



## THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EGO IDENTITY, GOAL ORIENTATION AND AGE AMONG EFL LEARNERS

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### Abstract:

This study particularly aimed at investigating the relationships of ego identity, goal orientation and age of the students among EFL university students. Ego identity is the core element through psychological issues and it sets social and cognitive structure of individuality. Goal orientation is a sign of personal issue and considered as a kind of motivation that guides the learners to their future actions. Four universities were randomly sampled. Participants were 217 students of whom 158 were females and 59 were males. The students responded to scale of the EOM-EIS and AGQ. SPSS was run, using Cronbach's alpha and Pearson correlation coefficient were applied. The results revealed all four subscales of ego identity except for identity-foreclosure, had a significant relationship with total goal orientation and age of the students. The results also demonstrated that total goal orientation had a significant relationship with age of the learners. Consequently, ego identity, and goal orientation are influential in academic achievement of the students. The current study revealed that identity achievement plays an important role in the locus of identity formation and it could be more crucial in their academic courses than the other learners who were more concerned with the other subscales of ego identity. Students who were more inclined to mastery goals were more oriented to progress

**Keywords:** ego identity; goal orientation; age

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## 1. Introduction

Educational psychology deals with how students learn in different educational settings. It is defined that educational psychology as a branch of psychology which studies, theories, and problems in education, including the application of learning theory to classroom teaching and learning, curriculum development, testing, evaluation and teacher education (Richard & Schmidt, 2002). According to Brown (2003), furthermore, considering that, academic achievement and training factors are the most substantial and challenging concepts in educational psychology, applying mental characteristics and differences in a student's life experiences are so considerable as well. As academic achievement and training factors are affected by mental characteristics, these factors have become paramount topics in educational psychology. Similarly, it has described educational psychology as "*the application of psychology to education by focusing on the development of the education, application of theories, principles of learning and instruction that can enhance lifelong learning*" (Kaplan, 1999, p.317). Church (2001), propounded, since 1960s recently, research has been done on psychology and foreign language learning. In this regard, language learners have become very important for educational psychologists and researchers and also it should be considered as a considerable factor.

Besides, there are conspicuous variables that should be taken into account and to be elaborated. One of the respective variables is ego identity. Ego identity is one of the most impressive and exceptional element through psychological factors. According to Vande Walle (1997), language is the core of ego identity. Therefore, the mutual relationship between language and language learning appears to be of utmost importance. According to Berzonsky (1989), however, in recent educational psychology literature a few specific factors have been studied in some depth. Ego identity development is such a factor. According to Streimatter (1993), identity development and identity processing styles have been demonstrated to have an impact on academic achievement, it seems that in talking on "self", or sometimes, "ego" a large number of different contributing factors need to be taken into account to give a more elucidating shape of the issue and related studies have been conducted by various scholars in psychology and the other areas of humanities.

According to Kaplan (1997), goal orientation is the construct originality in the educational literature suggests that individuals hold either a learning or performance orientation towards tasks. According to Meece (1990), a learning orientation is characterized by a desire to increase one's competence by developing new skills and mastering new situation. In contrast, performance orientation reflects a desire to demonstrate one's competence to others and to be positively evaluated by others. It is claimed that goals provide a framework which directs individual's cognition, affect and

behavior and it is considered as a major element in motivational research (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). According to Ames (1992), goal-orientation theory interprets the purpose of individual in their own achievement behavior. Moreover, it is defined as the goals which motivate students in educational settings. In other words, achievement goals means as a pattern of beliefs that presents the different ways of approaching, engaging and responding to success situations. In the past three decades, a number of different conceptual models of achievement goals have been developed and applied. Achievement goal theory or goal orientation theory has also received a good deal of attention and the different goal orientations have often been studied in relation to achievement outcomes (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). According to Maehr (1989), academic goals are defined as motivation, academic in nature that guides student's behavior in academic or classroom settings and in this domain, students have distinctive orientations toward certain types of goals.

### **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the present study is to investigate:

- Is there any relationship between ego identity and goal orientation of EFL learners?
- Is there any relationship between ego identity and age of the EFL learners?
- Is there any relationship between goal orientation and age of the EFL learners?

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Participants**

The participants of the present study comprised 217 university students who have B.A and M.A. in English literature, English language teaching and English translation at Imam Reza, Khayam, Tabaran and Islamic Azad Universities, Iran in November 2015. Out of 217 participants, 158 students were female and 59 students were male. Their age ranged between 18 and 39 with different language proficiency in the academic year of 2015-2016. The participant will be sampled randomly through the present research. The participants were fresher, sophomore, junior and senior and the rest of the participants were graduated. All of the subjects in the current study were volunteers and it was prevented to force students to take part, in addition the purpose of the study was told for those who were volunteers.

### **2.2 Instruments**

Three instruments are employed in the process of data collection for the present study the related instruments used, are as follows:

1. Identity Achievement status scale of the EOM-EIS (Bennion & Adams, 1986).
2. Achievement Goal Orientation Questionnaire (Elliot & Church, 1997)

### **2.2.1 Identity Achievement Scale of EOM-EIS 2.2.1**

Identity measure used in this study, the EOM-EIS, stands for Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status. Last version of this questionnaire was developed by Adams and Bennion. It contains 64 items which measures four areas of identity crisis subsets based on Marcia (1980) are as following:

- Identity-Achievement: individuals have considered occupational choices through a crisis period.
- Identity-Moratorium: individuals are attempting some compromise among parental wishes, society's demand, and their own capabilities and they are still in crisis period and unable to make a commitment.
- Identity-Foreclosure: individuals have made a commitment without experiencing a crisis and they are becoming what others have intended for them.
- Identity-Diffusion: individuals lack commitment; they may or may not have experienced a crisis period, they have not decided upon an occupation nor they have not concerned about it.

All items were answered using a 5-point Likert-type scale format ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The reliability and validity of the ego identity status questionnaire had been proven in various studies. Adams et al. following various studies had been reported satisfactory validity and reliability coefficients respectively and the reported reliability coefficient in the present study using Cronbach's alpha as .83 for identity diffusion, 0.77 for identity foreclosure, .74 for identity moratorium, and .81 for achievement identity in the present study.

### **2.2.2 Achievement Goal Orientation Questionnaire (AGQ)**

Achievement goal orientation questionnaire developed in the Persian version with reference to Elliot and Church (1997). It was used to measure three achievement goals:

- Mastery: It refers to deep learning, investing efforts and approaching challenges.
- Performance Approach: is concerned with being judicious and one shows evidence of ability by being successful, by outperforming others, or by achieving success with little effort.
- Performance Avoidance: Performance-avoidant goals are construed as fundamentally an avoidance form of motivation grounded in fear of failure and focused on the possibility of a negative outcome.

The AGQ consist of 18 items, with 6 items used to compute a total score for each major achievement goal factor. A 7-point Likert-type scale was used in the respective

questionnaire ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reported reliability alphas for the measures of mastery, performance-approach and performance-avoidance achievement goals were .78, .93 and .77 respectively in the present study.

### **2.3 Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection procedure started in November 2015 and the sample of participants with different degree and various proficiency levels are identified in four universities of Mashhad as Khayam, Tabaran, Imam Reza and Azad University. As the researcher determined to select 217 students randomly, it was impossible to distribute questionnaire at the same time and at one place, so this process was done through different sessions in different universities. In addition, the permission of professors for taking time to distribute questionnaires was mandatory. After identifying the sample of participants, at the first step they were asked to complete Identity Achievement Scale (identity achievement, identity moratorium, identity diffusion, and identity foreclosure) at home, as the numbers of the items contained 64 questions with a 5-point Likert-type scale, so it would be time-consuming for students at the first glance. After explanation about the former scale to take it home, it was the time to give student the latter scale named Achievement Goal Orientation (mastery, performance approach, performance avoidance) contains 18 items with a 7-point Likert-type scale. So the current data was given to the students in order to complete it appropriately at the exact given time. The achievement goal orientation questionnaire was given to learners 20 minutes before the class stated in order not to disturb the class. And a straightforward instruction regarding what the respondents should do and brief information about the purpose of the questionnaire and its scope was provided in their native language (i.e. Persian). They were also given an opportunity to ask questions and to offer suggestions.

### **2.4 Data Analysis Procedure**

The obtained scores were transformed into SPSS. For examining the reliability indices of three scales, Cronbach's alpha was utilized. To provide detailed information that describes the survey responses, the descriptive statistics for all scales are presented. To determine the relationship among variables under study and age, Pearson correlation coefficient was employed.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study examined the relationship between ego identity and achievement goal-orientation among EFL learners. This research is bound to realize the effect of two

individual variables and their components that influence on the part of learners. Moreover, the possible effects of age on two variables (ego identity and achievement goal orientation) were explored. This part provides detailed results of the data analyses. First, the descriptive statistics for all scales used in the study are presented. Descriptive statistics provide detailed information that describes the survey responses. Then, each research question is outlined according to the data analysis procedure and the results of the analyses. Tables provide detailed descriptions of the findings.

### 3.2 Descriptive Statistics

Number of participants, minimum and maximum scores, means and standard deviations of each of the scales used in the study are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1, indicates descriptive statistics of EFL learners' achievement goal-orientation and its subscales; mastery goal, performance-approach goal, and performance-avoidance goal. In addition, Table 2, displays descriptive statistics of the comprising factors of EFL students' ego identity, in other words, identity-achievement, identity-moratorium, identity-foreclosure and identity-diffusion.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics of EFL Learners' Achievement Goal-Orientation and Its Subscales; Mastery Goal, Performance-Approach Goal, and Performance-Avoidance Goal

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>GO Total</b>	217	32.00	108.00	67.44	14.23
<b>MG</b>	217	14.00	42.00	28.43	3.78
<b>PAP</b>	217	12.00	38.00	25.36	4.98
<b>PAV</b>	217	6.00	28.00	18.56	7.84
Valid N (listwise)	217				

Note: Go= Achievement Goal-Orientation, MG = Mastery Goal, PAP= Performance-Approach Goal, PAV= Performance-Avoidance Goal

As it can be seen, number of participants in the present study is 217. The possible range of score for achievement goal-orientation is between 18 and 126 and for its subscales is between 6 and 42. As table 4.1 indicates, the lowest minimum score of the subscales of learners' achievement goal-orientation is related to Performance-Avoidance Goal (6.00) and highest minimum is related to Mastery Goal (14.00). Besides, the lowest maximum is related to Performance-Avoidance Goal (28.00) and highest maximum is related to Mastery Goal (42.00). Moreover, among three subscales of learners' achievement goal-orientation, the highest mean score is related to Mastery Goal (28.43) and the lowest mean score is related to Performance-Avoidance Goal (18.56).

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics of the Comprising Factors of EFL Learners' Ego Identity; Identity-Achievement, Identity-Moratorium, Identity-Foreclosure and Identity-Diffusion

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>IA</b>	217	24.00	73.00	54.49	7.78
<b>IM</b>	217	20.00	70.00	48.33	5.62
<b>IF</b>	217	16.00	42.00	21.05	4.41
<b>ID</b>	217	17.00	42.00	20.12	3.13
Valid N (listwise)	217				

Note: IA= Identity-Achievement, IM = Identity-Moratorium, IF = Identity-Foreclosure, ID = Identity-Diffusion

The possible range of score for each subscale of learners' ego identity is between 16 and 80. As it can be seen in table 4.2, the lowest minimum score of the subscales of learners' ego identity is related to Identity-Foreclosure (16.00) and highest minimum is related to Identity-Achievement (24.00). Besides, the lowest maximum is related to Identity-Foreclosure and Identity-Diffusion (42) and highest maximum is related to Identity-Achievement (73.00). Moreover, among four subscales of learners' ego identity, the highest mean score is related to Identity-Achievement (54.49) and the lowest mean score is related to Identity-Diffusion (20.12).

### 3.2 Research Questions and Findings

Q1: Is there any significant relationship between ego identity and achievement goal-orientation of EFL learners?

H01: There is not any significant relationship between ego identity and achievement goal-orientation of EFL learners.

Q2: Is there any significant relationship between EFL learner's ego identity and their age?

H02: There is not any significant relationship between EFL learner's ego identity and their age.

Q3: Is there any significant relationship between EFL learner's achievement goal-orientation and their age?

H03: There is not any significant relationship between EFL learner's achievement goal-orientation and their age.

To answer question 1, which seeks to explore the possible association between ego identity and achievement goal-orientation, SPSS was run. Table 3 indicated the results of correlation coefficient.

**Table 3:** The Results of Correlation between ego identity and achievement goal orientation of EFL learners

	1.IA	2.IM	3.IF	4.ID	5.GO	6.MG	7.PAP	8.PAV
1.IA	1							
2.IM	.21	1						
3.IF	.17	.23	1					
4.ID	.11	.21	.14	1				
5.GO	.53**	.29*	.14	-.47**	1			
6.MG	.69**	.24	-.33*	-.65**	.59**	1		
7.PAP	.34*	.33*	.12	-.36**	.41**	.38**	1	
8.PAV	.21	.13	.28*	.12	.37**	.21	.19	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01

\*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05

From table 3, it can be concluded that among four subscales of ego identity (Identity-Achievement, Identity-Moratorium, Identity-Foreclosure, and Identity-Diffusion), identity-achievement has the highest relationship ( $r = .53, p = .000$ ) and identity-foreclosure has the lowest relationship ( $r = .14, p = .211$ ) with total achievement goal orientation. In addition, the results of correlation coefficient among mastery goal and subscales of ego identity shows that mastery goal has the highest relationship with identity-achievement ( $r = .69, p = .000$ ) and it has the lowest relationship with identity-moratorium ( $r = .24, p = .089$ ). Moreover, two negative relationships are found between mastery goal and identity-foreclosure ( $r = -.33, p = .026$ ), and identity-diffusion ( $r = -.65, p = .000$ ). Besides, the results of correlation coefficient among performance-approach goal and subscales of ego identity shows that performance-approach goal has the highest relationship with Identity-Diffusion ( $r = -.36, p = .004$ ) which is a negative correlation and it has the lowest relationship with identity-foreclosure ( $r = .12, p = .128$ ). Lastly, the results of correlation coefficient among performance-avoidance goal and subscales of ego identity shows that performance-avoidance goal has the highest relationship with



identity-foreclosure ( $r= .28, p=.031$ ) which is the only significant correlation and it has the lowest relationship with Identity-Diffusion ( $r= .12, p=.215$ ).

To answer question 2, which seeks to explore the possible association between ego identity and age, SPSS was run. Table 4 indicated the results of correlation coefficient.

**Table 4:** The Results of Correlation between ego identity and age

	1.IA	2.IM	3.IF	4.ID	5.AGE
1.IA	1				
2.IM	.21	1			
3.IF	.17	.23	1		
4.ID	.11	.21	.14	1	
5.AGE	.41**	.31**	.11	-.34**	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01

\*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05

As table 4 indicates, among four subscales of ego identity (Identity-Achievement, Identity-Moratorium, Identity-Foreclosure, and Identity-Diffusion) Identity-Achievement indicates the highest relationship ( $r= .41, p=.007$ ) and Identity-Foreclosure shows the lowest relationship ( $r= .11, p=.143$ ) with age. Moreover, after Identity-Achievement, it is Identity-Moratorium that shows high and significant relationship ( $r= .31, p=.021$ ) with age, furthermore, the table shows a weak negative and significant relationship is seen between age and Identity-Diffusion ( $r= -.34, p=.009$ ). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

To answer question 3, which seeks to explore the possible association between achievement goal orientation and age, SPSS was run. Table 5, indicated the results of correlation coefficient.

**Table 5:** The Results of Correlation between achievement goal-orientation and age

	1.GO	2.MG	3.PAP	4.PAV	5.AGE
1.GO	1				
2.MG	.59**	1			
3.PAP	.41**	.38**	1		
4.PAV	.37**	.21	.19	1	
5.AGE	.39**	.33**	.21*	.13	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01

\*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05

As the table indicates there is a positive and significant relationship between total achievement goal-orientation (GO) and age ( $r = .39, p = .002$ ). In addition, among three subscales of achievement goal-orientation mastery goal indicates the highest relationship ( $r = .33, p = .007$ ) and performance-avoidance goal shows the lowest relationship with age ( $r = .13, p = .098$ ) with age. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

#### 4. Discussions and Conclusions

The results our analysis indicated that a relationship exists between student's ego identity status and types of goals students will adopt. Findings show that mastery goal has the highest relationship with identity-achievement and it has the lowest relationship with identity-moratorium (i.e., these persons are facing an identity crisis and struggle to make commitment). According to Berzonsky (1989), identity achievement and mastery, goals have very close relationship with each other as both of the variables are looking for to benefit from challenging and elusive decisions in their life have related suitable strategies for coming true of their goals and they usually have differentiated character. In other words, they are able to separate themselves from unresolved emotional attachments. Moreover, two negative relationships are found between mastery goal and identity-foreclosure, and also mastery goal and identity-diffusion (i.e., not having stable approach and sampling smorgasbord approach through ideological issues). As features of mastery goal is so different from identity diffusion and identity foreclosure, the obtained result is reasonable. In order to confirm

the result, according to Bowen, foreclosed students are considered as undifferentiated characters. It means that they tend to remain fused in their relationships with their parents and significant peers. Besides, the results demonstrated that performance-approach goal has the highest and negative relationship with identity-diffusion and it has the lowest relationship with identity-foreclosure. Eventually, the findings determined that performance-avoidance goal has the highest and significant relationship with identity-foreclosure and it has the lowest relationship with identity-diffusion. This finding is supported by (Kaplan & Flum, 2010). According by Bandura (1993), goals are the criterion for judging one's ability, so learners with high self-efficacy adopt performance approach to demonstrate ability to their significant others. Students in foreclosure academic identity status with low self-efficacy adopt avoidance goal to hide their perceived lack of ability and looking idiot.

The results indicate that identity-achievement demonstrated the highest relationship with age and identity-foreclosure shows the lowest relationship with age. Moreover, a weak negative and significant relationship is seen between age and identity-diffusion. Like previous question, there are a few researches done through this domain related to the relationships of ego identity and age of the learners. Therefore, the researcher for clarification of the issue has provided evidential explanations. The present study are supported by (Adams, 1996) which demonstrated that those participants who were in adolescent time (12-18) exhibited higher identity diffusion and those who were at first years of early adulthood (19-25) exhibited higher identity foreclosure, in addition the participants who were in middle years of early adulthood (26-35) exhibited higher identity moratorium, furthermore, those who were in the later years of early adulthood (36-39) have demonstrated higher identity achievement.

According to Marcia (1993), one of the most important and positive aspects of ego identity is connected with identity achievement. Identity achievement is so crucial during life spans of each person especially during adulthood, identity achieved individuals had made important psychological identity-defining commitment as the time when individual make significant decisions through their life and they are pursuing self-chosen occupation and ideological goals as their age more increases. Identity achievement individuals are more field-independent. The second approximately significant and positive aspect of ego identity is related to identity moratorium, one person in this phase, are struggling with occupational or ideological issues, it means that they are tapped into crisis but achievement in this point is challenging so these persons experienced important challenging events of the life. Identity moratorium individuals are more reflective. The third relatively negative aspect of ego identity status is identity foreclosure. Marcia found that foreclosed students were more liable to change their evaluations of themselves, both positively

and negatively. All foreclosed learners had delivered maximum shock and doubt willing to do complemented task again. The fourth most negative aspect of ego identity status is identity diffusion. Identity diffusion persons are found lowest on the autonomy scale and highest on need for social approval.

The current results indicate that mastery goal has shown the highest relationship with age, performance-avoidance goal shows the lowest relationship with age, and performance approach goal has moderate relationship with age. Therefore, the persons who are in the first years of the early adulthood have inclined to performance avoidance goals and the persons who are in the middle years of the early adulthood have oriented to performance approach goal and the persons who were at the late years of the early adulthood have inclined to mastery goals, so the results is consistent to the present study. To the knowledge of the researcher two studies, the results are conflicting compared with the present study (Meece & Glienke, 2006). It was found that older learners were more likely to be performance oriented than mastery oriented. But the aim of the study is to prove that mastery goals of learners will be augmenting along with age increasing than performance goals. Learners with mastery goals are interested in and intrinsically motivated to learn course material and they exhibit more self-regulated learning and behavior, in addition they use learning strategies. On the contrary, learners with performance goal interpret failure as a sign of low ability, moreover views errors as a sign of incompetence (Locke & Latham, 1994).

The analysis indicated that identity foreclosure has a positive relationship with performance avoidant and negative relationship with mastery goals. It is interpreted that students who are in academic identity foreclosure seek approval from parents and friends and they are inclined to performance avoidant goals. So as the self-esteem of the foreclosed students is low, mastery goals are so complicated process for them. As discussed earlier, the academically diffused students demonstrated little educational involvement and suffer from lack of autonomy. The current analysis revealed that diffused academic identity status has negative relationship with performance approach goals and mastery goals. In the context of the current study, mastery goals and performance approach goals set as a challenging and demanding process. Moreover, it is found that there is high and positive relationship between mastery goals and identity achievement. It can be interpreted that students who are in academic identity achievement are more committed to learning or task goals. So learners who are mastery-oriented use more learning strategies that offered challenge and have more positive view about their class. Lastly, identity moratorium learners with active exploration led to achievement has positive relationship with performance approach goals; the students who are motivated to look good.

Among four subscales of ego identity status, identity achievement and identity moratorium had positive and significant relationships with age. Learners with identity achievement who have cognitive capacities are in the late years of the early adulthood and are oldest learners and learners with identity moratorium who are struggling with ideological issues are younger than identity achievement students. Furthermore, a negative and significant relationship is seen between identity diffusion and age. It means that with high degrees of identity diffusion, the level of the learner's age is getting lower. So learners with identity diffusions who have no ideological direction are the youngest learners. The relationship between achievement goal orientation and age were examined, mastery goals and performance approach goal had significant relationships with age. The results demonstrated that learners with mastery goal who focus on the development of self-referenced competence are in the late years of the early adulthood and are the oldest people. Moreover, individuals with performance approach goal who focused on the attainment of favorable judgments of normative competence are in the middle years of the early adulthood, in addition, persons who focused on avoiding unfavorable judgments of normative competence are in the first years of the early adulthood, and are the youngest people.

## **5. Pedagogical Implications**

The results and finding of the present study are demonstrated, therefore, based on the result and literature on the research, considering that ego identity is influential in educational psychology, multifarious implications employed. Ego identity must be perceived by individual and also it must be recognized and confirmed by the others. Erikson (1968), pointed out that the process of establishing an identity would involve assimilating into coherent whole one's past experiences, ongoing personal changes, society's demand and expectation for one's life. Grotevant (1987), discusses a variety of individual and contextual factors that affect identity formation. They elaborate the extent and success of identity formation depends on personality factors such as self-esteem, flexibility and tendency to monitor one's behavior. As above-mentioned expressions, implications for various audiences are implemented, so these implications can be considered for EFL teachers, curriculum designers and learners in order to how increase and reinforce their skills in social context.

### **5.1 Implications for Teachers' and Learners' Identity**

According to Wright (2011), in most foreign language learning environments, it is teachers who have the most control over what gets practiced, and how such practice is realized. Further, teachers act as role models and guides for their students, helping to

bridge the foreign with the familiar in their lessons. Given this fact, EFL teacher sociocultural identity is an important issue that deserves greater attention in the literature.

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