

### The Role of Social Goals in Iranian Undergraduate Students' Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioral Engagement

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**Abstract:** Learning in every context is influenced by the social factors such as the people with whom the learners are communicating in that specific learning environment. As the role that social factors can potentially play in the process of education seems not to have been explored comprehensively in the field of English language teaching, in general, and in the Iranian educational context, in particular, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the impact of both social goals and achievement goals on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement, in an academic context. The participants of the study consisted of 302 undergraduate students (88 females, 206 males, 8 unspecified), majoring in English literature at two state universities and two private universities in Iran. The data were collected through one questionnaire consisting of items relating to different types of social goals and various types of engagement. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Regression Analysis were conducted to analyze the data. The results of CFA confirmed the validity of such goals in our context. Also, regression analysis showed that mastery goals, social status goals, and social concern goals predicted variance in different facets of engagement.

**Keywords:** Achievement Goals, Social Goals, Academic Engagement.

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## Introduction

People normally do certain activities to achieve certain goals. One of the most researched theories dealing with goals is *achievement goal theory*. It explains what kind of goals direct us towards achievement-related behaviors and why learners, in general, attempt to achieve special goals (Maehr & Zusho, 2009). According to achievement goal theory, there are two major types of goals: mastery goals and performance goals (Kaplan & Maehr, 2007). Mastery goals are concerned with goals associated with developing competence through effort and hard work, whereas, performance goals are concerned with showing one's competence in a certain sphere. Performance goals may be manifested in outperforming other learners, for instance. Because of their focus on gaining competence, mastery and performance goals are referred to as competence-linked goals (Elliot & Church, 1997).

Several correlational and experimental studies have been conducted on performance and mastery goals and their influence on learners' academic behavior such as emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement (see for example, Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996); however, it should be noted that these are not the only goals being pursued. In an extended view of achievement goal theory, other goals like social goals also play a role in how learners behave in a learning environment.

The exclusive focus on mastery and performance goals is perhaps due to the fact that, most of the studies conducted on goals have taken place in a Western environment emphasizing an individualist tradition rather than a collectivist one. According to Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov (2010, p. 92):

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

As explained by Markus and Kitayama (1991), in collectivist settings, the self is defined in an interdependent fashion, where the individual is viewed as a tightly dependent member of the community.

As mentioned earlier, it has been suggested that social goals should also be included in an extended view of achievement goal theory (Urduan & Maehr, 1995). They define social goals as "perceived social purposes of trying to achieve academically" (p. 232). Studies show

that students in collectivist cultures, if compared to their Western counterparts, are more prone to pursue social objectives in educational contexts. For example, Church and Katigbak (1992) in a study compared the academic motives of Filipino and American college students. They found that Filipino students showed higher social motives than the Americans.

Social goals and achievement goals have shown to influence students' engagement (King, McInerney, & Watkins, 2012). Moreover, the studies by Chen (2008) and Dotterer and Lowe (2011) have shown that students' engagement affects their learning and achievement. As the study by King and McInerney (2016) showed social affiliation, social approval, social concern and social status were positively associated with deep learning and achieving learning strategies.

Iran, a Middle-Eastern country, is considered as a collectivist society (Hofstede et al., 2010) and education in such a setting is certainly influenced by such a standpoint. Therefore, social goals such as social approval goals (receiving praise from the people around you), social responsibility goals (showing that you are a responsible person), social status goals (obtaining economic or social reputation), social affiliation goals (to feel close to your friends), and social concern goals (helping other people with their activities), as categorized by Dowson and McInerney (2004), are given a special place in its educational context. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), academic certificates and diplomas are perceived differently in collectivist and individualist cultures. In individualist cultures, certificates improve a person's economic worth and self-respect by bringing a sense of achievement. In a collectivist culture, like Iran, diplomas and certificates bring honor to the holder of them. They are a means of associating with groups of a higher status and obtaining their social acceptance.

One of the branches of education is foreign language learning and learners in this field are influenced by the goals they adopt in their way toward their ultimate end. As one of the subparts of education, learning a second/foreign language is not restricted to gaining knowledge in that language, and due to the inherent social nature of classrooms (Martin & Dowson, 2009); several other goals like social ones are pursued. Moreover, studies conducted in the realm of foreign language learning examining the goals of foreign language learners have ignored social goals and have paid more attention to goals like improving one's proficiency in English to get a job (for example, Ghazvini & Khajehpour, 2011; Choubsaz & Choubsaz, 2014; Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2013; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010). Therefore, obtaining information about the importance of social goals is necessary and this study intends

to investigate the importance of social goals, their effects on EFL learners' engagement and any possible difference between males and females in terms of the adoption of such goals.

## **Review of the Literature**

In this section, a brief review of the two types of goals investigated in this study i.e. achievement goals and social goals and the concept of engagement and the related studies are provided.

### ***Achievement Goals***

The definition of goals in the psychological literature is different from what achievement goal theory considers as a goal. In the psychological literature, a goal refers to as an outcome or incentive a person is striving to accomplish (Maehr & Zusho, 2009). For example, my goal is to get an A in this class. This is a content-oriented approach and considers "what" a person is trying to achieve. By contrast, achievement goal theory focuses on "why" a student is trying to get an A (Urda & Maehr, 1995).

Mastery and performance goals have been mentioned in the literature using various terms. These include learning and performance goals (Dweck & Elliot, 1983), task involved versus ego involved goals (Nicholls, 1984), mastery versus ability focused goals (Ames, 1992), and task-focused versus ability focused goals (Maehr & Midlegy, 1991).

Generally speaking, mastery goals are associated with positive outcomes but research regarding performance goals is inconsistent (Maehr & Zusho, 2009). For example, Kaplan and Maehr (1999) found that task goals (mastery goals) were related to positive psychological well-being, whereas ego goals (performance goals) to negative psychological well-being. On the other hand, Sideridi's (2005) study showed that performance approach goals were positively associated with effort, persistence and achievement and negatively with depression and anxiety. Also, Linnenbrink (2005) found that personal mastery goals were beneficial for achievement. In addition, the study showed that performance approach goals were detrimental for achievement and test anxiety and they were unrelated to the other outcomes.

### ***Engagement***

According to Trowler (2010), "student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions

intended to optimize the students' experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and reputation of the institution" (p .3). Friedrichs, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) proposed that school engagement is composed of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. They defined behavioral engagement as participating in learning activities which include school attendance and positive conduct. Emotional engagement is defined as one's affective attitudes towards school and a sense of belonging to school. Cognitive engagement includes a kind of self-regulation in your learning. DeVito (2016) investigated the factors which influence student engagement. Through surveys, focus-group interviews, and observations he found that five factors affected students' engagement. They were interactions between teachers and students, level of academic challenge, supporting family environment, supporting classroom environment, and collaboration and involvement in learning activities. This study shows the social nature of the factors affecting engagement as they are a manifestation of students' relationships with different groups. Ganotice and King (2013) investigated the role of social support from teachers, parents, and peers in students' engagement. They found that teacher support and positive peer influence were positively related to all academic engagement indicators.

### ***Social Goals***

Research shows that theories of motivation have failed to pay enough attention to social goals. Researchers such as Urda & Maehr (1995) have noted that social goals must be included in the study of goals. Ford and Nicholls (1991) found two different types of social goals based on replicable patterns. Social responsibility was categorized as a member of a larger categorization named task accomplishment and belongingness within the category of caring relationships.

Ford (1992) made a sharper distinction between social goals and provided a detailed list of them. It includes self-determination, belongingness, individuality, equity, social responsibility, superiority, resource provision and resource acquisition. Urda and Maehr (1995) suggested social approval goals (obtaining the approval of others), social welfare goals (to become a productive member of your society), and social solidarity goals (obtaining honor for your family). McInerney, Yeung, & McInerney (2001) introduced two kinds of goals: social concern goals (a concern for helping the other students) and affiliation goals (belonging to a group). Dowson and McInerney (2004) proposed social concern, social status, social responsibility, social approval, and social affiliation goals.

The problem with the studies done on social goals is that they have only investigated a few of these goals and there is not a clear distinction between these goals and other goals (King & Watkins, 2012). It should be noted that there some studies (for example, Kormos & Kiddle, 2013) having the concept of social in their title but they are about social factors like social class and socio-economic status. To provide a more unified category for social goals in a series of studies, Dowson & McInerney (2001, 2003, 2004) identified five types of social goals: social responsibility, social concern, social status, social approval, and social affiliation. They constructed and validated Goal Orientation and Learning Strategies Survey, regarded as the most comprehensive scale for social goals in the literature. King, McInerney, and Watkins (2012) using this unified category of social goals, investigated the effect of achievement goals (mastery and performance), and social goals (affiliation, status, responsibility, approval, and concern) on cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. Their study showed that social concern and social responsibility goals predicted variance in different facets of engagement.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The participants of the study consisted of 302 undergraduate students majoring in English literature (88 males, 206 females, 8 unspecified) in their first, second, third, and fourth year of their studies from two state universities and two private universities in Isfahan and Mashhad, Iran with upper-intermediate and advanced levels of language proficiency. Their age range was from 18 to 22 years. The participants were selected through convenience sampling and they were chosen based on their availability.

### ***Instruments***

Three instruments including social goals scale, academic engagement scale, and achievement goals scale were used in the study to collect the data. The answers for each scale were based on a Likert scale consisting of five options, each option being assigned a score (i.e., strongly agree: 5, agree: 4, neither agree nor disagree: 3, disagree: 2 strongly disagree: 1).

### ***Achievement Goals Scale***

In order to measure achievement goals, mastery and performance goals subscale of Goal Orientation and Learning Strategies Survey (Dowson & McInerney, 2004) was used. The

number of the items for each of the mastery goals (e.g., *I want to do well at school to show that I can learn new things*) and performance goals (e.g., *I want to do well in school because being better than others is important to me*) was six. The Cronbach's Alpha for mastery goals was 0.759 and for performance goals, it was 0.903.

#### *Social Goals Scale*

The social goals subscale of Goal Orientation and Learning Strategies Survey (Dowson & McNerney, 2004) was used to measure to what extent the learners were interested in such goals. The scale includes five types of social goals, five items devoted to each goal. It consists of social approval goals (e.g., *I want to do well at school so that I can get praise from my teacher*), social concern goals (e.g., *I want to do well at school so that I can help my friends with their school work*), social responsibility goals (e.g., *I want to do good school work because other people expect it of me*), social status goals (e.g., *I do good school work so that I can get a good job in future*), and social affiliation goals (e.g., *I want to do well at school so that I can feel close to my group of friends*) with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.876, 0.929, 0.791, 0.922, 0.863 respectively.

#### *Behavioral Engagement Scale*

The ongoing engagement subscale of Research Assessment Package for Schools (Wellborn & Connell, 1987) was used to measure behavioral engagement. It consists of five items (e.g., *I work very hard on my school work*). The Cronbach's Alpha for this scale was 0.595.

#### *Emotional Engagement Scale*

To measure emotional engagement, the Affect to School subscale of Facilitating Conditions for School Motivation (McInerney, Dowson, & Yeung, 2005) was used. This scale consists of four items (e.g., *The subjects at school interest me*). The Cronbach's Alpha for this scale was 0.631.

#### *Cognitive Engagement Scale*

The cognitive strategies of Goal Orientation and Learning Strategies Survey (Dowson & McNerney, 2004) was used to measure cognitive engagement. It includes Elaboration (e.g., *I try to understand how the things I learn in school fit together with each other*), organization (e.g., *I try to organize my school notes when I want to learn things for school*), and rehearsal

(e.g., *When I want to learn things for school, I reread my notes*). The Cronbach's Alpha for each of the subscales of cognitive engagement i.e. elaboration, monitoring, and regulating was 0.887, 0.838, and 0.728 respectively.

It should be noted that the reliability of the whole scale was .936 and it enjoyed an acceptable reliability index.

### ***Administration***

The questionnaire was distributed by the first author among the students in one session after obtaining teachers' and students' permission. Because the medium of instruction was English in all B.A. classes, and most of the students were in upper-intermediate and advanced levels of language proficiency, the questionnaire was also administered in English. It should be noted that there were not any technical words in the questionnaire. To check that there is no problem with the questionnaire items, they had already been administered to a small group of students in a pilot study. 30 students participated in the pilot study and the reliability of the questionnaire for the pilot study was .922. No modifications were made in the items because they had already been administered in other studies and because of the level of the students there was no language problem for them.

### **Data Analysis**

#### ***Confirmatory Factor Analysis***

To determine the construct validity of the scales, confirmatory factor analysis was applied. Five CFAs were conducted for mastery-performance goals, social goals, cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement, and emotional engagement. All scales showed good fit indices. Table 1 provides goodness of fit statistics

**Table 1.** *Goodness of Fit Statistics*

<b>Model</b>	<b>CMIN/DF</b>	<b>RMSEA</b>	<b>GFI</b>	<b>IFI</b>	<b>TLI</b>	<b>CFI</b>
Mastery-performance goals	2.529	0.071	0.939	0.959	0.941	0.959
Social goals	2.021	0.058	0.855	0.932	0.923	0.931
Cognitive engagement	2.765	0.077	0.882	0.906	0.887	0.905
Behavioral engagement	1.904	0.055	0.99	0.986	0.964	0.986
Emotional engagement	1.985	0.057	0.994	0.989	0.966	0.989
Desired Level	1-5	<0.8	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9

**Note:** RMSEA= root mean square error of approximation, GFI=goodness of fit index, IFI=incremental fit index, TLI=Tucker-Lewis index, CFI=comparative fit index, CMIN/DF=normalized chi-square/degrees of freedom

## Research Questions

What social and achievement goals are more dominant among Iranian EFL learners?

The most supported goals were social status goals (Mean=3.86) followed by, mastery goals (Mean=3.81), social concern goals (Mean=3.34), performance goals (Mean=3.34), social responsibility goals (Mean=3.27), social approval goals (Mean=3.23), and social affiliation goals (Mean=2.75).

Is there a significant correlation between Iranian EFL learners' mastery goals, social goals and their engagement with language learning task?

As table 2 shows, mastery goals, performance goals, and social status goals were significantly and positively correlated with all the different dimensions of engagement. Also, social affiliation goals were not significantly correlated with any of the aspects of engagement and other types of goals were significantly correlated with some aspects of engagement.

**Table 2.** Correlation between Different Types of Goals and Different Facets of Engagement

	<b>Behavioral Engagement</b>	<b>Emotional Engagement</b>	<b>Elaboration</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>	<b>Regulating</b>
Mastery Goals	.413**	.312**	.378**	.437**	.359**
Performance Goals	.234**	.219**	.095	.202**	.199**
Social Affiliation Goals	-.020	-.057	.028	.059	.033
Social Approval Goals	.213**	.111	.058	.170**	.151**
Social Concern Goals	.124*	.096	.136*	.233**	.246**
Social Responsibility Goals	.095	.040	.091	.235**	.188**
Social Status Goals	.230**	.311**	.249**	.317**	.182**

\*P<.05, \*\*P<.01

Does gender make any difference in the kind of goals EFL learners adopt?

An analysis of variance was conducted to investigate the effect of gender on social goals. Table 3 presents the results of ANOVA for gender. The results showed that there was a significant difference between males and females in terms of the adoption of mastery ( $F=8.164$ , Partial  $\eta^2=0.027$ ,  $P<.01$ ) and performance goals ( $F=11.312$ , Partial  $\eta^2=0.037$ ,  $P<.001$ ). Females (Mean=3.88) scored higher than the males (Mean=3.81) for mastery goals. This higher score of the females (Mean=3.46) was also true for the performance goals (males, Mean=3.06).

Regarding the social goals, there was a significant difference between males and females in terms of social approval goals, social responsibility goals, and social status goals. The largest difference belonged to social status goals ( $F=13.482$ , Partial  $\eta^2=0.044$ ,  $P<.001$ ).

There were more important for the females (Mean=3.97) than the males (Mean=3.57). The smallest amount of difference ( $F=.014$ , Partial  $\eta=0.000$ ) belonged to social concern goals.

Finally, for different types of engagement, there was a significant difference between males and females just for behavioral engagement ( $F=4.64$ , Partial  $\eta=0.016$ ,  $P<.05$ ).

**Table 3.** ANOVA Results for Gender

		N	Mean	Std.Deviation	F	Partial $\eta(0.01)$
Mastery Goals	male	88	3.6515	.65538	8.164 **	0.027
	female	206	3.8811	.62013		
	Total	294	3.8124	.63851		
Performance Goals	male	88	3.0606	1.00293	11.312 ***	0.037
	female	206	3.4628	.91047		
	Total	294	3.3424	.95535		
Social Affiliation Goals	male	88	2.6951	.85217	.682	0.002
	female	206	2.7807	.79790		
	Total	294	2.7551	.81401		
Social Approval Goals	male	88	2.9640	1.01283	10.189 **	0.034
	female	206	3.3374	.87535		
	Total	294	3.2256	.93276		
Social Concern Goals	male	88	3.3447	.90224	.014	0.000
	female	206	3.3584	.89309		
	Total	294	3.3543	.89432		
Social Responsibility Goals	male	88	3.1212	.72790	5.965 *	0.020
	female	206	3.3366	.67675		
	Total	294	3.2721	.69822		
Social Status Goals	male	88	3.5701	1.00913	13.482 ***	0.044
	female	206	3.9757	.79987		
	Total	294	3.8543	.88580		
Behavioral Engagement	male	88	3.2386	.68000	4.64 *	0.016
	female	206	3.4097	.59813		
	Total	294	3.3585	.62751		
Emotional Engagement	male	88	3.7955	.73260	.294	0.001
	female	206	3.8434	.67810		
	Total	294	3.8291	.69395		
Elaboration	male	88	3.9583	.57472	1.092	0.004
	female	206	4.0372	.60033		
	Total	294	4.0136	.59291		
Monitoring	male	88	3.8125	.62249	1.716	0.006
	female	206	3.9118	.58334		
	Total	294	3.7432	.59729		
Regulating	male	88	3.6837	.55825	1.247	0.004
	female	206	3.7686	.61275		
	Total	294	3.7432	.59729		

\* $P<.05$ , \*\* $P<.01$ , \*\*\* $P<.001$

To what extents can Iranian EFL learners' achievement goals and social goals predict their engagement with language learning task?

In order to answer the question whether mastery-performance goals and social goals predicted additional variance in cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement, the predictors were entered in four steps in a hierarchical regression analysis. At step 1, gender was entered into the model. At step 2, mastery and performance goals were added. Finally, at step 3, social goals were added. The results showed that mastery goals and some types of social goals (social status, social responsibility, and social concern) accounted for an additional amount of variance in different facets of engagement.

At step 1, where gender was entered, it accounted for a significant amount of variance just in behavioral engagement ( $R^2=0.016$ ,  $Beta=0.125$ ,  $P<.05$ ) and not for the other two forms of engagement.

After entering mastery and performance goals at step 2, they accounted for a significant amount of variance in behavioral engagement ( $R^2=0.155$ ,  $Beta=0.38$ ,  $P<.001$ ), Emotional engagement ( $R^2=0.091$ ,  $Beta=0.253$ ,  $P<.001$ ), Elaboration ( $R^2=0.136$ ,  $Beta=0.405$ ,  $P<.001$ ), monitoring ( $R^2=0.17$ ,  $Beta=0.419$ ,  $P<.001$ ), and regulation ( $R^2=0.124$ ,  $Beta=0.338$ ,  $P<.001$ ). This large amount of variance was just for mastery goals and performance goals did not account for a significant amount of variance.

► Later, at step 3, when social goals were included, some of them accounted for a significant amount of variance but less than what was accounted for by mastery goals ( $R^2=0.051$  for behavioral engagement,  $R^2=0.108$  for emotional engagement,  $R^2=0.038$  for elaboration,  $R^2=0.072$  for monitoring,  $R^2=0.05$  for regulation). Specifically, social status goals predicted a significant amount of variance in emotional engagement ( $Beta=0.259$ ,  $P<.001$ ) elaboration ( $Beta=.170$ ,  $P<.01$ ) and monitoring ( $Beta=.176$ ,  $P<.01$ ). In addition, social responsibility goals contributed a significant amount to the variance just in monitoring ( $Beta=.142$ ,  $P<.05$ ), a subpart of cognitive engagement. Moreover, A significant amount of variance in regulation ( $Beta=.185$ ,  $P<.01$ ) was predicted by social concern goals and these goals weakly predicted variance in monitoring ( $Beta=0.115$ ,  $P<.10$ ). Finally, Social approval goals weakly predicted variance in behavioral engagement ( $Beta= 0.126$ ,  $P<.10$ ).

## Discussion

In the following sections, we attempt to present a brief description of the findings related to each of the variables under investigation, followed by a relevant discussion and interpretation, as well as an evaluation of the findings against previous studies conducted in each area of investigation.

Do social status goals significantly affect EFL learners' engagement?

Is there any significant difference between males and females in terms of the adoption of social status goals?

In our findings, social status goals enjoyed the highest rate of endorsement by the students. Most of the studies conducted in Iran and related to such goals, defined in terms of obtaining a job and expecting a brilliant future, have been conducted in terms of Attitude Motivation Test Battery by Gardner. According to that questionnaire, getting a job through improving one's proficiency in English is a crucial aspect of the instrumental domain of motivation. Previous studies conducted on social status goals by Iranian researchers include Ghazvini and Khajepour study (2011), Choubsaz and Choubsaz (2014), Nahavandi and Mukundan (2013), and Chalak and Kassaian (2010). In all the above-mentioned studies, learning English to obtain a job was important for the participants and our study corroborates the findings of these studies. Such a large amount of support for social status goals among the Iranian young learners may be looked upon as a normal fact, if we consider the low rate of job opportunities especially for social sciences majors as well as other university majors. Furthermore, the study conducted by King, McInerney, and Watkins (2012) in the Philippines indicated that social status goals enjoyed the highest rate of endorsement by the participants, a social condition that might be prevailing in most so-called "third-world" nations.

Another interesting finding for the Iranian context in the present study was the significant difference between males and females in terms of their support for social status goals; such goals enjoyed a higher rate of support among the females compared with their male counterparts. As Allaeddini and Razavi (2005) in their study predicted, the Iranian society's attitude towards women's employment and women's economic problems, mostly due to women's increasingly gaining admittance to universities and higher education institutes, is doomed to change, with males having to give the educated women the chance to assume jobs that were already exclusively male-dominated.

Moreover, social status goals predicted a significant amount of variance in emotional and cognitive engagement (elaboration and monitoring). A study conducted by Maric and Sakac (2014) in Serbia, corroborating the findings of the present study, showed that social prestige was a significant predictor of students' motivation for learning and achievement.

Do mastery and performance goals significantly affect EFL learners' engagement?

Is there any significant difference between males and females in terms of the adoption of mastery and performance goals?

Mastery goals were the second highly endorsed goals in the findings of the study, while performance goals took the fourth rank. There was also a positive significant relation between mastery/performance goals and most aspects of engagement. Mastery goals accounted for a significant amount of variance on all the aspects of engagement in the two steps of entering mastery/performance goals and social goals in the regression model. Regarding the performance goals, they did not account for any significant amount of variance on engagement.

As far as the Iranian context is concerned, studies like Yailagh, Alipour Birgani, Boostani, and Hajiyakhchali (2013) as well as Ghanizadeh and Mohammadzadeh (2015) have shown a significant positive relationship between mastery/performance goals and metacognitive strategies. Concerning the effect of mastery/performance goals on metacognitive strategies, Mohammadi Ghavam, Rastegar, and Razmi's (2011) study indicated that there was not a direct path of performance approach goals toward deep processing strategies. In addition, Nasrollahi Mouziraji and Birjandi's (2016) study showed a significant effect on students' self-regulation for mastery and performance-avoidance goals but not for performance approach goals.

Although, in the studies just mentioned as well as in the present study, as far as correlation is concerned, there exists a significant relationship between mastery/performance goals and aspects of engagement, other statistical procedures concerned with the effect of the variables on each other fail to account for any significant amount of variance in the dependent variables of interest, a fact that renders the role of performance goals questionable at least in issues related to engagement.

Regarding the studies conducted outside the Iranian context, the results are mixed. For example, Gonida, Voulala, & Kiosseoglou (2009) and DeBacker & Crowson (2006) found an

adaptive role for mastery goals in students' engagement but this was not true for performance goals.

In contrast to these findings, Matos, Lens, and Vansteenkiste's study (2007) showed that mastery goals and performance approach goals predicted all types of learning strategies. As for the mastery goals, there is a general consensus on their adaptive role in engagement. But, with regard to performance goals the results are mixed and the present study corroborates the findings of those rejecting any role for the performance goals.

Considering the study of performance goals in this study and their failure to account for any variance in the target variables, some points are worth mentioning. First, the nature of the participants' field of study (i.e., English literature) is important. Most of the students taking up this field have a history of attending private language institutes in their background. So, it may have created a kind of interest in their own field contrary to other fields, where students may have taken up a certain major without any previous background, a fact that might be regarded as a precursor to the adaptive role of mastery goals concerned with learning for its own sake rather than proving yourself to others. Second, it can be said that the lower desire for performance goals is the result of students' age. So, as the participants of the study consisted of B.A students majoring in English literature, the context of learning is somehow different from what they have experienced at high school and this might be a sound reason for mastery goals gaining more prominence than the performance ones.

With regard to the difference between males and females in terms of their support for mastery and performance goals, the results showed that both goals were endorsed higher by the female students than the male ones and the difference between the two groups for each of the goals was significant. Such a finding may provide evidence enough for the fact that as far as achievement goals are concerned, females are more prone to adopt such goals than the male group do.

Do social concern goals significantly affect EFL learners' engagement?

Is there any significant difference between males and females in terms of the adoption of social concern goals?

Social concern goals are categorized as "prosocial behavior" (Bergin, 2016). These behaviors include those with a desire to help others with an altruistic nature (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Such goals were in the middle in terms of the support they received by the participants. They were considered more important than social responsibility goals, social

approval goals, and social affiliation goals. Such a finding can mean that helping others is somehow important for the learners. These goals, moreover, predicted a significant amount of variance in two aspects of engagement, namely, monitoring and regulation, showing their adaptive role in students' learning.

As far as previous studies in the area of social concern goals are concerned, we may mention Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, and Zimbardo's (2000) longitudinal study on prosocial foundations of academic achievement, having shown that prosocialness had a strong positive impact on later academic achievement and social preferences. In another longitudinal study, El Mallah (2014) examined the association between social behavior and academic performance. The results showed that prosocial behaviors were moderately and positively correlated with academic performance. These two longitudinal studies prove the fundamental role of prosocial behaviors like social concern goals in human relations.

Furthermore, the results did not indicate a significant difference between males and females in terms of their support for social concern goals, implying the fact that the desire to help others is an inherent characteristic of the students, regardless of their gender.

Do social responsibility goals significantly affect EFL learners' engagement?

Is there any significant difference between males and females in terms of the adoption of social responsibility goals?

Social responsibility goals were among the three least supported goals by the participants. They only accounted for a small significant amount of variance in just one aspect of cognitive engagement that is monitoring. As far as the previous studies by Nakayama (1996) and Estrada (2011) are concerned, they have shown an adaptive role in students' learning which is in contrast to the findings of the present study. The question raised here is that in spite of the adaptive role considered for social responsibility goals in the literature, why their effect in the present study is not that much salient and is limited to just one aspect of engagement. One point of high importance is the definition of these goals in the present study. In fact, social responsibility goals were defined as to comply with other people's expectations and avoidance of getting in to trouble due to one's failure in fulfilling the course requirements. As stated earlier, students' interest plays the major role in taking up the field of English literature and such an interest can overshadow other people's expectations and even the fact that whether they are regarded a responsible person outside the

classroom context or not. In fact, the way these goals were defined here implies a kind of obligation or force in contrast with one's own interest in learning.

Do social approval goals significantly affect EFL learners' engagement?

Is there any significant difference between males and females in terms of the adoption of social approval goals?

Social approval goals were the second least endorsed goals among the findings. Except for their weak impact on behavioral engagement, they did not affect any other aspect of engagement.

As the study by Trucco, Wright, and Colder (2014) on stability and change of social goals in adolescence showed, the level of agentic and communal factors increases over time and this is followed by a decrease in submissive and separate factors. This is exactly what happened in the present study. As the participants of the present study were in a university context and they had already entered their adolescence period, they had become more agentic and less submissive showing their independence to other people interacting with and seeking less approval as a result.

Moreover, there was a significant difference between males and females in terms of their support for social approval goals, with females having a stronger desire for such goals. As far as the traditional Iranian culture is concerned, women have traditionally shown to be more obedient and such obedience manifests itself in the form of seeking approval for learning behaviors in a classroom context. In line with our findings, Nyikos (1990) acknowledged the fact that female students follow teachers' instructions on how they should study as a way of gaining approval and look for more social approval than their male counterparts.

Do social affiliation goals significantly affect EFL learners' engagement?

Is there any significant difference between males and females in terms of the adoption of social affiliation goals?

Social affiliation goals constituted the least supported goals in our findings. They did not account for a significant amount of variance in any of the aspects of engagement. This shows that learning and students' relationships with each other are two different issues and students' learning is not for the sake of maintaining their relationships. This low amount of support for social goals can also be attributed to the developmental characteristics of

adolescence. As the study by Ouano (2012) on social goal orientation of Filipino students from late childhood to adolescence showed, students' inclination toward social affiliation goals decreases in adolescence compared with the childhood period. Regarding the power of such goals to account for change in other variables, the study by Brewer & Klein (2006) on the effect of type of positive interdependence and affiliation motives in a synchronous, collaborative learning environment showed that interdependence and affiliation motives had a non-significant effect on achievement. Also, in another study by King and McInerney (2016) the links between social goals and learning strategies were examined. In the proposed model, social affiliation goals did not predict any of the surface or deep learning strategies.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, the results of the present study indicated that mastery goals accounted for a significant and great amount of variance on all the aspects of engagement, a fact that can be considered as a valid source of evidence for the adaptive role of such goals in students' learning and in line with what the literature has shown so far. As for the social goals, social status goals, and to a lesser extent, social concern goals had an impact on some facets of engagement. The point necessary to be mentioned here is that just the assumption of categorizing the Iranian society as a collectivist culture is not enough for predicting that all types of social goals are important in this society.

As the present study showed, just some social goals were highly supported, and some aspects of academic engagement were affected by these types of goals as well. This brings into question the previous categorization of the Iranian society as a collectivist society. Therefore, more studies are needed to investigate the dominance of a collectivist tendency, in general, and the role of the social goals, in particular, in the Iranian society.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

As social status goals were among the most endorsed goals by the learners, the skills concerned with what the learners are going to encounter in their future occupations are of high importance to be delivered to the students during their B. A. courses. This can be manifested through the application of those methods of teaching whose main concern is the participation of the students in the actual act of transferring knowledge to the other learners. This participation in the teaching process makes them familiar with the subtleties of teaching and helps them gain experience for their future careers which are directly related to what is occurring in their classrooms.

In addition, social concern goals received a moderate endorsement by the learners. This can be regarded as a relatively valid source of evidence for the implementation of those methods of teaching placing a high amount of value on cooperation among the student. Learning in such an environment helps both parties involved in teaching and learning improve their skill and have a better classroom experience.

As social approval goals did not receive that much support by the learners, the teachers in a university context should consider this fact that what is important for the learners is the learning itself and not learning for the sake of receiving the approval of others. Therefore, using approval as a technique for the enhancement of the performance of the students in an academic context does not seem to be an efficient strategy. Moreover, this disinclination for receiving approval is also true for what parents do toward their students' successes or failures. Perhaps at a university level, praising or criticizing the learners does not function the same as it functions at other levels and asking the learners in an interfering way about their performance at university is not that much efficient.

Although, the adoption of the performance goals may not be that much adaptive for the learners at the first glance, they can be regarded by the university professors as an efficient tool to enhance the selection of mastery goals and finally learning the material at hand. As the present study showed, performance goals were considered as a relatively important goal for the learners and interestingly the amount of support received by performance goals was also relatively prominent and this shows that studying for the sake of getting good scores or show off can be beneficial for the ultimate aim of studying which is learning for its own sake.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

This study was conducted using a previously developed and validated instrument in another context. Future studies conducted in Iran on social goals may develop their own instruments based on the information obtained from the Iranian context through relevant interviews.

In addition, future studies may use a more detailed scale for personal best goals covering all the characteristics of such goals including their challenging, competitive, and self-referenced nature.

Moreover, in the future studies, deep interviews may be conducted to discover the social goals being specifically preferable by the males and females and examine how males and females differ in terms of their adoption of a goal.

Also, the influence of each of the factors like students' grade point average, their financial status, and their family background as an independent variable can be investigated.

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