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Abstract

This study investigated goal setting for learning English language of Bangkok University students. A set of questionnaires for the assessment of goal settings and problems of learning English was administered to 370 second-year students. The study revealed that the goal setting was at a moderate level. There were statistically significant differences found in the students' opinions for goal setting at .05 level as classified by gender, faculty, and English learning experience, but no statistically significant differences in terms of educational background. Moreover, there was a positive relationship between English background knowledge and goal setting at .05 level. There was a negative relationship between English background knowledge and problems of learning English at .05 level. In addition, there was a negative relationship between goal setting and problems of learning English at .05 level.

Background of the study

Due to economic and political interaction with English speaking countries, there is growing popularity for and parental emphasis upon learning English in Thailand. English has long been a required course for all Thai students; however, only one percent of the Thai population has fluent English listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities (Wongprom, 2003). During my experience with university students, I noticed that students came to class with different perceptions about the English language. Some students came with high enthusiasm for learning and set learning goals by themselves whereas others did not consider the English language a very appealing subject. These students lack motivation, enthusiasm, practice, good attitudes towards the English language that greatly affect their English efficiency. Most Thai students have performed poorly because of these inner feelings (Masang, 1989).

The concept of goal setting has been a central concern of scholars in education and language learning in particular. A goal reflects one's purpose and refers to quantity, quality, or rate of performance (Locke & Latham, 1990). Setting goals can help students make the connection between their own personal choices and the end results. First, goals motivate students to exert effort necessary to meet task demands. Second, goals direct their attention to relevant task features, behaviors to be performed, and potential outcomes. Finally, goals help them focus on the task, select and apply appropriate strategies, and monitor goal progress. Schunk (1990) pointed out that when students enter learning activities with goals and self-efficacy for goal attainment, they observe their own performances and evaluate their own goal progress. When students perceive satisfactory goal progress, they feel capable of improving their skills; goal attainment, coupled with high self-efficacy, leads students to set new challenging goals.

Some research shows that setting goals and making commitments to achieving goals increases motivation and performance (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Latham & Locke, 2002). If

students set and write their goals for learning by themselves, they will keep concentrating on their goals and achieve greater success (Suwan, 2003). In other words, they need to be able to make their own decisions and guide their own behavior. In many countries, it was found out that ninety percent of successful students are those who have learning goals and proper methods of learning (Jamornmarn, 1995). Therefore, teachers should provide opportunities for students to select their own goals to boost intrinsic motivation and increase self-efficacy (Slavin, 2003).

In order to improve English proficiency, students should be assisted in developing goal-setting skills which will help them learn how to manage their time, make better decisions and take ownership of their own academic progress. Thus, the purpose of this research was to study students' goal setting for learning English with the hope that the findings might help them develop their goal-setting skills in the future.

Purposes of the study

1. To study students' goal setting for learning English and problems of learning English.
2. To compare goal setting for learning English of students with different background (i.e. gender, school, educational background, and English learning experience).
3. To investigate the relationship between the relationship between English background knowledge and goal setting for learning English.
4. To investigate the relationship between English background knowledge and problems of learning English.
5. To investigate the relationship between goal setting for learning English and problems of learning English.

Literature review

1. Bandura's social cognitive theory

Bandura's social cognitive theory provides a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human behavior. Bandura (1986) bases his theory on the acquisition of complex behaviors on a triangular diagram illustrating the interactive effect of three factors: the behavior, the environmental factors, and the personal factors in the form of cognition, affect, and biological events. The relationship between these three factors involves the influences of a person's perceptions and actions. First, the interaction between the person and behavior involves the influences of a person's thoughts and actions. Second, the interaction between the person and the environment involves human beliefs and cognitive competencies that are developed and modified by social influences and structures within the environment. Last, the interaction between the environment and behavior involves a person's behavior determining the aspects of their environment and in turn their behavior is modified by that environment.

Figure 1: Diagram of the Social Cognitive Theory (Pajares, 2002)
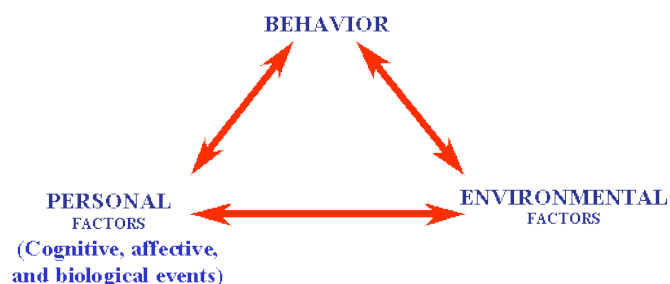
Bandura (1986) divides goal setting into four types: specific, challenging, short-term, and realistic goals.

1. Specific goals represent a managerial commitment to achieving specific performance targets with a specific time frame. The goals should be straightforward and emphasize what we want to happen and what we are going to do. Specific goals raise performance because they specify the amount of effort required for success.

2. Challenging goals ought to serve as a tool for stretching us to reach our full potential; this means setting them high enough to be challenging to energize us and our strategy. Easy goals do not motivate. However, the challenging goals that we set need to be practical and achievable. If our goals are so challenging, they will become impossible, and we will easily be discouraged.

3. Short-term goals are ones that you will achieve in the near future. They are achieved more quickly. The achievement of these goals are unlikely to increase motivation levels and improvements.

4. Realistic goals describe objectives that are specific with respect to magnitude and time. Realistic, in this case, means "do-able." Realistic goals are like stair steps to our mission, vision and reality.

2. Related research

Cheung (2004) used goal setting as motivational tool in self-regulated learning in college students. This study discussed the components of academic self-management which included motivation, methods of learning, physical environment, and social environment. Participants were 182 final year undergraduate students with computing major. They were invited to complete the questionnaire which asked them to state the grade they expected to achieve in the module of Oraganizational Behaviour. The expected grades were then matched with actual results at the end of the semester. Twenty of the participants were invited to participate in the focus group in discussing what are their barriers in goal setting. It concluded that the use of individual goal setting accompanied with appropriate feedback and teacher support is crucial in building effective motivational approaches and self-regulatory learning strategies in enhancing academic success.

Cunningham, Krull, Land, and Russell (2000) used goal-setting and self-evaluation techniques to improve self-efficacy in the students in kindergarten through fifth grade. This action research project implemented and evaluated a program to improve students' lack of effort and use of ineffective learning strategies. Participants were students in one kindergarten class, one second-grade class, one high ability fourth-grade class and one high ability fifth-grade class in a Midwest suburban school. Student and teacher surveys indicated the need to reduce six target behaviors: (1) reliance upon seeking help; (2) lack of metacognition; (3) failure to learn from mistakes; (4) quitting; (5) producing poor quality work; and (6) apathy. Goal-setting and self-evaluation techniques were implemented to improve self-efficacy in the students. Specific interventions included: (1) authentic evaluation (teacher observation checklists); (2) student self-evaluation; (3) student initiated academic goal-setting, and (4) student self- regulation of goal achievement. Specific interventions were implemented over a 12-week period. Improvement was measured by a series of student surveys and teacher observation checklists. In kindergarten and second grade, findings of the surveys and checklists indicated substantial improvement in the focus areas of persistence, problem solving, motivation, and accuracy. In fourth and fifth grades, findings of student surveys remained consistent, while the teacher observation checklists showed some improvement in the focus areas.

Bogolin, Harris, and Norris (2003) used goal setting to improve student writing. This research showed that students often lack the ability to set appropriate goals for their learning. The students in this study did not take ownership in their education, and expected teachers to make decisions for them. The students in the study were fifth grade students in middle class communities in the Midwest. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students were unable to foresee their future, and therefore do not construct long-term goals. Children who did attempt to set academic goals for themselves were unable to do so realistically. Because students were not involved in keeping track of their progress, they had a misconstrued perception of their writing ability. A review of solution strategies revealed that by setting their own goals in writing, students were more likely to be motivated and take ownership in their learning. When tracking progress, students were more goal-oriented and had the ability to see their writing progress and create further goals. Students who continued to see success of their writing goals had a higher level of self-efficacy. The results of this research revealed an increase in student writing ability. Appendixes contain a staff goal-setting survey with results; a student goal-setting survey with results; a persuasive/expository paper rubric; a narrative paper rubric; a parent goal-setting survey with results; expository and narrative writing prompts; a student goal chart; a parent post goal-setting survey with results; a student post goal-setting survey with results; and a letter to parents.

In Thailand, Sungthong (1996) studied the effect of cooperative reading with group goal setting on the Thai language reading comprehension. The subjects comprised of 32 students in Chumchonkhongwitaya School. They were selected by simple random sampling and divided into experimental group and control group. Each of which consisted of 16 students. The students in the experimental group were trained to read by using cooperative reading with group goal setting. The students in the control group were trained to read by using traditional method. The subjects were taught sixteen sessions within 8 weeks. Each session lasted 60 minutes. The reading comprehension post-test by the researcher were administered after the experiment. The t-test was utilized for data analysis. The result demonstrated that the students in the experiment group obtained higher reading comprehension scores for the post-test than those in the control group.

Research methodology

1. Subject

The subjects who took part in this survey were Bangkok University students in Thailand. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to formulate a sample of 370 second-year students from 9 faculties who were taking EN211 (Intermediate English) course.

2. Research instrument

The instrument used for collecting data was a three-part questionnaire which was used to collect the data in order to find out student's goal setting for learning English and the relationship between their goal setting for learning English and problems of learning English.

The first part gathered personal information from the respondents who are asked to answer the questions on gender, school, educational background, English learning experience, and English background knowledge. This general background might have something to do with students' goal setting.

The second part was a survey of goal setting. To respond this part, the respondents were asked to check their methods for setting goals: specific, challenging, short-term, and realistic goals.

The last part concerned the respondents' problems of learning English. The questionnaire was prepared for rating in a form of five-rating scale.

3. Data analysis

The acceptable statistical significance level was set at alpha (α) < .05. After the receipt of the completed quetionnaires, the data were statistically analyzed by using SPSS 12.0 for Windows through the following steps:

1. The data of personal information were brought to calculate for average means.
2. The data of goal setting and problems of learning English were brought to calculate for average means and standard deviation.
3. A t-test and a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test were used to compare the students' goal setting for learning English regarding gender, school, educational background, and English learning experience. Then Scheffe was used to test a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of any two groups.
4. A t-test and a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test were used to compare the students' problems of learning English regarding gender, school, educational background, and English learning experience. Then Scheffe was used to test a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of any two groups.
5. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was used to investigate the relationship between goal setting for learning English and problems of learning English.

Results

1. Results of fundamental analysis

The average means of goal setting for learning English and problems of learning English were used to find appropriate mean range based on the criterion of $\overline{X}\pm.5SD$. The results were presented in Tables 1-2.

1.1 Level of goal setting for learning English language

Table 1 Mean and standard deviation of goal setting for learning English language of Bangkok University students shown in all items

Goal setting for learning English	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level
1. Specific goals	3.23	.58	moderate
2. Challenging goals	3.58	.63	high
3. Short-term goals	3.27	.71	moderate
4. Appropriate and realistic goals	3.36	.68	moderate
Total	**3.36**	**.50**	**moderate**

The study revealed that the overall goal setting for Learning English Language of Bangkok University students was at a moderate level ($\overline{X}$ = 3.36). Among four items of goal setting for learning, the highest mean was challenging goals ($\overline{X}$ = 3.58), followed by appropriate and realistic goals ($\overline{X}$ = 3.36), and by short-term goals ($\overline{X}$ =3.27). The lowest mean was specific goals ($\overline{X}$ =3.23).

1.2 Level of problems of learning English

Table 2 Mean and standard deviation of problems of learning English of Bangkok University
students shown in all items

Problems of learning English	$\overline{\text{X}}$	S.D.	Level
1. Teacher	2.36	.63	low
2. Personal problems	2.64	.56	moderate
3. Language skills	3.20	.61	moderate
4. Textbook and teaching equipment	2.62	.53	moderate
5. Classroom	3.14	.84	moderate
Total	**2.79**	**.37**	**moderate**

The average mean of problems of learning English was at moderate level ($\overline{\text{X}}$ = 2.79). Among five items of goal setting for learning, the highest means of problems of learning English were language skills ($\overline{\text{X}}$ = 3.20), followed by classroom ($\overline{\text{X}}$ = 3.14), personal problems ($\overline{\text{X}}$ = 2.64), and textbook and teaching equipment ($\overline{\text{X}}$ = 2.62) respectively. All of the items fell on moderate level. The lowest mean was teacher ($\overline{\text{X}}$ = 2.36).

2. Results of hypothesis testing
2.1 Hypothesis 1 compared students' goal setting for learning English with different background information

Hypothesis 1 was partially accepted because not all variables of background information affected students' goal setting. According to the results of the comparison of the mean scores of goal setting, there was no statistically significant difference found in the students' goal setting in terms of educational background at level of .05. This means that background information had no impact on their goal setting. Goal setting of the students with different background information (secondary school, vocational school, and non-formal education) was not different.

However, there were statistically significant differences found in the students' goal setting at .05 level as classified by gender, school, and English learning experience. First, there was statistically significant difference found in the students' overall goal setting in terms of gender at .05 level. That is, female students set higher goals than male students. Second, there was statistically significant difference found in the students' overall goal setting in terms of school at .05 level. The overall goal setting of students in different schools was different. It was found out that students from School of Humanities set higher goals than students from other schools. Finally, there was statistically significant difference found in the students' overall goal setting in terms of English learning experience at .05 level. That is, the overall goal setting of students with different English learning experience was different. Students who had studied English for more than 12 years set higher goals than the two other groups (7-12 years and less than 6 years).

2.2 Hypothesis 2 investigated the relationship among English background knowledge, goal setting for learning English, and problems of learning English

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was used to find out whether there was a statistically significant relationship among English background knowledge, goal

8

setting for learning English, and problems of learning English. The results were shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Correlations among students' English background knowledge, goal setting for learning, and problems of learning English

VARIABLE	English background knowledge	goal setting for learning English	problems of learning English
English background knowledge	1.00		
goal setting for learning	.48*	1.00	
problems of learning English	-.22*	-.54*	1.00

* P < .05

2.2.1 The relationship between English background knowledge and goal setting for learning English

There was a positive relationship between English background knowledge of Bangkok University students and their goal setting for learning English at .05 level. In other words, students who had high grades tended to set high goals for learning. On the other hand, students who had low grades tended to set low goals for learning.

2.2.2 The relationship between English background knowledge and problems of learning English

There was a negative relationship between English background knowledge of Bangkok University students and their problems of learning English at .05 level. In other words, students who had high grades tended to have less problems of learning English. On the other hand, students who had low grades tended to have more problems of learning English.

2.2.3 The relationship between goal setting for learning English and problems of learning English

There was a negative relationship between goal setting for learning English of Bangkok University students and their problems of learning English at .05 level. In other words, students who set high goals tended to have less problems of learning English. On the other hand, students who set low goals tended to have more problems of learning English.

Conclusion

This study attempted to investigate Bangkok University second-year students' goal setting for learning English language, factors affecting goal setting for learning English, and relationships among English background knowledge, goal setting for learning English and problems of learning English. The statistical analyses revealed that the overall goal setting for learning English language of these students was at the moderate level. In addition, the correlation analysis revealed that the students who set high goals tended to have less problems of learning English while those who set low goals tended to have more problems of learning English. Therefore, teachers should help their students to set their own learning goals and encourage them to demonstrate effective planning, time management, and purposeful behavior in order to achieve enhanced learning outcomes. More emphasis should be placed on the students who are male, non-English majored, and less-experienced in English since these students tended to

set lower goals than female, English majored, and more experienced English students respectively.

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