language proficiency.

Key Words: Self-regulated Learning, Achievement Goal Orientation, Language Proficiency, Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

1. Introduction

Language teaching profession is interdisciplinary and other disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, sociology etc. have made

major contribution to the development and evolution of foreign language practice through history.

Over the past few decades, the issue of individual differences among language learners has received due attention. One of the issues that has bothered language teachers for a long time has been the point that why language learners do not perform similarly in language learning activities while they are presented the same material by the same teacher using the same method. A multitude of personality factors that may affect performance in language learning activities have already been investigated. Recently two new major constructs in educational psychology have drawn the attention of researchers; namely, achievement goal orientation and self-regulated learning, because these two constructs may partly account for some of the variance in language learners' performance.

1.1 Self-regulated Learning

Zimmerman and Schunk (1989) defined self-regulated learning (SRL) as self–generated thoughts, feelings and actions which are systematically oriented toward the attainment of students' own goals. Later, Zimmerman (2000) refined this definition and maintained that self-regulated learning is the learners' active participation in learning from the metacognitive, motivational and behavioral point of view.

Zimmerman (1989) proposed a model of self-regulated learning based on Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory in which self-efficacy and triadic reciprocity are two important constructs. Zimmerman (1989) believed that self-regulated learning is cyclical in nature which includes a forethought phase, a performance phase and a self-reflection phase. The forethought phase refers to processes that precede and prepare actions. The performance phase involves two kinds of processes the first of which is self-control that includes self-instruction and attention focusing .The second process is self-observation which is the deliberate attention to aspects of one's behavior. Finally, the self-reflection phase contains two categories; self-judgment, which refers to self-evaluation of one's own performance, and self-reaction, which includes self-satisfaction, i.e., perceptions of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) and affect regarding performance and inferences about what will have to be changed in future regulation-demanding situations. Due to cyclical nature of self-regulation, self-reflection further influences forethought process.

Boekaerts (1995) believes that the study of self-regulation unites the various subdisciplines of psychology. Self-regulation is central to

understanding learning process in the classroom and research into its dynamics and outcomes has potential implications for creating optimal learning environments. Winne and Perry (2000) maintain that self-regulation involves a cognitive direction that requires continuous adaptation and decisions, awareness to gain intelligent and valid comprehension of each situation, and a reflective disposition about what should be done in various academic activities. According to Perry and Vandekamp(2000), self-regulated learners exercise metacognition by analyzing the demand of tasks in relation to their academic strengths and limitations, and by searching their repertoire of effective learning and problem solving strategies for ones that will optimize their learning process and products.

Self-regulated learners are aware of their academic strengths, weaknesses, and strategies they can use to meet the demands of challenging tasks in classroom. They believe that ability is incremental, focus on personal progress and deep understanding and have high efficacy for learning (Hutchinson, Phillips & Perry, 2006).Emphasizing the role of goal setting, Schmitz and Wiese (2006) state that self-regulation can be used to describe the learning behavior of students with respect to given tasks. If a student tries to self-regulate his behavior, he will start with goal setting in relation to the task.

Mizrachi and Kramarski (2006) distinguish between general and domain specific SRL .They believe that general SRL refers to one being able to control and regulate problem solving processes regardless of the specific domain from which the problems or tasks are drawn. Domain – specific SRL focuses on the unique features of each domain and therefore varies among the various domains. Young (2005) maintains that essential to self-regulated learning are the learning strategies or mental processes that learners can deliberately recruit to help themselves learn and understand something new.

1.2 Achievement Goal Orientation

Pintrich(2000) defines achievement goal orientation as constructs that address the issue of the purpose or reason students are pursuing an achievement task. There are three types of achievement goal orientation:

1) *Mastery goal orientation* which involves a focus on enhancing one's task competence. This type of goal orientation represents a concern with mastering the material and concepts and learning as an end in itself.

2) *Ability-approach goal orientation* which involves a focus on demonstrating one's ability to others   and represents the students' desire to be higher than others.

3) *Ability-avoid goal orientation* which involves a focus on avoiding demonstrating one's lack of ability and represents the students' tendency to try not to be the poorest or look stupid.

Interestingly, in the achievement goal literature different labels have been used for the same constructs. Task goal, mastery goal and learning goal all have been used to describe a focus on learning and developing competence .Also, the terms ego involvement, performance goal orientation and ability goal have been used to describe a focus on one's performance (both approaching and avoiding).

A good deal of support has been offered for a three-goal model of goal orientation .Elliot and Church (1997) used factor analysis to guide the construction of their 18-item achievement goals questionnaire. Later, Smith, Duda, Allen &Hall (2002) tested this instrument with confirmatory factor analysis on data taken from a similar sample of students and found that 17 of the 18 items loaded on the hypothesized three factors. In addition, Middleton and Midgley (1997) conducted exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis and found the three factors in a sample of middle school students.

Shih (2005) believes that students espousing mastery goals are expected to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies .Accordingly , mastery goals are associated with a number of adaptive outcomes, including preference for challenging work and persistence in the face of setbacks Pajares, Britner and Valiante (2000) studied the relationship between achievement goals, motivation constructs, and gender in the areas of middle school writing and science. In both academic areas, task goals were associated positively with self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-efficacy for self-regulation and negatively with apprehension.

Tercanlioglu (2004) investigated achievement goal orientations in EFL   learning contexts. Her subjects were 135 EFL   learners who participated in her study of goal orientation. Results indicated that language learners   placed most emphasis on task goals and that this was related to language achievement. Task goals were negatively correlated with   performance-avoid orientation and performance approach   goal orientations were positively   related   with performance-avoid orientation.

Radosevich, Vandana, Yeo, and Deirdre (2004) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between self-regulated learning and goal orientations. In their longitudinal field study, they obtained data from 132 students over a 10-week period. Their results indicated that (a) learning goal orientation was positively related to how much resources participants allocated to their goals and the degree to which they engaged in cognitive self-regulation, (b) performance-avoid goal orientation was negatively related to cognitive self-regulation, (c) participants engaged in motivational processes aimed at lowering their goals when presented feedback that indicated their performance was below their intentions.

Since the literature lacks any study done in Iran on self-regulated learning and achievement goal orientation, the researchers believe that these two constructs have the potential to make a much-needed contribution to explaining individual differences in learning a foreign language in Iran. As a result, this study was conducted to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' goal-oriented and self-regulated learning and their language proficiency.

2. Method
2.1 Participants
The sample chosen for this study consisted of 127 university students at Teacher Training University. All the participants were BA students majoring in English. It is worth mentioning that the two questionnaires and the TOEFL test were given to 135 students, but only the 127 students who succeeded to answer all the three tests were selected as the participants of this study.

2.2 Instruments
In order to measure the participants' achievement goal orientation, the researchers used "Goal Orientation Scale" developed by Midgley, Kaplan, Middleton and Maehr (1998) .The English version of this questionnaire consisted of 18 items,each 6 items measuring a different goal orientation ;namely, task goal orientation, ability-approach goal orientation and ability-avoid goal orientation. Also, the researchers used "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire" developed by O'Neil and Herl(1998) to determine the extent to which the participants of this study engaged in the process of self-regulated learning. The English version of this questionnaire had 32 items and each 8 items measured a different construct: Planning, Self-checking, Effort and Self-efficacy. In both of these questionnaires, "Likert Scale" was used and

participants had to choose from five alternatives: 1) Almost Never 2) Seldom 3) Sometimes 4) Often 5) Almost always. Finally, in order to measure the participants' language proficiency, the researchers used a retired TOEFL test (1995) which consisted of 100 items.

Since the questionnaires of this study were used in Iran for the first time, they had to be standardized. Therefore, the researchers translated "Goal Orientation Scale" and "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire" into Persian. The Persian versions of "Goal Orientation Scale" and "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire" were piloted on a sample of 210 students, but only 199 of the students returned "Goal Orientation Scale" and only 189 of them returned "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire".

2.2.1 Reliability

The reliability of Persian versions of "Goal Orientation Scale" and "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire" was tested using Cronbach alpha. The alpha reliability for "Goal Orientation Scale" was found to be .79 and the alpha reliability for "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire" was found to be .78 which are acceptable indices of reliability. Based on these figures, the researchers could conclude that the two questionnaires used in this study enjoyed satisfactory reliability.

2.2.2 Validity

To investigate the construct validity of the Persian version of "Goal Orientation Scale" all the 18 items of the scale were factor-analyzed using Principal Axis Factoring. The result of factor analysis showed that 15 items(out of 18) of the Persian version of "Goal Orientation Scale" loaded on three factors, assuring the researchers that it enjoyed construct validity. In addition, the result of factor analysis revealed that 28 items (out of 32) of Persian version of "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire" loaded on four factors, meaning that this instrument had construct validity too. Those items in each questionnaire which did not load on the relevant factors were omitted for the main study.

2.3 Procedure

The Persian versions of "Goal Orientation Scale" and "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire" were administered to 127 English majors. The participants were required to rate the items using a 5-point Likert scale and a score was assigned for each answer. By dividing the sum of scores for each construct by the number of items related to that part, the total score for each construct was figured out. The allocated time for this part was 15 minutes.

Then, all the questionnaires were collected and in order to measure the participants' language proficiency a retired TOEFL test (1995) with 100 items was administered to the participants who were required to mark their answers on the answer sheet accompanying the test. The participants were informed that no negative points were conceived for their wrong responses. They were also asked to answer all the questions. The time allocated for this part was 100 minutes.

It is also noteworthy that in order to encourage the students to answer with more care, they were assured that their scores in all administered tests would be used solely for research purposes and that it would be kept confidential and would not be shown to their teachers.After collecting the data, the participants' responses were analyzed using SPSS software. Various statistical analyses including both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

3. Results

The results of descriptive analysis of the data are presented in

Table1.

Table1: Descriptive statistics

		TOEFL	SRL	GOAL
N	Valid	127	127	127
Mean		52.71	3.3206	3.3270
Std. Deviation		8.887	.28420	.31229
Variance		78.970	.08077	.09753

As it is shown, the mean scores for the participants' TOEFL score, self-regulated learning and achievement goal orientation are 52, 3.3 and 3.3 respectively. Also, the Standard Deviation for TOEFL is 8.8,

for self-regulated learning is .28 and for achievement goal orientation is .31.

Due to the fact that the statistical procedures used in this study required the normal distribution of the gathered data, Kolmogorov – Smirnov test was run to confirm the normality of the distribution. (see Table 2)

Table2: K.S test of normality of the data distribution

		SRL	GOAL	TOEFL
N		127	127	127
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	3.3206	3.3270	52.71
	Std. Deviation	.28420	.31229	8.887
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.102	.083	.110
	Positive	102	.083	.064
	Negative	-.051	-.053	-.110
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.150	.939	1.238
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.142	.342	.093

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

As shown above, the p-value for TOEFL test is .09 which is greater than .05.This means that there is no evidence against the null hypothesis that the sample has been drawn from a normal distribution. Also, the p-values for "Goal Orientation Scale" and "Self-regulation Trait Questionnaire" are .34 and .14 respectively .These p-values are greater than .05 which means that the sample was drawn from a normal distribution.

3.1 Achievement Goal Orientation and Language Proficiency

In order to find out if there is any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' goal-oriented learning and their language proficiency, Pearson correlation was run .As shown in Table 3, the correlation coefficient is found to be .47 which is significant at .01 level. This means that there is a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' goal-oriented learning and their language proficiency.

Table 3: Correlation between TOEFL scores and goal orientation

		TOEFL	GOAL
TOEFL	Pearson Correlation	1	.476 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	127	127
GOAL	Pearson Correlation	.476 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	127	127

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The "Goal Orientation Scale" which was used in this study to measure the achievement goal orientation of the participants consisted of three subscales; namely, task goal orientation, ability-approach goal orientation and ability avoid goal orientation.

Table4: Correlation coefficient between subscales of "Goal Orientation Scale" and TOEFL scores

		TOEFL	TASK	APPROACH	AVOID
TOEFL	Pearson Correlation	1	.581 **	-.003	.130
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.974	.145
	N	127	127	127	127
TASK	Pearson Correlation	.581 **	1	.215 *	.122
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.015	.172
	N	127	127	127	127
APPROACH	Pearson Correlation	-.003	.215 *	1	.641 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.974	.015	.	.000
	N	127	127	127	127
AVOID	Pearson Correlation	.130	.122	.641 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.145	.172	.000	.
	N	127	127	127	127

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

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

The correlation coefficients between the three subscales of "Goal Orientation Scale" and TOEFL scores are presented in Table 4.

The correlation coefficient between task goal orientation and TOEFL scores is .58 which is significant at .01.However, no significant correlation is found between ability- approach and ability – avoid goal orientation and TOEFL scores.

3.2 Self-regulated Learning and Language Proficiency

In order to investigate whether there is a relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-regulated learning and their language proficiency, Pearson Correlation was run. (See Table 5)

Table 5: Correlation coefficient between self-regulation and TOEFL scores

		TOEFL	SRL
TOEFL		1	.454 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	127	127
SRL	Pearson Correlation	.454 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	127	127

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

As the above table illustrates, the correlation coefficient between SRL and TOEFL score is significant with an r value of .45 at .01 levels. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-regulated learning and their language proficiency.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study are in line with many studies such as Butler and Neuman (1995) and Ryan and Pintrich (1997) which demonstrated that adopting task goal orientation has performance benefits. In particular, this finding is consistent with Tercanlioglu (2004) who found a significant correlation between task goal orientation and language proficiency. This implies that those language learners who are mainly concerned with learning the language and choose challenging tasks and do not care about others' judgments

obtain better results on language proficiency tests. In addition, lack of any significant relationship between ability-approach goal orientation and language proficiency may indicate that those language learners who study to be higher than others in language classrooms will not necessarily do better on language proficiency tests. Also, lack of any significant correlation between ability-avoid goal orientation and language proficiency means that the behavioral patterns that emerge as a result of adopting ability-avoid goal orientation such as procrastination ,finding excuses for not studying and students' anxiety regarding their academic performance are not conducive to better performance in language proficiency tests. As for correlations among the three subscales, the correlation coefficient between task goal orientation and ability-approach goal orientation is significant at.05 level(r = 21) .This may indicate that some task-oriented language learners wish to both master the material and get good grades. Also, a significant correlation was found between ability-approach and ability-avoid goal orientation(r =.64).This may be explained by the fact that both of them are performance goals and before the emergence of a trichotomous framework of achievement goal orientation, they were regarded as one single construct; namely, performance goal orientation. However, no significant correlation is found between task and ability-avoid goal orientation.This may be due to the fact that these two goal orientations are characterized by contrasting affective and behavioral patterns; while task-oriented learners focus on learning, the avoidance-oriented learners try to avoid failure.

The findings of this study also indicate that those language learners who self-regulate their learning process also get better grades on language proficiency tests. This can be explained by the fact that self-regulated learning is a broad construct that embraces a wide variety of factors such as cognitive strategies, metacognition, motivational beliefs etc. and it makes sense that those language learners who take advantage of what characterizes self-regulated learners outperform those who clearly lack these features.

4.1 Pedagogical Implications of this study

This study is important for language teachers because students' achievement goal orientations can contribute to a deeper understanding of academic achievement. As Dweck (1989) mentions, the role of contextual factors in adopting goal orientations cannot be ignored because, although individuals are to some extent predisposed to set one type of goal, the situational factors can influence their choice of goals. This implies that language teachers can create classroom environments that encourage language learners to adopt one goal or another. Since the result of this study showed that only task goal orientation is related to language learning, language teachers need to focus on establishing appropriate contexts for the development of task goal orientation among language learners. This can be done through creating a non-threatening environment in which errors are tolerated and final exam is not the most important criterion for passing judgments on language abilities of learners. Students who choose performance goals are worried about the judgments others make about them, so if this source of anxiety is removed and if language learners become aware that what matters to the teachers is learning as an end in itself and the teacher considers gradual, personal progress over time to be a measure of success, they will turn to adopting task goal orientation.

Nevertheless, language teachers need to work hand in hand with educational psychologists to find out how the nature of tasks, evaluation, rewards and teachers' comments or other possible factors can help them create psychological environment that produces task goal orientation.

The result of this study also showed that self-regulated learning is related to language proficiency. Therefore, language teachers must create classroom features that foster self-regulated learning. The work of Perry, VandeKamp, Mercer and Nordby (2002) can provide language teachers with useful insights by helping them focus on features of high SRL classrooms and eliminating features of low SRL environments.

According to Perry et al. (2002) in order to promote self-regulation among language learners, educators should give students many choices to take responsibility for their learning. Language learners must understand   that instead of following what the teacher says passively, they need to be active participants in their learning by choosing from different options the language teacher gives them. Also, language teachers should focus on complex, open-ended

activities because engaging students in simple, closed activities will not lead to developing self-regulation.

Moreover, the support from the language teachers must be instrumental. They should carefully orchestrate instruction to provide students with the domain and strategy knowledge they need to operate independently, helping them to make appropriate choices, encouraging them to expand their abilities by attempting challenging tasks.

An important feature of high SRL classes is that they challenge the students without threatening their self-efficacy. In order to help students become self-regulated learners, evaluation in language classrooms must be ongoing, embedded in daily activities, focused on personal progress and promote the view that errors are opportunities to learn.

4.2 Suggestions for further research

This study just focused on investigating the relationship between self-regulated learning, achievement goal orientation and language proficiency. Further research needs to be done on the relationship between these two psychological constructs and language skills.Also, the relationship between learning strategies and multiple intelligences and language proficiency has been investigated in earlier research studies. Now it would be interesting to find out which learning strategies can predict different goal orientations and which learning strategies can promote self-regulation. In addition, a study needs to be done to find out if more intelligent language learners also use more SRL strategies.

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