APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The relationship between learners’ academic goal motives and L2 (second language) Willingness to communicate in English language classes: A look at academic goal motives’ orientations

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Abstract: The current study examined the relationship between academic goal motives and learners’ second language willingness to communicate in an EFL (English as a foreign language) context. It also investigated the potential orientations of students’ academic goal motives. A sample of 372 Iranian students on BA, MA, and Ph.D.s of teaching, translation, and linguistic and literature degrees at an Iranian university participated in the study. The participants completed two questionnaires investigating their academic goal motives and willingness to communicate in English language classrooms. The correlation analysis showed that academic goal motive was positively correlated with learners’ WTC (willingness to communicate) in English classrooms. Moreover, the findings revealed that students are motivated by both intrinsic (mastery, self-presentation, fake goodness, and self-made duty) and extrinsic (future achievement, family, peer, and the teacher) factors.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

When students start academic education, they bring not only their prior knowledge but also a diverse range of motives, intentions, and expectations which will influence their learning process. Given the intentions of education and the need for expanding effective learning outcomes, strong goal motives are desirable among school and university students. Accordingly, understanding the orientation of goals helps the estimation of when intended events will occur in the future (Ben Malek et al., 2018). The current study examined the relationship between academic goal motives and learners’ second language willingness to communicate. It also investigated the potential orientations of students’ academic goal motives. The correlation analysis showed that academic goal motive was positively correlated with learners’ WTC (willingness to communicate) in English classrooms. Moreover, the findings revealed that students are motivated by both intrinsic (mastery, self-presentation, fake goodness, and self-made duty) and extrinsic (future achievement, family, peer, and the teacher) factors.
Subjects: Curriculum Studies; Educational Psychology; Language Teaching & Learning

Keywords: goal motives; academic goal motives; goal motives orientations; willingness to communicate

1. Introduction
Since the basic role of education in each society is high-quality learning (J. W. Davidson, 2002), researchers try to track the factors that affect students’ learning engagement and academic output (Biggs, 1999). Active engagement in academic work is considered as an important ingredient for change and progress (Fredricks, 2015; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Studies on achievement goal theory (Dweck, 1986; Elliot, 2005; Senko, 2016) assert that engagement in academic work conforms to the goals students adopt when they first undertake their work (Bong, 2009; Elliot et al., 1999; Liem et al., 2008; Vrugt & Oort, 2008; Wolters, 2004). Despite these studies, questions remain concerning the exact nature of academic goal motives.

When students start academic education, they bring not only their prior knowledge but also a diverse range of motives, intentions, and expectations which will influence their learning process (Biggs, 1996; Marton & Booth, 1997). Given the intentions of education and the need for expanding effective learning outcomes, strong goal motives are desirable among school and university students (Baxter & Hatt, 2000; Bennett, 2003; Mathews & Mulkeen, 2002). Accordingly, understanding the orientation of goals helps the estimation of when intended events will occur in the future (Ben Malek et al., 2018). Furthermore, learners’ performance and achievement are moderated by the goals and motives which have special meanings to the students (Hernandez et al., 2015). However, students’ interpretations of learning and their links with personal and academic motives may vary as the academic level increases (Wang & Tsai, 2017).

Referring to the field of language teaching, motivating the second language (L2) communication is necessary for boosting successful language learning. The interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996) and output hypothesis (Swain, 1985) support Skehan’s (1989) belief that “learners need to communicate to learn” (p. 48). Yet, the quantity of L2 communication depends greatly on learners’ willingness to communicate (WTC; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Despite the importance of L2 communication as a foreign language (EFL) around the world, many learners are often silent and passive in language classrooms. Silence is often considered a negative signal in EFL classrooms because it stops developing communicative abilities, especially in contexts like Iran where the classroom is the only place for interactions in the L2. In light of the importance of WTC for successful EFL learning, finding an effective means of increasing EFL learners’ WTC seems necessary. According to goal theory, motivation for learning is conceptualized as goal-directed behaviors that have been initiated by learners to complete learning tasks (Ames, 1992; Duda & Nicholls, 1992). Therefore, by understanding learners’ goal motives, teachers and educators can design and stimulate learning environments aligned with learners’ goal motives to increase learners’ participation.

2. Literature review
Willingness to communicate was initially proposed as a concept to define why some individuals like to communicate more than others in their L1, viewing it as a stable attribute across different settings (McCroskey & Boer, 1985). But, L2 WTC is based on linguistic, social, and psychological factors that are not related to the L1 (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Review of literature reports some quantitative studies focusing on the cause-and-effect relationships between L2 WTC and other factors associated with WTC. According to the findings of these studies, WTC was influenced by communication apprehension (MacIntyre et al., 2002), communicative competence (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 2002; Yashima, 2002), L2 linguistic self-confidence (e.g., Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Peng & Woodrow, 2010), motivation (e.g., Peng & Woodrow, 2010), attitudes toward the target language community (Ghonsooly et al., 2012), ideal L2 selves (e.g., Munezane, 2016; Peng, 2012), and L2 learning experience (e.g., Khajavy et al., 2014; Peng, 2012; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Besides, some qualitative or mixed-methods research studies have
reported WTC fluctuations due to interlocutors and context (X. Cao, 2014; Cao & Philp, 2006), topic and time (Y. Cao, 2014), culture (Peng, 2012), excitement, responsibility, and security (Kang, 2005). Language learners start learning new languages with a goal but fail to succeed because they find no harmony between their goals and what happens inside the classroom. According to goal setting theory (Locke, 1996), goals cause human action, which occurs whenever the goals are set and pursued. Different studies have revealed the positive effects of goal-setting on task performance, academic achievement, well-being (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010), and learner autonomy (Pintrich, 2000). Despite the importance of goals, they have not been used in interventions to enhance WTC until recently (Munezane, 2015).

Research has shown that people’s motives and their beliefs about their future, including general and special life events, shape the construction of their future thoughts (D’Argembeau & Mathy, 2011) and help them guide imagined events in particular themes and sequences (D’Argembeau & Demblon, 2012). Further evidence shows that goals activate and guide the construction and organization of future-oriented knowledge and events (D’Argembeau, 2016; Thomsen, 2015). Goals are mental representations of desired outputs (Austin & Vancouver, 1996) that individuals follow in their daily lives including personal and academic contexts (Emmons, 1986; Klinger, 2013; Little, 1983; McAdams, 2013). Besides, motives are of special importance for reflecting individuals’ experiences with the challenges of daily life goal pursuit. Different experts have claimed that following personally meaningful goals is one of the necessary principles in shaping and sustaining satisfaction with life (see Brunstein, 1993; Emmons, 1986). Progress towards goals that are strongly related to a person’s motivational state should lead to the joy of motivational needs and the feeling of boosted emotional well-being (Brunstein et al., 1998). Favorable constellations that smooth goal attainment work as necessary preconditions for higher levels of well-being, emphasizing the role of contextual goal characteristics (Brunstein, 1993).

Goals and how we think and feel about them leads not only to our well-being (e.g., Cantor et al., 1991; Emmons, 1986) but also to our success in different tasks and broader life-challenges (e.g., Nurmi et al., 2002). Although it was reported some time ago that personal goals are a promising part of the analysis as they show both the personality of an individual and the focus of his or her goals (Cantor et al., 1991), few attempts have been made to study goals as multilevel constructs showing both individual differences and differences between goals. Instead, most of the studies have either investigated goal appraisals by assembling them across different goals (Lecci. et al., 1994), or examined goal appraisals separately in different settings (Karoly & Ruelman, 1996). Although psychological explanations of goal pursuit have largely ignored interpersonal processes, analyzing it in isolation from the social world (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000), the role of interpersonal dynamics has been acknowledged by several theories (Rusbult et al., 2009) and has received great experimental support. Consequently, the present study is designed to address the following research questions:

  1) Is there any relationship between learners’ academic goal motives and L2 willingness to communicate in English language classrooms?
  2) What are the EFL learners’ academic goal motives?
  3) Do EFL learners with different academic degrees have common academic goal motives?

By addressing these questions in this study, we hope to contribute to a fuller understanding of EFL learners’ goal motives in language learning especially stimulating them to communicate in L2.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample was predominantly female (63.7%) with participants’ ages ranging from 18 to 46 years. The majority of students were in their undergraduate years of study (59.9%), with the
remainder of the sample being in either their MA (32.1%) or Ph.D. years (8%). Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the university administers. It was explained to the students that they could participate in the course even if they did not agree to be part of the research. During the project, students' participation was completely voluntarily and they received no remuneration. It had been made clear that the students could withdraw from the study at any stage with no consequences, that pseudonyms would be used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and that the data would not be shared with anyone including the university administrators. They also understood that the results of the data collection were intended only for research purposes. There were 197 teaching students, 38 translation students, 56 Linguistics and literature, and 21 students not mentioning their academic field. They were recruited from two departments of foreign languages in Kerman and Zahedan. They were invited to complete the questionnaires in the classroom environment or they were sent to the students as an online questionnaire. Before completing the questionnaires, students were informed about the study aims and the general form of the questionnaires, and that their participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. It took respondents approximately 30-40 mints to complete the questionnaires.

3.2. Instruments
To capture and collect the required data, the researchers utilized a quantitative research method applying two questionnaires as the instrument of the study. The description of each instrument is presented here. The questionnaires were in Persian and then for publishing purposes, they were translated into English using the forward-backward translation design retaining the conceptual meaning of the original measures.

3.2.1. Willingness to communicate inside the classroom questionnaire
The main objective of the English language classrooms is the improvement of the students’ proficiency in the four skills, and all the skills are treated in class. Accordingly, to provide an objective measure of the participants’ willingness to communicate in English language classrooms, the WTC questionnaire (Appendix A) was adapted from MacIntyre et al. (2001). It measures students’ willingness to speak in class, to read in class, to write in class, and to comprehend in class. Responses to the items on a 5-point Likert scale were anchored at one end by “never willing” and at the other end by “always willing”. Higher scores indicated higher levels of WTC in English inside the classroom. The alpha reliability estimates for this instrument in the current study are as follows: speaking (8 items, $\alpha = .88$), comprehension (5 items, $\alpha = .76$), reading (6 items, $\alpha = .83$), and writing (8 items, $\alpha = .89$). The questionnaire was submitted to several domain experts to judge the face validity, content validity, and language clarity. Also, the experts were asked to comment on the content of the items and add appropriate items, if necessary. They were also pilot tested with a population similar to that in the study to test their validity and reliability. The feedback received led to revisions such as reformulations of some of the questions and clarity of instructions.

3.2.2. Academic Goal Motives questionnaire
To investigate participants academic goal motives, the researcher used Academic Goal Motives (AGM) questionnaire designed by the authors of the current study based on the review of literature (Appendix B): an 8- item factor labeled mastery ($\alpha = .79$), Self-presentation ($\alpha = .86$), Fake goodness ($\alpha = .87$), Self-made duty ($\alpha = .85$), Future achievement ($\alpha = .91$), Family-oriented ($\alpha = .73$), Peer-oriented($\alpha = .81$) and Teacher-oriented ($\alpha = .84$). The questionnaire comprised background information, and Academic Goal Motives Scale (AGMS). This scale consists of 23 statements which were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). To check the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was piloted on a sample of 15 English students similar to that of the main study. According to the results of the pilot study, the question items were analyzed and changed to increase the reliability and validity of the instruments. Five colleagues were also invited to share further comments on the question items before the questionnaire was finalized. Based on the feedback, we revised some wording and added Persian examples to explain what we mean in the options.
3.3. Procedure
After receiving the approval from the universities, the researchers one in Kerman and one in Zahedan approached principals of the two universities and explained the objectives of the study in detail. Answering the questions on questionnaires took around 30 to 40 min, and participants were free to fill out the questionnaires in their own free time. Formal permission to use the anonymized data in future articles and conference presentations was obtained from the participants. They were told that their participation in the study is voluntary, were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and that their answers would not affect their course grades. Then, the participants were invited to complete the questionnaires in the classroom environment or they were sent to the students as an online questionnaire.

4. Findings
The current study is a quantitative study based on descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The data is presented and analyzed in the following sections. Table 1 shows that there was a statistically positive relationship between academic goal motives and willingness to communicate among the participants of the study ($r = .57, n = 312, R^2 = .32, p < .01$). Also, the coefficient of determination value ($R^2 = .32$) leads us to the fact that academic goal motives in students will display about 32% of participants' willingness to communicate.

Besides, findings (Table 2) showed that the motives priority was in the following order for BA students: mastery ($1^{st}$), future achievement ($2^{nd}$), family-oriented ($3^{rd}$), self-made duty ($4^{th}$), self-presentation ($5^{th}$), teacher-oriented ($6^{th}$), fake goodness ($7^{th}$), and peer-oriented ($8^{th}$). For MA students: mastery ($1^{st}$), future achievement ($2^{nd}$), self-made duty ($3^{rd}$), family-oriented ($4^{th}$), self-presentation ($5^{th}$), teacher-oriented ($6^{th}$), fake goodness ($7^{th}$), and peer-oriented ($8^{th}$). And for Ph.D. students: mastery ($1^{st}$), future achievement ($2^{nd}$), family-oriented ($3^{rd}$), self-made duty ($4^{th}$), self-presentation ($5^{th}$), teacher-oriented ($6^{th}$), fake goodness ($7^{th}$), and peer-oriented ($8^{th}$).

One-way analysis of variance (Table 3) showed that participants' academic goal motives were not significantly different in terms of their academic degree.

The results of Tukey post hoc test (Table 4) revealed that academic goal motives were different just among BA and MA ($ΔM = -3.5, p < .05$) students.

5. Discussion
In this study, the researcher focused on academic goal motives that have been neglected in EFL contexts. It examined the relationship between academic goal motives and learners willingness to communicate. It also investigated the potential orientations of students' academic goal motives. The statistical analysis answered the research questions as follows:

The first research question was:

| Variables | Pearson Correlation | n  | $R^2$ |
|-----------|---------------------|----|-------|
| Academic goal motives | .57** | 312 | .32   |
| Willingness to communicate |          |    |       |

**p < .01
1) Is there any relationship between learners’ academic goal motives and L2 willingness to communicate in English language classrooms?
The findings showed a positive relationship between learners’ academic goal motives and L2 willingness to communicate. This finding is in line with some other studies (Bong, 2009; Dweck, 1986; Elliot, 2005; Elliot et al., 1999; Liem et al., 2008; Senko, 2016; Vrugt & Oort, 2008; Wolters, 2004) asserting that there is a relationship between the goals students adopt when they first undertake their work and their engagement in academic work. Moreover, this relationship is confirmed by Hernandez et al. (2015) and Zimmerman et al. (2017) that learners’ performance and achievement are moderated by the goals and motives which have special meanings to them.

The second question is as follows:

2) What are the EFL learners’ academic goal motives?

The results of the study revealed that mastery, future achievement, and family are the most referred academic goal motives. The students were interested in acquiring a lot of new knowledge to pursue their ideal future and be a credit to their family. This sheds some light on ‘the process by which individuals construct goals for themselves when encountering new social situations as foreign language users. Our findings are confirmed by some other studies that individuals are motivated when they are willing to achieve a certain future state (Deci & Ryan, 1991), higher academic achievement (Harackiewicz et al., 1998), support (Duffy & Azevedo, 2015), knowledge and skills (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008), and progress (Seifert & O’Keefe, 2001). Results relating to family are consistent with previous findings showing the importance of family and relationships as sources of goal meanings (Debats, 1999; Delie Faye et al., 2013; Lambert et al., 2010; O’Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Prager, 1997; Schnell, 2010).

The third question is as follows:

3) Do EFL learners with different academic degrees have common academic goal motives?

The results of the Tukey post hoc test revealed that academic goal motives were different among BA and MA students. It confirms Wang and Tsai (2017) asserting that students’ interpretations of learning and their links with personal and academic motives may vary as the academic level increases.

In brief, to establish balance in pursuits across different contexts, individuals need to find personal meaning in their goals within each environment. Language learners start learning new languages with a goal but fail to succeed because they find no harmony between their goals and what happens inside the classroom. Therefore, understanding the orientations of goal motives can help educators establish a learning environment in line with students’ goals. According to goal-setting theory (Locke, 1996), goals cause human action, which occurs whenever the goals are set and pursued. Therefore, understanding students’ goal motives and their orientations is important for psychologists and educators, as they seek to develop learning environments that promote high-quality learning outcomes.

6. Conclusion

Due to the compelling role of learners’ goal motives in the teaching and learning processes, it seems essential to explore the factors that may have some bearing on its construction since goals and goal motives play a leading role in directing behavior and in promoting personal and professional well-being of the learners. Based on the literature review and bearing in mind the aforementioned limitations of previous research, to our best knowledge, the present study is the first which detects academic goals of EFL learners as multilevel constructs. Besides, goal motives in this study are expected to shape foreign language users’ participation and direction. More specifically, the present study highlights the discursive nature of academic goal motives and its effect on the way learners construct their direction concerning class participation. However, there are some potential limitations to consider when interpreting the findings which provide directions for future
research. This study relied exclusively on the self-report questionnaires, which points to the possibility that socially desirable response sets may have influenced the obtained results. It is therefore limited by the lack of experimental control when assuming causal directions. Nevertheless, it would be valuable for future research to replicate these findings using multiple sources of data collection. Given that students pursue a host of goal motives from various life domains, it would also be interesting for future studies to examine other factors that might construct goal motives except the ones mentioned in this study. It is also important to note that the findings of the present study are based on cross-sectional data which do not allow inferences about causal processes. Thus, longitudinal research designs should be employed.

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Appendix A

WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

This questionnaire is composed of some statements concerning your feelings about communication with other people, in English. Please indicate the frequency of time you choose to speak in English in each classroom situation (adapted from MacIntyre et al., 2001). 1 = Almost never willing 2 = Sometimes willing 3 = Willing half of the time 4 = Usually willing 5 = Almost always willing

1) Speak in a group about your summer vacation

2) Speak to your teacher about your homework assignment

3) Have a conversation with a stranger if he/her talks to you

4) Ask for instructions/clarification when you are confused about a task you must complete

5) Talk to a friend while waiting in line

6) Be an actor in a play

7) Describe the rules of your favourite game

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(8) Participate in a debate 1 2 3 4 5
(9) Read part of an English novel 1 2 3 4 5
(10) Read an English article in a paper 1 2 3 4 5
(11) Read letters from a pen pal written in native English 1 2 3 4 5
(12) Read personal letters or notes in which the writer has deliberately used simple words and constructions 1 2 3 4 5
(13) Read an advertisement in the paper to find good merchandise, e.g., a book, you can buy 1 2 3 4 5
(14) Read reviews in English for popular movies 1 2 3 4 5
(15) Write an invitation to invite your schoolmates to a weekend party 1 2 3 4 5
(16) Write down the instructions for your favourite hobby 1 2 3 4 5
(17) Write a report on your favourite animal and its habits 1 2 3 4 5
(18) Write a story 1 2 3 4 5
(19) Write a letter to a friend 1 2 3 4 5
(20) Write a newspaper article 1 2 3 4 5
(21) Write the answers to a “fun” quiz from a magazine 1 2 3 4 5
(22) Write down a list of things you must do tomorrow 1 2 3 4 5
(23) Listen to instructions in English and complete a task 1 2 3 4 5
(24) Bake a cake if instructions were in English 1 2 3 4 5
(25) Fill out an application form in English 1 2 3 4 5
(26) Take directions from an English speaker 1 2 3 4 5
(27) Understand an English movie 1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B
Academic goal motives

Degree: □ BA □ MA □ Ph.D.
Semester: ________________________ Gender: Male □ female □
Major: Teaching □ Translation □ Literature □

INSTRUCTION: Please read each item carefully and fill up the appropriate circle alongside the question number to indicate your level of agreement with the statements below. Choose the one most appropriate response to each question. Thank you for your cooperation. Responses for each question include:
The motives that help to follow my academic goals are:

Mastery

1. It is important to me that I learn a lot of new concepts in my field.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

2. My academic motive is to master a lot of new knowledge.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

3. It is important to me that I thoroughly understand the concepts presented in this course.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

Self-presentation

4. One of my motives is to look better in comparison to the other students in my field.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

5. It is important to me that other students in my class think I am good at my class work.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

6. One of my goals is to show others that everything is easy for me.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

Fake goodness

7. My fear of performing poorly in this field is often what motivates me.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

8. My main goal is to avoid looking like I can't do my work.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

9. Avoiding a show of low ability is more important to me than learning a new skill.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

Self-made duty

10. I work hard because learning is a student's duty.
    a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree
11. I make efforts to do well because it gives me a feeling that I am doing the right thing.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

12. I will feel guilty if I don’t study hard.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

Future achievement

13. I do the work assigned in this semester because my achievement is important for attaining my dreams.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

14. I do my best in this field since my achievement plays a role in shaping my ideal future.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

15. I do the work assigned because understanding this content is important for becoming the person I want to be.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

Family-oriented

16. I work to make my family regard me as their pride and honor.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

17. I make efforts because good performance will make my parents proud of me.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

18. An important reason why I do my semester work is that I want to be a credit to my family.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

Peer-oriented

18. I sometimes pretend to do worse because I want my friends to feel no difference between us.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

19. I don’t want to excel too much for fear of losing friends.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

20. To be accepted by my friends, I sometimes let my university work slip.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree
Teacher-oriented

21. An important reason that I do my course work is to please my teacher.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

22. I do my university work because I want to live up to my teacher's expectation.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree

23. I work hard because I don't want to let down my teacher.
   a) Strongly agree b) agree c) neutral d) disagree e) strongly disagree