

**ACHIEVEMENT GOALS TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNING: THE CASE OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS OF THE
FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE, UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA**

D.M.D.S. Wickramasingha* and S. Kumar

*Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
dinithiwickramasingha@yahoo.com

In the Sri Lankan learning context, regional languages dominate while English acts as a second language. Although improving student English competencies has received much attention in primary and secondary school curricula, there is a general dissatisfaction with student skills in English. This dissatisfaction with student competence in English extends to university education as well. While learning English may be viewed by teachers and parents as the primary objective of students who attend English classes, students themselves might have other goals or purposes of participating in them. Objectives of this study were to explore the goals students report towards English language learning and examines the relationship between their achievement goals and learner characteristics and students' interest to learn English. Achievement goals reflect the reason why individuals engage in achievement related behavior. Much of the research on achievement goals focus on a tripartite model that identified three academic reasons as mastery, performance approach and performance avoidance for engaging in achievement contexts. Yet, other research has suggested that work avoidance goals, which highlight a desire to disengage, and social goals may play an important role in achievement contexts. Considering the difficulties in motivating university students to engage in English learning, it is important to understand the reasons they subscribe to learning English.

Sixty first-year undergraduates aged 22-24 years from the Faculty of Agriculture; University of Peradeniya, participated in the study. Stratified Random Sampling, in which First year marks for English and gender were used to form strata, was used to select participants. Conversational interviews were used to identify goals held by students. A structured questionnaire was used to measure gender, learner characteristics and interest to learn English. Conversational interview responses were analyzed to find frequencies of each achievement goal adopted by students. Both mastery and social affiliation goals were the most frequently adopted goals by students. Binary logistic regression was used to examine the role of perceived English language ability, attitude toward English language, gender and willingness to take risk on each achievement goal. Linear regression analysis was run to examine effect of each goal on interest in learning English, where interest was conceptualized to consist of the five types; personal interest, situational interest, meaningfulness, interest due to involvement, and interest due to group work.

Results indicated that social goals play a substantial role in students' reasons for engaging in English learning. However, the number of students who have social goals suggested that the tripartite model is insufficient to capture the nature of goals that motivate students to learn English. Further, these goals were found to predict students' interest in learning English. The findings suggest that when devising curricula and motivating students, these social reasons for attending and learning English should be addressed in a manner that would encourage students to engage with English learning more effectively. Also this study may provide a means through which students could be better motivated to participate in English learning activities.