

Goal Orientations in an EFL Advanced Academic Writing Context

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Dehghan, F. & Razmjoo, S.A. (2015). Goal orientations in an EFL academic writing context. *Journal of Pan-pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 19(1), 149-162.

Academic writing at advanced levels is the most important way of demonstrating one's expertise in a discipline. Developing this kind of competence is especially a challenging effort for students in foreign language contexts. Many factors may be involved in determining why some students are more and some are less motivated in writing successful, discipline-specific academic texts. One of these important factors is motivation. In educational psychology, one view of academic motivation is in terms of different goal orientations that students hold in their academic activities. This study, as part of a larger project, tries to explore different goal orientations that postgraduate students in a foreign language academic context hold while they are involved in writing practices necessary to achieve success in an academic context. The sample was chosen according to convenience sampling. Following a qualitative design, 28 postgraduate students of TEFL (Ph. D. candidates, M.A. holders, and M.A. students) were selected for this study. The participants took part in in-depth interviews. They were asked questions on the way they compose their professional texts, the required compositions (especially paper assignments) and any factor that motivates them in their writings. Analyzing the transcribed interviews, the researchers were able to identify four categories of goal orientations. These categories were named as career-directed, context-directed, mastery, and work avoidance goal categories. This taxonomy brings together the issue of motivation as goal orientation in educational psychology and the socio-cognitive view of writing in a foreign language academic context.

Key Words: Goal orientations, academic motivation, disciplinary writing expertise, academic writing

1 Introduction

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Over a half of century of research on educational psychology suggests that motivation is among the most important factors leading to academic success. From the perspective of educational psychology, academic motivation can be characterized as an outcome of many factors among them goals which students hold in their academic performance can be regarded as an important one (Brdar, Rijavec & Loncaric, 2006; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

Goal theorists define motivation in terms of goal-directed activities performed by students in academic settings. In other words, academic motivation is conceptualized as different goal orientations that determine why some students are more and some are less motivated. Having been regarded as a prominent feature in motivation theory (Was, 2006), goals are defined as the end toward which effort is directed. Cumming (2006) maintains that goals are the mediators between learning, teaching, and curriculum. Research on goal theories has been followed in recent decades within a framework of achievement goal theory which regards goals as the most important instrument of academic motivation which will lead to successful academic achievements (Cumming, 2006). Goal theories tend "to focus more on individuals' beliefs and behaviors – adopting the conventional perspective of educational psychology, and leading to applications that can help learners better regulate their own learning" (Cumming, 2006, p. 5). In addition, this approach towards the role of goals in learning is in line with the new viewpoints about writing strategies in terms of self-regulation activities (e.g. Hammann, 2005).

Writing in academic contexts is an important achievement that university students must acquire during their graduate studies. Academic writings like theses, dissertations, research papers, reports and book summaries are examples of writings that postgraduate students must write as the requirements of their courses and graduate program. As such, academic writing can be regarded as an important demonstration of academic achievement. Regarding writing proficiency, it has been shown that goals which students hold and writing strategies are two important factors involved in gaining both general L2 writing proficiency (Cumming, 2006; He, 2005) and disciplinary writing expertise (Dehghan, 2013; Riazi, 1997). It has also been argued that in achieving better ESL/EFL writing outcomes, two factors of composition strategies and achievement goals are the most influential ones (He, 2005). However, the particular goal orientations of L2 postgraduate student-writers have not been thoroughly researched before. Based on these facts, this study aims to explore different goal orientations which postgraduate students hold in writing their academic texts. In short, the study tries to answer the following research question:

What are different types of goal orientations postgraduate students hold in an EFL academic context while they are involved in composing their professional writings in their disciplines?

Followed will be presented literature on goal orientations in general as well as those studies which worked on the issue of L2 writing and writing strategies from a goal orientation perspective.

2 Background

2.1 Research on Goal Orientations

Literature on goal theories divides achievement goals into two main categories: mastery or learning goal orientation and performance goal orientations (Cumming, 2006; Was, 2006). While the first group are willing to improve their knowledge and skills about the task at hand, the second group are more cautious about outperforming others or completing the task in order to avoid failure. That is why some researchers have divided performance goal orientation into two categories: performance approach and performance avoidance goal orientations. Performance-approach goal holders are those who are concerned with outperforming their peers and thus demonstrate their abilities to their teachers, peers and parents. On the other hand, students who hold performance-avoidance goals try to avoid showing their inability to do something to others. Finally, mastery goal holders have less concerns about demonstrating their ability or lack of ability to others; instead, they learn the material in order to understand it and add to their abilities in a specific domain (Mattern, 2005).

Still another goal orientation is identified by some scholars (Was, 2006). Work avoidance goal orientation which refers to those students who try to perform their tasks with as little effort as possible. These four categories of goals have been researched by many studies in the field of educational psychology and other related fields.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987, 1989) proposed a distinction between knowledge telling and knowledge transforming in ESL writing including students who just tell their knowledge in order to complete their writing task and students who aim to transform their knowledge in order to develop their skills and competences. While the first group are only devoted to the requirements of university courses, the second group are highly skilled and smart writers who work intentionally and to achieve learning (Cumming, 2006). If we consider expert writing competence as one of the most important achievements that postgraduate students need to acquire, we can suppose that different goal orientations held by these students may have significant influence on their academic motivation and their final academic writing expertise as well as the strategies that are necessary for the development of such expertise. Next section will review research done on this issue.

2.2 Studies on L2 Writing from a Goal Theory Perspective

Research on writing expertise of EFL students in disciplines and the strategies that leads to its development has also paid attention to the issue of the goals these students hold about their academic achievement. Goals have been a focus of 'L2 literacy education' studies (Cumming, 2006). L2 "writing, in particular, has long been recognized as a characteristically goal-oriented activity. Students use goals to regulate themselves through the extended mental effort required to coordinate and direct their thinking while they compose" (Cumming, 2006, p. 4). This view about goals is in line with the new conceptualization of learning strategies proposed by Dornyei (2005) defining strategies as self-regulated processes. self-regulated students set goals to develop their knowledge and maintain motivation. These self-regulated learners try to achieve academic goals strategically and solve problems in their way of learning from different resources (Randi and Corno, 2000, as cited in Dornyei, 2005; Winne, 1995). Weinstein, Husman and Dierking (2000) offer three distinguishing features of learning strategies: goal-directed, intentionally invoked and effortful.

In a study on writing strategies, Nelson and Hayes (1988) examined the way in which university context determines the students' strategies and goals in searching and writings from sources. The authors used a process log research method asking two groups of students (eight advanced and eight freshmen students) to record their writing processes while involved in real time, natural writing of their assignment using regular entries. The authors found that the two groups of students adhered to very different goals and strategies for completing their search tasks. The freshmen mostly adhered to content-driven approaches or goals using more low-investment strategies for writing from sources such as one-shot library research, choosing those sources from which information can easily be extracted and rote reproduction of others ideas. More advanced students, on the other hand called upon more issue-driven goals using high-investment strategies like looking for new issues and approaches and judging the sources based on their rhetorical relevance rather than ease of access. Content-driven students were those who looked for easily accessed information in their searches while students who were issue-driven had a critical, analytical look in their searches and in their writing strategies. They searched the sources based on their qualitative features like rhetorical relevance, new angles or approaches.

Riazi (1997) examined the issue of goals which postgraduate students adhered to in an ESL university context when they were involved in academic literacy practices. The author points that the participants of the study "formed their general goals by looking at the [writing tasks] from their personal, educational, and career perspectives" (p. 119). From among the goals held by these postgraduate students, the researcher mentions acquiring knowledge, fulfilling the course or program requirements and gaining experience for future career. These goals, indicate that participants tried to make their activities more related to their identity as members of their academic discourse community. The writer argues that these goals had an

important effect on the use of macro-strategies (especially metacognitive strategies) in accomplishing writing tasks by the students.

Cumming, Busch and Zhou (2002, cited in Manchón, Roca de Larios, & Murphy, 2007) argue that "goals integrally relate to (and may perhaps even determine) the strategic operations that people undertake in performing specific tasks" (p. 193). They go so far as talking about strategies for taking practical steps in pursuing their the goals and argue that writing strategy use should be analyzed referring to the goals which motivate people and guide their performances. They identified five categories of strategies students used in order to attain their goals of writing improvement: 1) seeking assistance from other people (peers, teachers, friends), 2) self-regulation strategies (e.g., writing an outline, planning, editing and revising the texts), 3) stimulation (such as talking to people), 4), using tools and resources (books, magazines, computers, dictionaries), and 5) language practice (strategies to improve the linguistic aspects of written texts like grammar, vocabulary and rhetoric).

Cumming, Busch, and Zhou (2002) also propose a categorization of goals and their relationship to writing improvement. Interviewing 45 ESL students at the beginning and at the end of a course, they studied three important features of writing improvement goals which were found to be constant over the course: long-term aspirations of the goals, objects of the goals and actions taken to achieve those goals. Regarding long-term aspirations, the authors identified three important categories of goals including university-, future career- and test-orientation goals. The objects on which these students focus their goals included concerns for grammar, vocabulary, and rhetoric in their writings as well as less important objects like composing processes, ideas, and identity development. Finally, actions taken to achieve their goals were greatly dependent on the students' learning styles (e.g., relying on teachers and other people, relying on self and resources, and finally relying on studying and reading).

Based on the literature reviewed, it can be stated that goal orientations play an important role in academic including L2 academic writing. However, what has not been researched enough is the nature of this factor and how different goal orientations may appear in an L2 academic writing context. As a result, this study tries to quarry into the issue of goal orientations with a focus on academic disciplinary writing and to find out different types of goal orientations students hold in their attempts to write professional texts in their disciplines.

3 Method

3.1 Context, Participants, Instrument

This study was run based on a qualitative design. For this purpose, 28 postgraduate students of TEFL (20 M.A. students, 3 M.A. holders, and 5 Ph. D. candidates) took part in in-depth interviews. The age average of the group age was 27.4 (24-33). All of them had learned English as a foreign language.

They had completed their BAs in TEFL and English literature. As this study is based on a qualitative design, more participants were interviewed until no new theme was gained (data saturation). The reason behind choosing postgraduate students of TEFL was that these students are among few majors in Iranian academia who have to write their papers and theses in English. These students have to write all their textual assignments as well as proposals, theses and dissertations in English. As a result, they have to maintain high levels of proficiency and advanced academic literacy in English. The university offers courses on advanced writing and research which are designed to help MA students get familiarized with writing and research practices of the discipline.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The interviewees were interviewed separately and the discussions were recorded for further transcription and analysis. The interviewees were free to answer the questions either in English or Persian. No time limit was set for the interviews, with the shortest lasting 48 minutes and the longest clocking in at 95 minutes. This was done in order to provide the participants with enough time to reflect on the questions.

The interviews were initiated with a brief introduction to the topic. The interviewees were then asked to concentrate on the process of writing and its different stages, from the very beginning of the process to the final drafting. Based on the literature, the questions focused on the role of professors and classmates and their feedback in the development of their professional writing skills, their confidence in writing in their own ways, their reliance on published works and their L1 (in all the stages of drafting), their feelings and concerns at different stages of drafting their professional writings, planning and managing the written drafts, the problems they encountered in this regard and how they dealt with them, and finally factors which they regarded as influential in the development of their writing abilities.

All the recorded interviews were transcribed for further analysis. In order to secure credibility (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010), the transcripts of the comments were given to the respondents in order for them to review their opinions and check the answers written in detail. After collecting data, the transcribed interviews were coded by the researchers to gain common themes and concepts. The categories emerged will be presented and explained in the next section.

4 Results

The analysis of the transcribed interviews revealed emergent categories of goal orientations held by this group of postgraduate students in the area of producing professional L2 writings. After analyzing the transcribed interviews, the researchers were able to extract four general categories of

goals which, informed by literature were classified as career-directed, context-directed, mastery, and work avoidance goal orientations. Bellow, these categories will be examined in details.

Career goal orientation was the most frequent type of goal category these postgraduate students adhered to in their writing performance. Based on previous literature, this goal orientation has some similarities with performance approach (Was, 2006). However, it includes more other features than what was mentioned about performance goal orientations. As a kind of extrinsically-directed goal orientation, it characterizes students who write for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of their courses or graduate program, passing exams, and avoiding failure. In addition, students who write with the aim of publishing their papers in journals or presenting them in conferences to complete their resume for applying to universities after their graduation or taking part in Ph.D. exams were also characterized as having career-directed goal orientation. What follows is a sample of the students' comments which depict their career-directed goal orientation:

When I am writing a paper assignment, I try to observe all the standards of making it publishable. I need to have publications because I want to take part in the Ph. D. exam.

A large number of students (25) identified the fulfillment of their courses and the graduate program as one of their main goals they adhere to while they are writing their research papers, theses, or dissertations. Twenty out of twenty-eight expressed that their concerns about employment or exams made them write based on standards and finally, sixteen students stated that they decisively wanted to write a publishable or presentable paper for the above-mentioned goals.

Context-directed goal orientation comes next. It can also be regarded as an extrinsic, performance-approach goal orientation. Among the identifying key features of this goal orientation are attention to the performance of peers, competition, and attempts to show their abilities to their instructors. Context-oriented students are greatly concerned about competing with their classmates and peers, getting the best grade or becoming the top student, trying to look good in the eyes of their instructors and being known as a good, hard-working, and top student in the department. Regarding writing academic texts, the following comments were extracted from the interviews showing goals which are related to the context:

I am highly concerned about the grades of my classmates and want to outperform them. This is also the case with my writing assignments (a female first-year M.A. student).

Another female second-year M.A. student:

When writing my assignments, I try to consider the feedbacks I

receive from my advisor because I do not want him to think of me as someone who just wants to back out of the job.

A second year M.A. student also mentioned her concern for others' opinions about her writings:

When I am writing my thesis or research papers, I always think about other people reading them and feel my responsibility for what has been written. As a result of this concern, I try to have as least mistakes as possible.

In other words, here the student is concerned about others' views about her work and then because of this concern (something related to the context) tries to improve her skills in academic writing.

Mastery goal orientations can be regarded as the intrinsic type of goal orientation which characterizes those students who learn something in order to promote their skills and competences. In case of writing advanced academic texts, mastery goal orientation can be defined in terms of writing for its own sake or for promoting one's writing abilities in order to become a proficient writer in the field (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, 1989). A second year M.A. student said:

I enjoy challenging myself with new topics, as I like to learn more about issues in my discipline.

A Ph. D. student expressed her goal in writing as follows:

I try to improve my writing because I like to be a professional writer in the field.

Another Ph. D. student:

When our professors give us a research paper assignment, I look at it as a good opportunity to make my writing skills better. When I started my M.A. course, I wrote my paper assignments with a lot of difficulty. As a result, I decided to write more and more.

All these comments show a self-directed, internal motive behind these students' efforts to acquire and develop advanced writing skills in the discipline. As Cumming (2006) argues, these are highly smart writers who work intentionally to achieve learning goals and objectives of the task at hand or the whole program.

The final goal category identified in this data set is named as work avoidance goal orientation. This identifies those who just want to cut the corners by doing as little effort as possible and finding shortcuts and alternative ways instead of really trying to learn. Though the frequencies of

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the cases observed for this category were very low, still it was possible to trace cases of this goal orientation within the comments of the students. A male second year M.A. student stated that his only aim for writing his required assignment was to get the greatest grade with the least effort possible:

I just want to do the work, just what counts is to write it and submit it.

Or another second-year female student stated that:

Whether you copy or write it yourself, the grades are the same. So why bother to write a whole paper for each course. I wrote one and submitted it to two professors for two courses.

Two students said that they had copied parts of others' articles as their research assignments but not for their thesis. This goal orientation was not observed among Ph. D. students.

Table 1 summarizes the results of the frequencies with which each of these goal categories was observed. The reason for the greater number of observed goals in comparison to the number of participants (28) relates to the issue of multiple goals (He, 2005). In fact, participants showed different goal orientations and all these cases were identified.

Table 1. Frequencies of Goal Orientations

GOAL ORIENTATION	TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES OBSERVED (91)	PERCENTAGE
Career-directed	34	37.36
Context-directed	31	34.06
Mastery	22	24.17
4 Work avoidance	4	4.39

Finally, the obtained information in this study is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Codification Results

THEME	CATEGORY	SAMPLE
Mastery	Intrinsically motivated activities	<i>I enjoy challenging myself with new topics, as I like to learn more about issues in my discipline.</i>
	Writing for its own sake or for promoting one's writing abilities in order to become a competent writer	<i>I try to improve my writing because I like to be a professional writer in the field.</i>
	Promoting one's skills and competences	<i>When our professors give us a research paper assignment, I look at it as a good opportunity to make my writing skills better. When I started my M.A. course, I</i>

		<i>wrote my paper assignments with a lot of difficulty. As a result, I decided to write more and more.</i>
Context-directed	Competing with classmates and peers	<i>I am highly concerned about the grades of my classmates and want to outperform them. This is also the case with my writing assignments.</i>
	Showing their abilities to their instructors, getting the best grade or becoming the top student, trying to look good in the eyes of their instructors and being known as a good, hard-working, and top student in the department	<i>When writing my assignments, I try to consider the feedbacks I receive from my advisor because I do not want him to think of me as someone who just wants to back out of the job.</i>
	Having concerns about the audience reading their compositions	<i>When I am writing my thesis or research papers, I always think about other people reading them and feel my responsibility for what has been written. As a result of this concern, I try to have as least mistakes as possible.</i>
Career-directed	Completing their resume for applying to universities after their graduation or taking part in Ph.D. exams	<i>When I am writing a paper assignment, I try to observe all the standards of making it publishable. I need to have publications because I want to take part in the Ph. D. exam.</i>
	Fulfilling the requirements of their courses or graduate program, passing exams, and avoiding failure	<i>These papers are part of nearly every course and we have to write them.</i>
Work-avoidance	Cutting the corners by doing as little effort as possible	<i>I just want to do the work, just what counts is to write it and submit it.</i>
	Finding shortcuts and alternative ways instead of really trying to learn.	<i>Whether you copy or write it yourself, the grades are the same. So why bother to write a whole paper for each course. I wrote one and submitted it to two professors for two courses.</i>

5 Discussion

Goal orientations is an important factor influencing the writing practices of L2 postgraduate students. This finding can also be supported by literature following a socio-cognitive perspective towards literacy development (e.g. Cumming, 2006; Cumming et al., 2002; He, 2005; Nelson & Hayes, 1988;

Riazi, 1997; Yang, et al., 2004; Zhou et al., 2006). According to Manchón et al. (2007), the socio-cognitive view within the broad conceptualization of L2 writing strategies includes goal theories of educational psychology. This view considers L2 writing as a goal-directed activity and writing strategies can be defined as "deliberate actions or sets of procedures that learners select, implement and control to achieve desired goals and objectives in the completion of learning or performance tasks" (Manchón, 2001, p. 48).

The results of this study revealed four categories of goals sought by these postgraduate students which were named as mastery, context-directed, career-directed, and work avoidance goal orientations. Context- and career-directed goal orientations were the most frequent goal categories among these students. Previously referred as performance goal orientations by some researchers (e.g. Was, 2006), these goal categories are extrinsic and instrumental in nature. In other words, the rhetorical purposes of many of these students were limited to the fulfillment of the requirements of their courses and graduate programs and their knowledge of the discourse community was confined to the classroom and the department where they studied. Therefore, it is not strange that the extrinsic goal orientations were more frequent than the intrinsic mastery goal orientation.

This study contributed to the previous literature by presenting a categorization of goal orientations for a particular task (discipline-specific writing) and in a particular context, i.e. writing in a discipline by EFL postgraduate students. Previous literature has examined goal orientations in language learning from a general point of view (Mattern, 2005; Was, 2006). Those studies which have paid attention to the issue of L2 writing (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, 1989; Cumming, 2006; Cumming, et al., 2002; He, 2005; Nelson & Hayes, 1988; Riazi, 1997) did not provide a classification of the goals students pursue in their academic writings. Though this categorization was related to L2 professional writing in the disciplines, it can be used as a model in other areas of L2 acquisition.

6 Conclusion

This study was part of a larger project (Author, 2013) attempting to examine disciplinary writing expertise and factors which were most influential in its development. One of these emerging factors was goal orientation of the students involved in writing professional texts in a foreign language. Following a socio-cognitive perspective, this study aimed to have a closer look at goal orientations in writing in a foreign language academic context and find specific categories and classifications about them. As a result, four basic categories of goal orientations were identified named as mastery, career-directed, context-directed, and work avoidance goal categories. These categories demonstrate different points on the extrinsic-intrinsic continuum referred to previously as the issue of motivation in literature which is now considered as goal orientation in educational psychology. This study brings together the issue of motivation as goal orientation in educational psychology

and the socio-cognitive view of writing in a foreign language academic context.

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Received: January 12, 2015

Revised: June 10, 2015

Accepted: July 2, 2015