SUSTAINING MOTIVATION: SELF-DIRECTED LEARNERS' STORIES

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Abstract

As part of a four-year longitudinal study, the researchers investigate how learners of English at a university in Japan sustain their motivation to engage in self-directed study outside of class. Drawing on the self-regulation of motivation (SRM) model (Sansone, 2009; Sansone & Thoman, 2005) interview data collected in the first two years are analysed according to whether the participants engage in goals defined motivation, experience defined motivation, or a combination of the two. This paper will present case studies of three learners and show how motivation and self-regulation have developed from year 1 to year 2.

Keywords: Self-directed learning, learner autonomy, second language learning, self-access learning, motivation, interest, goals, self-regulation

1 Introduction

The focus of this paper is on how learners sustain and regulate their motivation to continue directing their own learning outside of class. The authors present some results from the first two years of a longitudinal study which will follow nine learners through their four year undergraduate degree and beyond. Although regulation of motivation is important for language learning in general, it is particularly crucial for independent language learners where students are either studying language by distance or outside the classroom, for example in a self-access centre (Hurd, 2008). There have been relatively few studies of motivation in such learners, and further research in settings that can be described as examples of 'learning beyond the classroom' is needed (Benson & Reinders, 2011).

The purpose of the overall study is to see how language learners working outside the classroom are able to maintain their motivation over time. In the first year of the study (McLoughlin & Mynard, 2015), the importance of *interest* became clear. Regulating their

levels of engagement and interest was a key factor in helping learners maintain their motivation. In the present paper the authors describe findings from interviews with the participants in their first two years. As in the first part of the study, the self-regulation of motivation (SRM) model (Sansone, 2009; Sansone & Thoman, 2005) is again used as the theoretical framework. The purpose of this segment of the research is to see whether the participants' self-regulation motivation has changed and to investigate any interesting patterns or occurrences in more detail. Whereas in the first paper, patterns could be observed among the 89 participants, in this phase of the study, there are only nine participants so it is more appropriate to approach the research as a multiple case study. Data for all nine participants will be shared for year 1 of the project, and data for three of the participants will be discussed related to year 2 of the project.

1.1 Defining motivation

As reported in McLoughlin & Mynard (2015), there are different ways in which self-directed learners maintain their motivation. These ways are related to the different kinds of motivation and consequent behaviours that individuals display. *Goals-defined* motivation (Sansone, 2009) is extrinsic motivation oriented towards the achievement of particular goals and includes behaviours such as setting goals, choosing appropriate strategies to meet those goals, and evaluating progress towards those goals (Sansone & Thoman, 2005). Individuals can have *target goals*, which reflect the *what* of activity engagement (completion of task, high scores in a test) and *purpose goals*, which reflect the *why* (to achieve, to enjoy) (Sansone, 2009). Many theories of motivation have tended to focus on goals-defined motivation (Hidi, Renninger, & Krapp, 2004). However, the ability to persist with learning may depend not only on goals-defined motivation, but also on *experience-defined* motivation (Sansone, 2009; Sansone, Smith, Thoman, & MacNamara, 2012). This is motivation that arises from enjoying and being interested in the experience of learning itself. McLoughlin & Mynard (2015) found that interest played an important role in helping some learners maintain their motivation to continue a course of self-directed learning.

Interest is a source of intrinsic motivation: it causes individuals to choose and initiate an activity, persist in that activity, and reengage in the same (or a similar) activity in the future (Sansone et al., 2012). Interest enhances motivation and performance: interested learners study more, read more deeply, persist longer, remember more, and get higher grades (Silvia, 2008). Interest is more fundamental to self-regulation than was previously recognized. There is an interplay between goal-striving behaviours and interest. For example, interest will be higher if activities are perceived as being 'goal-congruent'; it will also be higher if individuals value their goals and are confident of attaining them (Sansone & Thoman, 2005). If individuals already have strong extrinsic motivation, interest may be superfluous; whereas if individuals do something out of intrinsic interest, then adding an external goal can decrease interest (Sansone & Thoman, 2005).

Though short-term goals may be enough to initiate learning behaviour, "when goals are no longer firm or require choices among multiple options", "interest may be necessary for goal-directed action to continue" (Hidi & Ainley, 2009, p. 83). Over the longer term, students may need to employ strategies that enhance motivation, as well as ones that focus on maintaining progress toward goals (Sansone et al., 2012). According to Sansone et al. (2012), for sustained long-term engagement to occur, both goals-defined and experience-defined motivation are necessary. The self-regulation of motivation (SRM) model proposed by Sansone and Thoman (2005) aims to integrate goals-defined and experience-defined motivations within the one self-regulatory process.

In the SRM model, as part of the self-regulation process, learners can use strategies that help them regulate both their goals-defined motivation and experience-defined motivation (Sansone, 2009). For example, they can regulate goals-defined motivation by employing strategies that enhance their motivation to reach a goal. In addition, learners can use strategies to regulate their experience-defined motivation. Learners can make activities more interesting by changing how they perform them so that performance of the task becomes more interesting (Sansone & Thoman, 2005). While strategies that make learning more interesting may have the negative effect of diverting learners from their goal and lowering performance, in the long run they may lead to greater persistence and ultimately improved performance (Sansone, Weir, Harpster, & Morgan, 1992; Sansone, Wiebe, & Morgan, 1999).

Researchers distinguish between two types of interest: *situational interest* and *individual interest* (Hidi, 1990). Situational interest refers to the psychological state that is triggered by a specific stimulus (Ainley, Hidi, & Berndorff, 2002). Individual interest refers to one's relatively enduring predisposition to reengage with particular content(s) (Hidi et al., 2004), and is "associated with a psychological state of positive affect and persistence" (Ainley et al., 2002, p. 545). How do "momentary experiences of interest" (Sansone & Thoman, 2005, p. 177) lead to individual interests? In other words, how do traits come from states (Silvia, 2001)? The experience of situational interest sparks exploration, which can lead to a broadening of experience and an increase in knowledge about the object of interest (Fredrickson, 1998). This may lead to an increase in knowledge, which in turn may lead to an increase in perceived value, thus motivating further learning.

Hidi & Ainley (2009) propose that individuals go through phases of interest development, from situational interest to individual interest. Phases 1 and 2 are situational interest, the first being *triggered situational interest* and the second being *maintained situational interest*. In both these phases, interest has to externally supported, and can be developed through working with others (Hidi & Ainley, 2009). Phases 3 and 4 are *emergent individual interest* and *well-developed individual interest*. Interest becomes more self-generated, and there is evidence of greater self-regulation and self-reflection (Hidi & Ainley, 2009).

2 Context
2.1 Self-access learning

The context of the study is the Self-Access Learning Centre ("The SALC") at a small private university in Japan specialising in languages and cultures. The purpose of the SALC is to provide space, facilities, materials and support for both English language study and English language use. There are various forms of support available to students including a language advising service provided by a team of professional learning advisors (LAs). An LA is a trained language teacher who works with students outside the classroom in the SALC. Whereas the classroom teacher normally has the primary responsibility to ensure that the students taking the course achieve curriculum goals, the LA can help the learner to identify and pursue personally relevant learning opportunities. To further support students and prepare them for self-study outside the classroom, the SALC has offered self-directed learning "modules" since 2003. The Effective Learning Modules (ELM) are eight week self-paced courses designed to help students to learn about being a self-directed learning, set language-related goals, and implement a course of study with support from an LA. ELM 1 is the introductory module which contains four input units before learners design and implement their own plans for four weeks. ELM 2 begins with learners designing their own plans and implementing them for the entire eight weeks. The modules were originally incentivised with points (maximum 10) that were added onto a student's final class grade. The points incentive ceased in 2015, but modules continue to be offered as usual without any kind of external incentive. Without points, sign ups for the modules remain high (around 300 students per year), but only students with high levels of motivation or awareness of how to self regulate are likely to complete the entire eight weeks. Understanding these self-regulatory processes will help with decision making about the form future modules could take and the kind of support needed by learners.

3 The Study

As the research will span four or more years and papers will be published at key stages, a brief overview of the project is provided in Table 1 in order to situate the research in the present paper (phase 2 in years 1 and 2).

Table 1. Overview of the Overall Research Project

Phase 1	Phase 2			
April 2014 to March 2015	***November 2014 to January 2015** **(year 1)**	***November 2015 to January 2016** **(year 2)**	**November 2016 to January 2017** **(year 3)**	**November 2017 to January 2018** **(year 4)**

Analysis of 89 weekly reflective journals in ELM 1 and ELM 2.	Interviews with nine participant volunteers who completed ELM 1 and were taking ELM 2.	Interviews with six of the original nine participants.	Interviews with as many of the original nine participants as possible.	Interviews with as many of the original nine participants as possible.

<div align="center">* The present research</div>

The research question for phase 2 is: How did the learners generate and maintain motivation for learning English? This question is being investigated through semi-structured interviews held near the end of each academic year, a process which will continue for four years.

3.1 Participants

In year 1 there were nine participants, three males and six females. All of them completed two modules in their first year and volunteered to be interviewed each year. All but one of the participants was Japanese and one was Chinese.

3.2 Methods

Each interview was conducted in English by one of the researchers (the same researcher for all of the interviews in the study) and lasted around 30 minutes. Each participant's interview transcript was analysed through the lens of the SRM model (Sansone, 2009; Sansone & Thoman, 2005), which emphasizes both goals-defined motivation and experience-defined motivation. The recording and transcript was analysed by the two researchers discussing it together and identifying elements of the model which best fitted the way in which the participants described their motivation and self-regulatory behaviours.

4 Phase 2, Year 1
4.1 Results

The SRM model was an appropriate tool to use for the analysis as clear patterns were found in terms of whether participants had experience-defined, goals-defined motivation, or a combination of both. A summary of the analysis of the interviews conducted in year 1 is presented in Table 2.

<div align="center">**Table 2. Summary of Year 1 Interviews**</div>

#		**Main motivation orientation**	**How s/he keeps motivated**
17	M	Experience-defined ('my passion')	It's part of his identity, enjoyment
31	F	Goals-defined (target: TOEFL score)	Works with others, rewards

35	F	Goals-defined (purpose: TOEFL reading)	Enjoyable activity, routine
39	F	Goals-defined (target: TOEIC score)	Takes regular tests, enjoyable resource
41	M	Goals-defined (purpose: be a teacher)	Future dream, record keeping
42	M	Goals-defined (target: EIKEN score)	Imagining achieving the score, routine
45	F	Goals-defined (purpose: study abroad)	Future dream, fun activities
53	F	Experience-defined (goal: speaking)	Enjoyable resource, identity
54	F	Experience-defined (goal: listening)	Interesting resources, correct level

4.2 Discussion of Results
4.2.1 Goals-defined motivation

Seven out of the nine students mentioned goals in the first interview. Some of these goals were target goals such as achieving an exam score, and some were purpose goals such as being able to study abroad. This extract from an interview with participant 42 demonstrates how powerful a target goal can be in regulating motivation.

> "When my motivation goes down, I think about how I will feel when I get the score"
> (Participant 42, M)

In the interview, the same participant went on to give details about how he shows persistence in his learning in order to achieve his goal (a test score):

> "Study is become my custom. It's like a job. If my motivation goes down, I take a day off and start again tomorrow. I study 2 hours everyday… If I don't feel like studying, I force myself" (Participant 42, M)

Similarly, Participant 45 sustained her motivation by focussing on her dream to study abroad. Her motivation is also goals-defined, but with a purpose instead of a target.

> "My goal is to study abroad. When my motivation drops, I think about my dream"
> (Participant 45, F)

4.2.2 Experience-defined motivation

Experience-defined was also the main source of motivation for three of the participants interviewed in year 1, but a further three participants mentioned enjoyment in learning in the first round of interviews. Movies were one example of an 'experience' that helped to sustain learner motivation as these excerpts indicate:

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"I choose new interesting topics every week" (Participant 54, F)

"I choose a movie, something I have been interested in since I was a child … It's fun to shadow the main character" (Participant 53, F)

4.2.3 Experience-defined / goals-defined complementary

In some cases, experience defined and goal-defined motivations were complementary to sustaining motivation. For example, Participant 39 explained how using a motivating resource helped her maintain her study where her goals was to achieve a desired score on a test:

"If I feel I don't want to study for TOEIC, I use TED or another resource" (Participant 39, F)

In some cases, although a combination of experience-defined and goals-defined motivations were mentioned by the participants, they are not complementary and are unlikely to help the participant to achieve her goal. However, as this example shows, the experiences seemed to help the participant to sustain self-study, at least in the first year.

"Sometimes my motivation is low, so I change something. Do something fun like drawing pictures or watching movies" (Participant 45, F)

Analysing the interviews from year 1 was helpful for understanding key ways in which the participants sustained their self-study. Turning now to the second interviews held in year 2, the researchers were particularly interested in discovering what, if anything, had changed from year 1 to year 2. For that reason, the results will be presented as case studies using a narrative to describe the learners' experiences.

5 Year 2: Case Studies

In the second year of the study, all of the nine interviewees were contacted again. None of them continued to take modules (which were by now non-credit bearing). Due to personal circumstances only three of the participants were available to be interviewed face-to-face, and three others participated in extended email exchanges instead as they were studying abroad or too busy at the time. Only the participants who were interviewed face-to-face will be shared in this paper. It is anticipated that in subsequent years, more students will be available for interviews; nevertheless, as the researchers are taking a multiple case study approach for phase 2 of the research, this is not a severe limitation. The three case studies discussed in the remainder of the paper allow the researchers to discuss whether the motivation and self-regulation of the three participants changed from year 1 to year 2. The researchers draw upon the original analysis of the modules in addition to the interviews in year 1 and year 2.

5.1 Case study 1: Participant 17, M

Year 1
It was clear in the first interview with Participant 17 that he had not thought about motivation before as he already has a strong and established sense of what Hidi and Ainley (2009) term *individual interest* as this extract indicates:

> "English is really my passion and I want to learn and that's why I can keep myself motivated"

He has been interested in English songs, movies and dramas since middle school and English is an integral part of his life. In fact, Participant 17 does not mention goals at all in the first interview. The reason he did the module was for points. It was an opportunity to add ten points onto his English grade to ensure an A+. He was able to keep doing the module for two semesters as "I wanted to force myself to finish. If I quit, would just stay at home sleeping. I want to use my time well." In addition, he wanted something to force him to learn or in his words "some power force to push me". It was clear that he could get an A+ even without the module points, but he kept going.

While doing the first module, he noticed that his weakness was speaking, so he used the opportunity to improve his speaking skills. He felt that his work in this first was inefficient and he did not realise this until he began the second module, specifically, his activities did not match the goals he had set for the module.

Year 2
In the interview in the second year, it was clear that Participant 17 had maintained his individual interest for learning English and described daily activities that used English as much as possible:

> "There are a lot of things you can do, for example, I like games. I play mobile games now and I always set the language for the game - always English. I'm trying to do what I like to do in English like live streaming while I'm cooking and when I'm not busy, I just put it there - commentators talking about the game and other things and that's a good way because I can keep doing it for a long time"

> "I learn English for my life, that's the best way. It takes time. Keep going and actually you have to like English….I think it's very important to find something interesting. And do it with English. It works for me. It became part of my life….Just small things in life. I do everything in English."

The interviewer asked him whether he focussed on any particular goal, or whether he just did things he enjoyed. Participant 17 mentioned that he needed to take the IELTS exam, so his

strategy was to work on that intensively for a month, but he would be unable to sustain his motivation by focussing on exam study:

> "I can keep doing IELTS maybe for only one month and then I can't exist doing IELTS for half a year it's impossible. Stressful."

This is an example of a situation where adding an external goal (IELTS) can decrease interest (Sansone & Thoman, 2005). The participant recognizes this and limits the amount of time spent focussing on IELTS study.

It is quite clear that for Participant 17, English study and use continued to be an integral part of his life. An example of this is when he described how studying vocabulary had become routine:

> "I have a habit when I heard something I don't know, like a word I don't know I'll make a guess usually, I won't ask but if I can't follow, I will ask, but I'll keep that in mind and I'll just put it in my phone or in my vocabulary book... I'm not trying to memorise these words, I just record them...Sometimes I feel like I should find out the deeper meaning of the word… because it's interesting. It's pretty interesting. Sometimes I just want to know more. I'm always trying - when I'm listening - I'm trying to catch the keywords and slang and I'll find out how to use them."

The interviewer asked him about whether his motivation had changed from first year to second year:

> "I think I'm more motivated now. Last year was my first year and I had just started to learn English."

5.2 Case study 2: Participant 39, F

Year 1
In her first semester, Participant 39 set a vague goal related to speaking skills in English. She initially signed up to take the module for points. She managed to complete the module even though she did not notice particular learning benefits. Her main motivation for completion was that her learning advisor was "kind". In her second semester, Participant 39 set a more specific target goal of achieving TOEIC 700. The reason for setting this very different kind of goal was that she wanted to be "strict on myself". In the interview conducted at the end of year one, she was reflective and looked back at her development over the first year at university in terms of her self study. It was clear that in year 2 she had begun to see that the activities she did in the module actually had a bearing on her learning as this extract indicates:

"I used to think I had to study, but now I want to study because I see my progress"

In the interview she admitted that although generally her activities are not particularly enjoyable, having the target kept her going. She self-regulated by choosing enjoyable resources when she did not feel like studying for TOEIC and the resources (listening to presentations on the TED.com website) seemed to be somewhat helpful for her goal.

Year 2

In the interview in year 2, Participant 39 told the researcher that she continues to pursue the same goal - to achieve a specific score on the TOEIC test. Reflecting back on her learning journey, she knew from experience that focusing on an exam score was necessary in order to sustain her self study. As in year 1, Participant 39 mentioned that additional interesting tasks - not TOEIC study - are also necessary in order to sustain motivation so that she is able to achieve her desired score. This approach now seems to be largely unconscious. Whereas during the module period, Participant 39 was constantly reflecting on her learning approaches, in year 2 she now manages her learning effectively with automaticity. Participant 39 stressed two 'facts' about learning effectively and these are summarised with these two extracts:

"I will take TOEIC test to make me study more"

"I think the most important thing to keep high motivation, is just enjoying studying".

Participant 39 still recognizes the importance of goals; at the same time, however, she increasingly appreciates that she cannot sustain unless she engages in interesting tasks.

5.3 Case study 3: Participant 42, M

Year 1

As with the other two students, Participant 42 initially decided to take the module in order to gain additional points for his English class grade. His original focus was to get a good score on the Eiken test (a Japanese test for English often required by employers) for job hunting purposes. His goal could be described as goals-defined (target). Although ultimately, his Eiken score would be useful for future jobs, part of his motivation was sustained by imagining how he would feel a sense of intense satisfaction when he achieved his ideal score. He showed a high degree of awareness of what he needed to do to sustain motivation: do a lot of tasks and treat studying "like a job"; i.e. not something enjoyable. The key was to establish a routine in order to keep going and the module fulfilled this purpose in year 1. "I study 2 hours everyday. Study has become my custom"

Year 2

There seemed to be a shift in motivation from year 1 to year 2 as this extract from the interview indicates:

"English is just a tool. In the first year I just focussed on studying and exams, but now I focus on people, connections and what I want to do in the future" (3D design modelling).

Whereas in year 1, Participant 42's self-study was an individual project, something that he alone needed to work on, in year 2, he emphasised the important role that other people play. For example, he makes a point of connecting with people in his chosen field and asks for introductions. He even has a mentor who has influenced him. He still engages in some self-study, for example teaching himself valuable design and computer skills. In addition, he recognises that English proficiency tests are important, but he seems to have more of an awareness that he will need to use English if he achieves his dream to work for a large international company. He still enjoyed the feeling of doing well in a test, but that seems to be only part of his motivation as he now seems to view the experience more holistically and with increased maturity. Looking back at his first year, he felt that his focus was misaligned:

"I think I missed the point."

6 Conclusions

In the first year of the project, the researchers established that in their context, goals and interesting / enjoyable experiences are both important for maintaining motivation for self-access learners (McLoughlin & Mynard, 2015). In the second year of the research (the present paper), the focus was on investigating whether the motivation orientation and self-regulation had changed. In the case of Participants 17 and 39, their motivation orientation had stayed the same, yet appeared to be stronger and more developed. Participant 42 continued to rely on a goal to sustain his motivation, but there was a switch from a target to a purpose goal. Along with this switch was a greater holistic awareness of the purpose of self-directed study. The transition from year 1 to year 2 is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Main Motivation Orientation

#		Year 1	Year 2
17	M	Experience-defined ("English is really my passion")	Experience-defined ("I learn English for my life"
39	F	Goals-defined (target: TOEIC score)	Goals-defined (target: TOEIC score)
42	M	Goals-defined (target: EIKEN score)	Goals-defined (purpose: Connecting with people in his chosen career field)

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