The Realization of Goal Setting and the Necessity of Guidance

目標設定の実現とガイダンスの必要性

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Abstract

In this short paper, I consider the issue of goal-setting theory in L2 teaching and show how it is applied to a real teaching situation. Since it was introduced by Locke and Latham (1990), goal-setting theory has been applied in many academic contexts and numerous research studies have supported its application to L2 teaching as well. However, as an English student for three years at university, I strongly feel that this theory has still not yet been fully utilized by teachers in the classroom. The first half of this paper therefore deals with development of goal-setting theory and its relationship to language teaching. In the second half, its application to a teaching situation is considered from a student's point of view. Finally, I conclude this paper with a strong suggestion that teachers should pay more careful attention to goal-setting theory in their teaching.

 要旨

本論では、第二言語教育における目標設定理論について取り上げ、またどのように実際の教 育現場で適用されるのかを第二言語学習者の視点から検討した。Locke、Latham に提唱されて以来目標設定理論に関する数多くの研究が行われ、第二言語教育への応用研究も盛んに行 われてきた。しかしながら、現在まで三年間英語を大学で学んできている筆者の視点からす ると、この理論が実際の言語教育現場において教員に十分に活用されているとは言えない。 よって本論の前半では目標設定理論に関し言語教育と結びつけて述べた。次に、その言語教 育現場への応用例を学生の視点から検討した。以上の考察より、言語教育において目標設定 理論に対するより注意深い関心が必要であるという提案に至った。

Keywords: goal setting, motivation, language learning/teaching, student perspective 目標設定、動機付け、言語学習・教育、生徒の視点

Motivation has been one of the central focuses of teachers and researchers in the field of L2 teaching. There have been many motivational strategies suggested in order to help them motivate students to learn the target language so that facilitates students' learning in the classroom and even outside the classroom. I am a junior undergraduate student majoring in International Studies at Tokai University, and got interested in English education two years ago. Upon researching on motivational theories, I realized that much of my language learning had been immensely influenced by the degree of motivation I had at certain time, and how teachers helped me to keep it. This noticing has made me far more interested in this field. While research on motivation has been highly developed over the past several decades, it is also true that some teachers have failed to utilize or even ignored these motivational strategies in a language classroom. Therefore, my prime purpose in this article is to help teachers realize the importance of motivational strategies in a classroom, and a goal-setting theory is focused on as one of them. My secondary

purpose is to show how important teachers' help is when the theory is applied.

Background

A goal-setting theory was introduced by Locke and Latham in 1990, suggesting that people are more likely to deliver a great performance when they are provided with specific, difficult yet attainable goals and that feedback relevant to performance has also a crucial role in allowing them to be committed to seeking the goals (Locke & Latham, 1990; Latham, 2003). Specific goals refer to ones with specific dates, time or other components to be attained so that performers work on it on a step-by-step basis with clear visions. In this regard, it is reasonable to assume that this theory is readily and broadly applicable to a L2 teaching situation since language learning or acquisition requires a long-time and demanding process for students.

However, looking around at my fellow students at university reveals that most of them do not have so-called "specific, difficult, yet attainable goals" for English learning. For instance, Japanese university students often aim to get a high score on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) that many companies require them to have. Similarly, others might want to improve speaking skills which enable them to be able to communicate with foreigners or English speakers. These students are initially motivated to learn English, but from the perspective of a goal-setting theory, they are less likely to be successful because these goals are not specific. To make their goals more specific, in the former case, students should also care about "*Specifically what score is necessary?*" and "*By what means it should be achieved?*" In the latter case, "*With whom do I want to have a conversation?*" and "*What is my purpose in having this conversation?*" These are vital questions to be answered by students themselves.

In my three years at university, I have spent a considerable amount of time talking with my fellow students about our English teachers and reflecting on the extent teachers help students set and reach specific attainable goals. My provisional conclusion is as follows: "A good English teacher" is often referred to as an "entertaining, easy-to-talk to, and sometimes funny teacher" by students, but "a great teacher" is seen as one whom students gain great benefits from and are somehow motivated by to learn language for certain purposes. Reaching this conclusion has also allowed me to realize that many teachers in a way have succeeded in motivating students tentatively, but only a few of them have actually been successful in helping them keep long-term, lasting positive learning attitudes. Despite the fact that teachers are too busy to deal with every aspect of learning, to go beyond merely teaching language, teachers should try to expend more effort and time on helping and encouraging students to more clearly visualize their language learning. In order to achieve this, I would like to suggest a goal-setting theory as a useful focused activity for teachers and students in the classroom.

Goal-setting Theory in Language Teaching

Numerous studies have identified the importance of goal setting in language learning (Zimmerman, Bandura, Martinez-Pons, 1992; Alison, 1993; Kelly, 2001; Haynes, 2011). In more specific terms, Dörnyei (2001) concluded that goal setting in language learning leads to essentially positive outcomes because it helps learners achieve a high grade in school. He also categorized four mechanisms of goals in performance: First, a goal helps students to focus efforts and concentration on primary tasks, instead of being distracted by irrelevant activities. Second, having a clear goal enables students to envisage how much effort or time should be expended on studying so that they are likely to manage their learning. Third, students tend to be engaged longer in learning when they have a goal, and it is likely to last until their goal is achieved. Last, appropriate strategies for learning can be applied, based on their

specific goals. Aside from facilitating already-motivated students, Alison (1993) points out that goal setting plays a meaningful and effective role in motivating unwilling, reluctant students to learn. As such, goal setting has been widely accepted as a meaningful process for L2 learners.

After recognizing the importance of goal setting, it is now valuable to examine how it is actually applied in language teaching/learning. A goal-setting theory consists of five principles: clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and task complexity. It is highly desirable that goals students have include these five features. Therefore, teachers who plan to utilize goal-setting theory in their teaching should help students to take these five aspects into consideration when they ask them to set goals.

Putting Theory into Action

First, goals should be clear for both students and teachers. Especially, when specifics such as a date or score are clear, students are more likely to be motivated to learn. This can be exemplified by my personal experience. The reason why I started studying for TOEIC in the beginning was just because I thought it would be important, and hence, my motivation did not last for a long time due to my lack of a clear purpose. However, when I started planning to participate in the study abroad program offered by my university and consequently a specific score and date were determined, the incentives that I had for getting the score greatly increased and lasted continuously until I achieved the goal that I had set for myself.

Second, challenging and difficult goals within students' range of capacities are necessary for helping them commit themselves to learning and for enhancing their motivation (Bloom, 2013). In this respect, teachers should be fully aware of the importance of comprehending students' levels of English by monitoring and assessing them. Failure to do this often allows for students to be distracted from

learning. In my own case I was always struggling with this because I had a higher proficiency than my classmates; so, most of the tasks that we did in class were not challenging or difficult for me. I clearly remember one teacher at university who thankfully always took great care of students, and gave me an extra task or asked me to foster a conversation in a class. His kind consideration helped me keep motivated and find value in the tasks that we were assigned.

Third, it is important that students place a certain degree of value on goals so that they are likely to start and keep on committing themselves to achieving the goals. More often than not, university students are required to take English classes that do not interest them and consequently lead them to devalue learning itself. The great teachers that I have encountered, always attempted to connect goals to students' real-life through highly imaginative situations. In their classroom, for instance, vocabulary-building activities for TOEIC, often regarded as boring, were integrated with job-interview activities or résumé writing since TOEIC-specific vocabulary is directly related to business situations. In this sense, the goal was no longer merely to get a high score on TOEIC, which we tended to find useful only for job-hunting, but also to improve authentic communication skills or writing skills for a real-life purpose.

Fourth, feedback also plays a significant role in keeping students motivated to strive for a goal as Petchprasert (2012) has comprehensively reported. Students are highly liable to be distracted from pursuing goals, so providing them with feedback at appropriate intervals and helping them not to be distracted are essential for their development. More importantly, feedback also helps students realize where they are in the goal-achieving process, and how much they have done and they should do to attain their goals. In retrospect, my learning has always been related to, and supported by, feedback from teachers and friends alike.

Teachers' feedback was helpful particularly when pursuing certain goals such as getting an "A" score in an assignment or English proficiency test. Such feedback gave me a clear direction for achieving my goal. Peer feedback was more related to psychological aspects such as being more confident or feeling comfortable about using the target language.

Last but not least, task complexity is one of the important keys in goal setting. Despite the similarity of task *complexity* to the first aspect of task *challenge* (both involve a certain difficulty in achieving a goal), task complexity needs to be dealt with in a different way. As mentioned above, students are liable to be distracted from concentrating on the goal, or just from learning. In addition, students are more likely to fail to reach a goal when the task merely requires them to make a slight effort to achieve it. This is often seen among studious, diligent students. It is highly likely, for example, that students will quit studying if remembering all the vocabulary items from a textbook is the only task required to get a good grade in an examination.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this article by sharing my insights into the issues that I have addressed above and discussing some new ideas that I got from presenting at CCLT3 and talking with other attendees. First of all, applying a goal-setting theory in a language classroom has a crucial role in motivating students, and more importantly, teachers should be fully aware of this fact. Following Oxford and Shearin (1994), I have the strong feeling that goal-setting theory has not been efficiently or regularly utilized in language classrooms. By taking the theory into consideration, students are more likely to engage themselves in learning, and consequently, teachers' expectations for their success are more likely to be met. However, hearing real scholars' voices and understanding their points of view and questions gave me different and fresh insights and reveals that some of them may

make more efforts than I thought they do. I found out that one of the obstacles that hinders them from taking great care of this issue is caused by time limitation and obligation to follow school rules or norms. These findings led me to think that closer and frequent collaboration between students and teachers is necessary in the classroom in order to promote a goal-setting process for learner development.

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Reader Response 1 to *The Realization of Goal-Setting and the Necessity of Guidance*

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As a learning advisor, I find myself often discussing motivation with fellow advisors, teachers, and students. For advisors, motivation is a key focus in our work and is dealt with directly. In talking with teachers, it is often expected of students to understand their own motivation on their own, while students themselves tend to be so accustomed to being led that they lack internal motivation. Yusei Ando's self-awareness to his own studies and research into motivation is a remarkable achievement all teachers might wish for their students to discover. A self-aware student can improve a class by focusing on his own learning, as well as the class as a whole. Yusei not only looked at himself and questioned what he and the teachers were doing and why, but also asked his classmates about their own goals and motivation. Yusei's article brought up questions that I often have when hearing about students like him. I have to wonder where and when that spark first appeared for him to explore his own studies. Was that commitment to reflection always there or did something, or multiple events and experiences, lead to it?

Yusei lays out a path for teachers to help encourage and guide students towards motivation. For many students like Yusei, this is often not done directly. When I have taught motivation directly, I often question the effectiveness of such teaching. Some students are willing from the start, while others simply go through the motions and claim to have been motivated, but motivation to please teachers is not the kind of motivation that is intended or needed. Can there be a way to tell the difference between true internal motivation and simply following directions? When does one end and the other begin?

Ultimately the student must be aware of his or her goal and capabilities towards achieving that goal, especially in competing in today's marketplace. A passive student becomes a passive worker, and those types of jobs cannot compete with today's globalization and automation. Students today must be able to anticipate change and react to it, which requires a nearly endless supply of internal motivation. The sooner and more frequently this is taught in school, the better their chances. Even if a student does not fully grasp the concept of their own motivation in their years of schooling, with repeated activities over time focusing on questions of motivation, the student is likely to become more capable of self-awareness.

In Yusei's further studies, I hope he explores further where motivation comes from and how it grows or withers. And hopefully that will lead to stronger evidence that teaching and learning motivation can have effects beyond the years in the classroom and help empower students to create new opportunities as they face the challenges of technological and global change.

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Reader Response 2 to *The Realization of Goal-Setting and the Necessity of Guidance*

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In this article, Yusei Ando explores the possibility of effectively using goal-setting theory in classroom. One of the features that stands out for me the most is actually not the content discussed but rather the point of view from which the article is written, that of an undergraduate learning English in Japan. Upon reading the article, I began to immediately notice the lack of consistent goals that my students have in most communication classes that I teach. Outside of a few test-based classes and a small number of students who have aspirations to go abroad, my students lack tangible goals that could apply to practical usage of English.

Of course, the syllabi I make and the materials I pass out all coalesce to emphasize "becoming able to converse in English" or "writing academically and with good structure." However, to what extent these official other-determined goals are making an impact on my students' development is not obvious. Many of these official goals are more of a formality to set a tone for a class rather than to help students develop their own self-directed learning and create the impetus they need to become motivated in the classroom.

If students themselves can set appropriate goals for themselves, then they will start to understand how and why they should do to accomplish a goal. However, even before setting a goal there must be a purpose to learning English. Simply by setting goals, students do not immediately become motivated to learn. Here, Ando explains that the study abroad program at his university served as the main catalyst to propelling him to create and meet his own English-learning goals. What of other students in other universities that may not have as much opportunity as Ando? While some students are fortunate enough to be put into a situation where they can have long-term goals involving the use of English, what of those who do not have the socio-economic status, available time, or resources at university to do so? There are still many Japanese students that can legitimately say they have never spoken to a foreigner face-to-face before. Perhaps in the future there will be a higher concentration of international presence in all universities and places of learning in Japan, but at this time goal-setting could well be hindered by the immediate resources (both pedagogical and personal) students have at hand at the universities they attend.

Reading this article, I have no doubt that Ando is a truly blessed student. In a perfect world, all of our students would have the motivation, drive, and resources that he does. As Ando's article and experiences show, goal setting is an important part of language learning. However, I feel that we must also look into how to spur students into formulating goals for themselves and helping them to take a more hands-on approach to their own education. This could be a suggestion for more research into learner autonomy or motivation, but there is also a pressing need to analyze and critique the current landscape of education in Japan.

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> What is your opinion about goal-setting or motivation? Share your practice, experience, and ideas with the Learner Development community by writing a short reflection and sending it to learninglearning.editor@gmail.com .