Flourishing EFL Learner's Goal Setting and Self-regulation by Positive Psychology Intervention

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental study aimed at addressing the impact of Positive Psychology (PP) on Goal Setting (GS) and Self-regulating (SR) of EFL learners in an English institute located in Kerman. In so doing, the study utilized an experimental design with 20 participants, in two groups totaling 9 male and 11 female, students, and aged 19 to 34. In accordance with Dornyei (2007) cluster sampling, all intermediate EFL students (20 intermediate EFL students) in the institute, were selected to participate. The pretest showed that all the participants were homogenous with regard to their proficiency level as well as their goal setting and self-regulation. Data was collected over two months using the goal setting and self-regulation questionnaires developed by Erickson et al. (2015) before and after one term. The results of the post-test revealed that PP had a positive and significant impact on these learners' goal setting and self-regulating. The findings from this research suggest positive psychology offers an effective path towards understanding, managing and successfully self-regulating and setting goals for ESL students.

Keywords: EFL context, goal setting, self-regulating, positive psychology

1. Introduction

Positive psychology is a useful framework to comprehend learner' academic achievement, mental health, and career development by concentrating on those strategies that enhance or promote happiness, positive emotions, and well-being (Seligman, 2002).

Different studies have shown that for everyone positive emotions create a kind of thinking that promote awareness and resources; (personal and social) for future life (Gregrsen, Maclntyre,& Meza,2016). Emotion is a central part of everybody's life both personally and interpersonally, and the experiences that are generated emotionally can have both positive and negative impact on functioning. Maybe because of this powerful effect, these experiences are not free floating, so if you want to understand the pressures you are under from other individuals and from society you should cultivate awareness of them, you should check them (Nezlek & Kuppens 2008,). Research shows that emotional regulation decreases the danger of depression (Davidson, Pzzagalli, Nitschke & Putman 2002), enhances the ability to control violent impulses (Davidson, Putman& Larson 2000), enhances a sense of morality (Eisenberg,2000) and fosters psychological development (Dodge. 1989).

Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn and Smith (2006) stated that the environment and events in school and university can highly boost the character of a student. Positive psychology also causes an appreciable change in Educational Psychology by creating positive emotions and promoting student's strengths, satisfaction and character growth (Seligman et al., 2009; Seligman, 2013). The aim of character education is to ensure that the academic abilities of students are developed in such a way as to positively influence of their character (Berkowitz& Bier, 2004), an aim that is integral to positive education movement (Seligment, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich & Linkin, 2009). In fact, positive psychology focuses on measuring, understanding and building human strengths and character (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and promote a life of greater morality, happiness and well-being with better relationships, improved health, growth happiness and performance. Self-regulation is related to individual choices and the way individuals achieve their goals. Learners with the confidence in their abilities to achieve their goal, believe that they can reach that goal provided they put in sufficient effort. Self-belief and effort can enable them to employ appropriate strategies, bounce back from adversity and overcome challenges to reach a higher level of language attainment. Positive psychology encourages students to concentrate on strengths and capacities that can be evaluated, and by so doing promotes performance and improves everyday life (luthans, 2002)

Education should contribute to enhancing learner's emotional well-being and happiness. Considering this, it is necessary to pay more attention to enhance positive feelings in educational setting .Since self-regulation is capable of forming a positive concept of ego and boosting individual's self-effectiveness It will act as significant element in learning achievement and adaptability of learners (Mischel, Shoda, & Peake, 1988).Self-regulated learning is an activity regarding effective learning and its accomplishments (Schraw, 2010). A learner regulates his or her motivation during the learning process through self-regulation, maintaining positive emotions, utilizing effective learning strategies, and accomplishing the

learning process by controlling his or her behaviors so self-regulated learning is a predictor of the emerging emotional well-being.

Self-regulation is not a mental ability or a skill related to academic performance specifically. Rather, it is a self-directed process in which a learner links their own mental abilities to activities practiced in a particular context (Zimmerman, 1990). Such an approach considers educating a proactive process that students learn through self-regulated learning. In various times and by using a range of methods the research and observations done on self-regulated learners (Zimmerman, 2001), show this skill strongly affected their school work. They approached education confidently and diligently. Students who find ways to overcome adversity, such as a bad study environment, a confusing teacher or difficult to understand course book can, nevertheless, find a way to be successful.

Knowledge acquisition for self-regulated learners is a systematic process that is under their control and so they feel greater responsibility for their results (Annarita, Bramucci, 2013). Desire to achieve long term goals has been show to explain educational achievement and success beyond what is predicted by IQ (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007). The skill of trying to overcome challenges, coping with failure and adversity while maintaining interest is related to the individual's life satisfaction (Duckworth, Quinn, 2009; Peterson et al., 2007). Full understanding and acceptance of one's personal qualities, skills and ability is needed for setting an achievable goal (Jernigan, 2012).

Generally it is essential that individual students recognize their habitual strategies, optimal strategies (including the use of self-regulation), positive resources and approaches and their effects when setting goals for academic success. In order to examine this theory; this research investigated the effect of introducing and combining Positive psychology on Goal Setting and Self-Regulation when teaching EFL university students in Iran. The purposes of the present study that mentioned generally should be kept in mind, and guided our research:

1) To what extent psychology has a significant impact on EFL learners' achievable goal?

2) To what extent psychology has a significant impact on EFL learners' self-regulation?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Positive Psychology and Second/Foreign Language Acquisition

Positive education claims to enhance effective learning by creating positive emotions. Like so, positive psychology zoom in the positive feelings that educational settings climate can build White and Waters (2015) and White (2014) describe it as an "an umbrella term used to describe tentatively validated interventions and syllabus from positive psychology that have influence on student well-being. Ergo, positive psychology zero in on the positive feelings that educational climate can build. It means a student is happy in the environment in which s/he acquire instructions s/he will learn simply and more lastingly (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009). In like manner, language learning process basically is an emotionally driven task (MacIntyre, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005; Garret & Young, 2009; Bown & White, 2010; Imai, 2010).

Emotions involve changes that effect cognitive processing and performance (Schumann, 1997).The quality and quantity of success in language acquisition and performance is evaluated by emotional experiences in interaction with other external factor. The conclusion that "efficiently engaging, energy and interest investment in the learning process caused learners to learn better" was one of the most significant principles of language learning identified in a study by Bolitho et al (2003). Similarly, Maclntyre (2002) mentioned that students' level of involvement is based on the attachment experienced during the language learning process, playing in groups and with the teacher, and their own feelings in class and during teaching and learning can stimulate these feelings (Sansone & Thoman, 2005, Scherer, 2005. Hascher, 2008).

The fundamental concern of positive psychology is to pay thorough attention to building pleasant experiences in educational settings. That means that when learners are happy in the learning environment they will learn easily and more permanently (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009). The study of positive emotion in SLA in particular, is a potentially rich and powerful direction for future investigations (Gabryś-Barker & Gałajda, 2016; MacIntyre et al., 2016). Accordingly, enhancing EFL learners' positive emotions needs to be at the focus of research attention, as a tool to foster well-being in the field of second language acquisition.

2.2 Positive Psychology and Goal Setting

Our goals are what that we try to achieve and the object of an action (Lock, Shaw. Saari, & Latham, 1981). Common goals set by students in academic situations are increasing skills and knowledge, getting a high score and accomplishing the work. In fact, they recognize, control and follow through with their goals (Bandura, 1988; Lock & Latham, 1990). Furthermore goals are a positive force and they produce more investment in time and energy, greater persistence and concentration and the employment of strategies that make task performance easier (Locke & Latham, 1990). What that can promote our motivation determines our life goals. The strong link between goals and motivation is the reason most definitions of motivation include goals. As an example, motivation has been defined as "the mental process that boost understanding, direction and persistence of willful goal centered action" (Mitchell, 1982, p.81). The effect that goals have on motivation and behavior is affected by the quality of the goals. Also, goal setting has been shown to enhance success. For example it is said that by setting people well-designed goals to achieve, teachers can stimulate their motivation better than would be the case by simply telling them to do an activity without setting any goals (Locke & Bryan 1966; Bryan & Locke 1967; Locke & Latham, 2002). In educational settings clarified goals help close the gap between students 'present situation and a desirable outcome

(Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Many studies have shown that attainable goals motivate students to pursue, achieve and fulfill their ambitions. Certain educational goals set by teachers give learners a clear and exact image of what they should do and also help them focus their concentration as they attempt to achieve their goal (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

2.3 Positive Psychology and Self-regulating

Self-regulated learning is an effective kind of learning (Schraw, 2010). A self-regulated learner aims to evaluate his/her motivation, maintain positive emotion, and employ useful learning strategies and by these means of focusing on her/his behavior can succeed learning process. So a child with good self-regulation in learning achieves a high level of accomplishment and it is easier for him/her to experience positive emotions (Pintrich & Degroot, 1990; Zimmerman, 2002).

To decrease learning stress, creating a self-regulated attitude is essential. Studies showing this kind of learning is an effective key for successful learning. (Snyder, 2000; Snyder, Rand, & Seligman, 2002). As self-regulation results in the successful achievement of goals, the level of life satisfaction will be higher (Shoda, Mischel, & Peake; 1990; Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). Self-regulation creates an ability to form a positive ego and improves self-effectiveness and also it effects on different aspects of our life like happiness, health, life satisfaction and also learning; a higher level of well-being is based on high level of self-regulation (Cote, Gyurak, & Levenson, 2010) and more positive adaptation (O'Connor, Sanson, Hawkins, Toumboura et al., 2011). Pupil's confidence is improved by self-regulated and increases their happiness (Cho et al., 2008). Despite the importance of PP and its potential to make a change in students' Self-regulation and Goal setting, to the best of the author's knowledge, very few studies have examined how Pp can promote Goal Setting and Self-regulation specifically in EFL contexts.

Consequently, this article is the first—though not an exhaustive—attempt to identify this hidden effect particularly in Iran.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

In Lowry's (2003) definition, a population is the entire group of people or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate. The participants in the present quasi-experimental study were 20 (11 female and 9 male) intermediate EFL students at Positive English Language Institute in Iran. They were L1 speakers of Persian, between the ages of 19 and 34, and had learned English only through classroom instruction. In accordance with Dornyei's (2007) cluster sampling, the students were selected on language proficiency and were all at intermediate level. They were then distributed into two groups containing both male and female. During instruction, attempts were made to provide both groups with equal opportunities in terms of class time, the number of sessions, and materials used. The participants were. After receiving information about the aims and the main scope of the research, the data to be collected and their right to withdraw from the study at any time, all participants signed a consent form confirming their interest in taking part in the study. To meet the main requirement of experimental research and to ensure that the learners were homogeneous with respect to their English proficiency level and their GS and SL interests, the Erickson et al. (2015) Goal Setting and self-regulating Questionnaires were administered

as pretests.

3.2 Instrument

To assess the participants' level of goal setting and self-regulation, the Goal Setting questioner (GSQ) and Self-regulation Questionnaire (SRQ) by Erickson et al. (2015) were used. The first questionnaire consists of the eighteen closed-ended items and the second questionnaire consists of the twenty-two items that were rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from "not very like me" to "very like me". Additionally, the Cronbach Alpha reliability was used to measure the reliabilities of these two questionnaires which were .80. And.75 respectively, and thus, the questionnaires were deemed to be a reliable instrument for eliciting the intended data.

3.3 Procedure

This study was conducted in the Positive English language Institute, over ten sessions. In this study, positive psychology was the independent variable and goal setting and self-regulation were independent variables. The procedure consisted of the following four steps: 1) the proficiency pretest was administered to both groups, 2) the goal setting and self-regulation pretest was administered to both groups, 3) PP was integrated into experimental group classroom activities, raising students' awareness of their strengths and 4) the goal setting and self-regulation posttest was administered to both groups. In this study, the independent variable (positive psychology) is considered to have had a direct effect on the dependent variables (goal setting and self-regulation). The two classes were conducted by the same teacher who was one of the researchers in the present study. The course book, and the instructional materials, as well as the procedure were identical for the participants of the two groups. In both groups, about 60 minutes of the class time was devoted to working with the course book, and the rest (30 minutes) to watching CSBP clips. The teacher assisted the students to set attainable goals. At first the learners were encouraged to develop a good understanding of and feeling for their characteristics, skills and abilities focusing on their strengths and those psychological capacities that could be measured, developed, and effectively managed. They set their future goals based on their personal and professional strengths. Moreover, setting some short-term goals as positive daily habits, regularly doing which leads to students' self-regulation in both personal and educational life, such as getting up early by earlier sleeping time shifts or doing regular exercise both physically and mentally, like meditation and mindfulness. Also, many other self-mentoring factors have been reviewed as a result of measuring students' consistency to keep on doing them in 60 days and obtaining self-regulation toward their achievable goals.

4. Results

As stated above, the present study was conducted with the main goal of exploring the effect of positive psychology on EFL learners' goal setting and self-regulation. Consequently, a basic quantitative research design was adopted to collect and analyze the data. To identify whether a significant change occurred in the goal setting and self-regulation of the two

groups between the beginning and the end of the study, paired samples T-Test and independent samples T-Tests were used, with the alpha level set at .05. The results of the paired sample T-test analysis showed a strong difference in the mean scores for the pre-test (M1=3.29, SD1=0.53) and (M1=3.262, SD1=0.537) posttest (M2=4.14, SD2=0.25) and (M2=4.070, SD2, 0.303) of self-regulation and goal setting groups respectively. According to Table 4.1and 4.2 the level of self-regulation level in the pre-test had a mean of 3.29 and standard deviation of 0.53 and the level of self-regulation in the post-test had a mean of 4.14 and standard deviation of 0.25. The level of goal setting in pre-test had a mean of 3.262 and standard deviation of 0.537 and the level of goal setting in the post-test had a mean of 4.070 and standard deviation of 0.303.

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics of Self-regulation in Pre-test and Post-test

variables	Mean	Standard deviation
PRE-Self-regulation	3.29	0.53
POST-Self-regulation	4.14	0.25

Table 4.2. Descriptive Statistics of Goal setting in Pre-test and Post-test

variables	Mean	Standard deviation
PRE- GOAL setting	3.262	0.537
POST- GOAL setting	4.070	0.303

5. Discussion

The effectiveness of applying positive psychology to EFL learners' goal setting and self-regulation are evaluated in this paper. The first research question – to what extent psychology has a significant impact on EFL learners' achievable goal? – was answered in the affirmative. Based on results (table 4.2); the pair sample T-Test and the independent samples T-test in the pretest and the posttest, positive psychology is successful in helping EFL learners to understand, value and set their goals. Data analysis shows a practical recommendation on how Positive Psychology can help learners set their goals. In other words this study emphasizes learners' individual strengths and personal motivation as ways to set their goals. Every human being have some character strength and individual capacities (Peterson and Park 2009). Given that the task of PP is to care, trigger and develop existing strength not apply or establish new ones. In this study it is assumed that character is not a

fixed and carefully defined structure. PP shows that character is dynamic and specific to each individual. This study used an intervention that provides a way for students to set their future goals by understanding and effectively using their specific character strength.

The findings of this study agrees with others that show goals setting is an essential strategy related to different positive psychology results such as total psychological modification, positive emotion, social confidence, calm behavior and life satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larson& Griffin, 1985; Leary& MacDonald, 2003). Whether there is helpful role for positive attachment, a topic not completely studied in SLA, might provide a path of enquiry for future research (Maclntyre & Mercer, 2014). These results justify the growing interest of using positive psychology in SLA (Gabry Barker & Galajda, 2016; Maclntyre et al., 2016)

The second research question was: to what extent psychology   has a significant impact on EFL learners' self-regulation?

Based on the results (table 4.1) positive psychology is helpful and self-regulation level of

Learners'. Based on the paired samples t-test and the independent samples t-test in the pre-test and post-test, self-regulation increased. This paper agrees with   Bouffard et al, 1995, which proved learning goals has positive effect on educator's self-regulation and similarly. Supported the (Pintrich & Degroot, 1990) findings that confirmed, good self-regulation in learning and educational setting attains a high level of achievement accompany with experiencing positive emotions. Moreover the result is in line with Yun, Y., & Choi, J. (2018).   Study that examined the influence of self-regulated learning upon children's emotional well-being.

6. Conclusion

As indicated earlier, the present study set out to investigate the impact of implementing Positive psychology in EFL classes on students' Goal setting and Self-Regulation abilities. The results indicated the positive had significant impact of PP on GS and SL. In other words, the integration of PP in EFL classes tends to foster EFL students' GS and SL. It can be plausibly argued that positive emotions, considered as the outcome of character strength, expand learners' strengths and awareness to build future goals and reach a greater degree of self-regulation. Positive emotions lead to positive outcomes, a process that contributes directly to personal and educational goal growth. In other words, positive psychology leads to a sense of purpose and a meaningful life (Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008). Possessing conviction that life is meaningful has been shown to be associated with satisfaction, self-realization, and feelings of fulfillment (Steger et al., 2008). We realized that because the learners felt good about themselve when they reached a satisfying level of self-regulation and ability to use of their strengths, they became intrinsically motivated to set their own personal and educational goals, and so were likely to become very successful learners. Learning was observed to increase as the motivation of the students increased. Moreover, these students found the confidence in their own ability to achieve their goals, and believed that it was probable that they would reach those goals with sufficient effort.

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