

&lt;実践報告&gt;

# Incorporating Autonomy-Supportive Teaching into an English Conversation Programme in a Self-Access Language Learning Environment

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Autonomy-supportive teaching is an approach to support second-language learner motivation by nurturing the three psychological needs identified in self-determination theory; autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This approach to facilitating motivation may have potential in self-access language learning due to the emphasis on learner autonomy. In this paper, I explore how autonomy-supportive teaching has been built into the design of a new English conversation programme at *Global Commons*, the self-access centre at Kyoto Sangyo University, and how autonomy-supportive teaching is used in individual sessions to try to motivate language learners who use the programme.

**KEYWORDS:** Autonomy-supportive teaching, Self-determination theory, Self-access language learning

## 1. Introduction

From a dynamic systems theory perspective, language development in individuals, including second language (hereafter L2) development, progresses or regresses based on numerous interacting variables (De Bot *et al.* 2005, p. 3). These variables might include how much language exposure individuals have, their age, prior language learning experiences and attitudes towards language learning (De Bot *et al.* 2005, p. 3). Amongst these interacting factors motivation may also play an important role (De Bot *et al.* 2005, p. 3). Dörnyei and Ryan (2015, p. 72) have even suggested motivation may be the determinant in L2 learning. Therefore, designing educational programmes based on what motivates L2 learners may benefit them and contribute to the success of any potential programme.

However, multiple theories have been put forward to explain L2 motivation and how to motivate L2 learners, creating several potential solutions for educators. In this paper, I aim to

introduce how an English conversation programme was designed with L2 motivation in mind from the perspective of one of these theories, self-determination theory (hereafter SDT). I begin by reviewing SDT and attempt to justify my focus on this theory of motivation based on its relevance to *Global Commons*, the self-access centre at Kyoto Sangyo University. I then discuss how an autonomy-supportive 'motivating style' derived from SDT satisfies the three psychological needs in SDT; autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Finally, I explain how autonomy-supportive teaching has been incorporated into *Let's Talk!*, the abovementioned programme. However, I also reason the degree to which autonomy-supportive teaching motivates learners may not be easily discernible and may fluctuate based on various factors.

## 2. Literature Review

Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 54) have suggested motivation is a phenomenon that energises and activates people towards particular actions.

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Dörnyei (2001, as cited in Sade 2011) expands this definition, stating motivation is “the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it, and the effort expended on it” (p. 44). Thus, Ryan and Deci (2000), and Dörnyei (2001, as cited in Sade 2011) imply motivation is a psychological state that catalyses and maintains behaviour. In L2 learning, this equates to a state that initiates L2 learning and acts as the driving force to sustain it over time (Dörnyei & Ryan 2015, p. 72).

Despite the similarities in these definitions, there has yet to be a consensus on precisely what motivation is and, in L2 motivation studies, how L2 learners become motivated. Accordingly, multiple theories have been proposed that attempt to explain motivation or, in some theories, different types of motivation. The existence of these distinctions may suggest teachers can motivate students in numerous ways, or that motivational methods may be context-sensitive. Indeed, Brown (2007, pp. 170-171) suggests context might impact what learners are motivated by and how motivated they are. Based on this assumption, I suggest SDT may be particularly compatible with self-access language learning (hereafter SALL). Such an argument may be supported by several researchers (Robson & Hardy 2018; Yarwood *et al.* 2019; Shelton-Strong 2022; Mynard & Shelton-Strong 2022) who have also focused on SDT and its application in self-access centres (hereafter SACs). For the remainder of this section, I introduce SDT, while in the next section I explain its relationship with SALL.

## 2.1. Self-Determination Theory

In the 1990s, L2 motivation theory research focused on cognitive theories from mainstream and educational psychology (Dörnyei & Ryan 2015, pp. 73-74). One prominent theory from this period is self-determination theory (hereafter SDT), first introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985, as cited in Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011, p. 56). A fundamental assumption of SDT is that although people are innately predisposed to learning and growth, three psychological needs in particular, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, must be supported for

psychological growth and learning to occur (Ryan & Deci 2020, p. 1). Ryan and Deci (2020, p. 1) define autonomy as the feeling of control over, and interest in one’s actions, competence is viewed as the feeling one can accomplish something and learn, and relatedness is the feeling that one belongs. According to Ryan and Deci’s (2002, p. 7-8) explanations of how these needs are supported, in an L2 learning context, supporting autonomy would require L2 learners to feel they have control over their experience and for them to experience learning as an “expression of the self”. Competence is supported by creating environments that allow learners to develop their L2 confidence and skills through appropriate challenges. Finally, relatedness needs are met by connecting learners as individuals and as a community, and building mutually respectful relationships. Ryan and Deci (2020, p. 1) argue motivation will be damaged if one of these needs is not sufficiently met.

The degree to which these needs are met affects whether learners are more or less motivated, with learners being *intrinsically* motivated if these needs are met to a high degree (Ryan & Deci 2020, p. 1). *Intrinsically* motivated learners do an activity for its own sake, as they find it enjoyable or interesting (Deci & Ryan 2000, as cited in Ryan & Deci 2020, p. 2). Alternatively, in SDT, learners may be *extrinsically* motivated. *Extrinsic* motivation is described as a state of motivation where actions are performed “for reasons other than their inherent satisfactions” (Ryan & Deci 2020, p. 2) because they are “expected to lead to a reward or the avoidance of a punishment” (Deci & Ryan 2009, p. 442). *Extrinsic* motivation is, however, viewed as a less desirable form of motivation (Ryan & Deci 2002, p. 14; 2020, pp. 1-2). This form of motivation is divided into four categories, which relate to the degree of autonomy experienced by learners (Deci & Ryan 2009, p. 443). The four kinds of *extrinsic* motivation Deci and Ryan (2009, p. 443) list are *integrated*, *identified*, *introjected*, and *external regulation*.

Deci and Ryan (2009, p. 443) list *integrated regulation* as the most autonomous form of

*extrinsic* motivation where learning is seen as consistent with the learner's values. It is similar to *intrinsic* motivation; however, the learner lacks the enjoyment they do as with *intrinsic* motivation. *Identified regulation* is where the learner has slightly less autonomy, but still accepts the importance of the behaviour they are asked to engage in (Deci & Ryan 2009, p. 443). The final two *extrinsic* motivations are less autonomous forms of motivation. *Introjected regulation* is where learners control their behaviour to avoid negative mental states. In contrast, *external regulation*, the least autonomous state, is where learners only engage in learning to receive rewards or to avoid punishments; the behaviour is not an expression of self and is controlled by external factors (Deci & Ryan 2009, p. 443). In summation, in SDT, while learners may be motivated without their autonomy needs being met, this motivation will not be as potent as *intrinsic* motivation, which may emerge when learning aligns with learners' values, they feel they have ownership over learning, and when their relatedness and competence-based needs are also nurtured.

### 3. Self-Determination Theory & Self-Access Language Learning

As previously stated, several researchers (Robson & Hardy 2018; Yarwood *et al.* 2019; Shelton-Strong 2022; Mynard & Shelton-Strong 2022) have also focused on SDT and its application in SACs and SALL in recent years. A major reason for their linking of these fields may be the centrality of autonomy in both concepts. SALL is an approach to L2 learning used outside of formal L2 classrooms (Mynard & Shelton-Strong 2022, p. 2) and has "as its ultimate goal the moving of learners from teacher dependence towards autonomy" (Gardner & Miller 1999, p. 34). According to Cotterall and Reinders (2001, p. 2) SALL is the learning taking place in SACs; which usually are physical spaces offering language learners learning support and materials to learn with (Mynard & Shelton-Strong 2022, p. 2). Learning support may include opportunities for language practice or L2 learning advising sessions with

teachers or social learning with peers, (Mynard & Shelton-Strong 2022, p. 2), through which learners' autonomy is encouraged. Therefore, given SACs concentrate on facilitating autonomy, and autonomy is also a psychological need in SDT that, if fulfilled, results in preferred forms of motivation, SDT may be useful to both explain and increase L2 motivation in SACs. For instance, SACs may be attractive and enjoyable environments for *intrinsically* motivated learners but also help sustain their L2 motivation. SACs may also push *extrinsically* motivated L2 learners towards more autonomous forms of motivation, such as *integrated* or *identified regulation*. Thus, while many theories of motivation exist, SDT appears to be particularly compatible with SACs, such as *Global Commons*, and their goals. For these reasons, in the following section, I outline how SDT has been implemented in the design of an English conversation programme to improve L2 learner motivation and achieve the SAC's goals.

## 4. Self-Determination Theory & *Global Commons*

Having previously offered some rationale as to why I focus on SDT in this paper, in this section, I provide an overview of autonomy-supportive teaching, a motivating style derived from SDT. I also explain how it is incorporated into *Let's Talk!*, a new English conversation programme at *Global Commons*, to increase L2 motivation by satisfying L2 learners' autonomy, competence and relatedness; the three psychological needs identified in SDT. However, before doing so, I briefly explain how *Global Commons* functions and introduce *Let's Talk!*.

### 4.1. *Global Commons*

*Global Commons* is the SAC at Kyoto Sangyo University. It opened in 2016 to encourage learner autonomy and international exchange, and to improve and support students' overall language abilities and L2 communicative competency. *Global Commons* has several spaces available to support these goals. Depending on the area, they may be used by students or staff for quiet self-study, group study, classes,

workshops, presentations, and watching DVDs. Students may also access books, materials, games and DVDs to support their studies. At the time of writing, *Global Commons* is run by two full-time learning support teachers, two full-time service-operating staff, and several part-time staff. The learning support teachers focus on running language and cultural workshops, learning support sessions, group chat sessions, and *Let's Talk!*, and assisting the student-staff group, *LINK*, in running student-centred sessions. The other staff run book and DVD lending services, and handle reservations for the various spaces in *Global Commons*. The facility is open from Monday to Friday between 08:45 to 19:00 and from 08:45 to 13:00 on Saturday. Most learning support services are only available during the weekdays until 16:45.

#### 4.2. *Let's Talk!*

*Let's Talk!* is a new English conversation programme launched at *Global Commons* in May 2023. Each session is held one-on-one between a student and a teacher, and lasts twenty minutes. The sessions are focused on English conversation practice, and students can use worksheets to help prepare for the session. Eight worksheets are currently available, featuring topics such as *self-introductions, hobbies, trips and daily life*. A free-talk option is also available, although students are asked to prepare a topic to discuss when they select this option. *Let's Talk!* aims to train students to converse without relying on a worksheet and acts as a space where students can get one-on-one speaking practice with a teacher on topics they deem speaking practice important. In its first semester, over 150 reservations have been made. Crucial to this paper, autonomy-supportive teaching, a motivating style explained in the following sub-section, has been built into the programme at several stages to help motivate students' language learning.

#### 4.3. Autonomy-Supportive Teaching

According to Reeve (2016), autonomy support is "the instructional effort to provide students with a classroom environment and a teacher-student relationship that can support their

students' need for autonomy" (p. 130). For classrooms to be autonomy-supportive, Reeve (2016, p. 130-133) suggests teachers alter their 'motivating style' by creating a classroom dynamic where teachers and students are in relationships that are 'in-synch'. These relationships may allow students to make suggestions to alter the activities proposed by teachers, and where teachers can make amendments based on these suggestions (Reeve 2016, p. 133). In essence, this motivating style would involve positive teacher-student relationships where negotiation is possible; compared to more controlling environments that require students to comply with the teachers' requests, leaving little room for discussion (Reeve 2016, p. 133). Reeve (2016, p. 130) also proposes teachers engage, identify, nurture, strengthen and grow students' inner motivational resources (Reeve 2016, p. 130). Alterations to teachers' motivating style are also made by adopting six behaviours; taking the students' perspective, vitalising inner motivational resources, providing explanatory rationales for requests, acknowledging and accepting students' expressions of negative affect, relying on informational, non-pressuring language, and displaying patience (Reeve 2009; Reeve & Cheon 2014, as cited in Reeve 2016, p. 136).

Reeve (2016, p. 136) divides these autonomy-supportive behaviours by the stage of the class he argues usually necessitates their appearance; before the lesson, as the lesson begins, and during the lesson. Prior to the lesson, Reeve (2016, p. 137) argues teachers, based on their prior experiences, should try to view the lesson from the students' perspectives and align the lesson plan with the students' interests, goals, needs and preferences rather than trying to force their agenda. When the lesson begins, and the students are invited to engage in a learning activity, Reeve (2016, p. 138) states teachers should seek to activate and nurture learners' inner motivational resources; their autonomy, competence, and relatedness, along with their curiosity, interest, and intrinsic goals. Doing so requires identifying and focusing teaching around these inner



motivational resources (Reeve 2016, p. 139). However, suppose the teacher thinks the students are uninterested in a proposed activity. In that case, they should provide adequate rationales for why the students will do it to lead them to understand why it may be worthwhile (Reeve 2016, p. 142). The final phase is during the class when problems such as disengagement arise. Here Reeve (2016, p. 143) advocates acknowledging and accepting negative affect, using non-pressuring language and being patient. These behaviours may help manage in-class problems and may indicate the lesson does not satisfy students' preferences or needs.

Autonomy-supportive teaching asks teachers to view learning from students' perspectives at multiple stages. Since autonomy-supportive teaching aims to fulfil the three psychological needs, autonomy, competence and relatedness, these needs should be predicted before and considered during the class. According to Reeve (2016), during the class, students may feel the lesson is uninteresting and not aligned with their preferences, they may not understand why they are being requested to do an activity, or they may display negative affect; all which may indicate the learners' needs, especially, autonomy are not being satisfied. During these moments, Reeve (2016) suggests teachers should communicate positively and patiently, indicate they are open to taking on the students' suggestions, and take them on if possible. These behaviours may give learners ownership over their learning by allowing them to create more interesting lessons, optimise challenges to be more relevant to their level, or adjust the class to emphasise group work more. Such an approach may satisfy students' needs by helping them to mould lessons closer to their goals, needs and ability, and may establish positive, mutually respectful teacher-student relationships. This approach may lead to autonomy, competence, and relatedness need-satisfaction, which according to SDT, would result in L2 learner motivation.

#### 4.4. Autonomy-Supportive Teaching & *Let's Talk!*

Several studies (Dincer & Yesilyurt 2017;

Hornstra *et al.* 2021) and Ryan and Deci's (2020) meta-analysis of a large number of studies link autonomy-supportive classrooms with increases in autonomous forms of motivation identified in SDT, such as *intrinsic* motivation and *identified regulation*. Therefore, as a facility aiming to develop L2 learners' autonomy, autonomy-supportive teaching matches some of the main goals of *Global Commons*. While *Let's Talk!* sessions neither operate in the same way as formal classes or run in classrooms, autonomy-supportive teaching can be and has been utilised in the programme's design stage and day-to-day running. For the remainder of this sub-section, I discuss how autonomy-supportive teaching is used in *Let's Talk!*, using the same model as Reeve (2016), where autonomy-supportive teaching is divided into distinct stages in a class. In this case, I divided *Let's Talk!* into its design stage and prior to the student attending *Let's Talk!*, as the session begins and during the session, and finally, at the end of the interaction.

Autonomy-supportive teaching was factored into *Let's Talk!* during the design stage. In essence, the session was designed to be easy to access to eliminate potential barriers to entry to *Global Commons* for students. This decision was made based on research suggesting SACs are "hard to enter" for many students (Murray & Fujishima 2017; Hooper 2020; Bibby *et al.* 2016, as cited in Taylor *et al.* 2020, p. 70). For instance, a twenty-minute time limit and easy topics were selected. The worksheet topics were selected and designed according to suggestions by student-staff volunteers at *Global Commons*, who were asked about topics they believed other students would like to discuss during the sessions. Like other *Global Commons* sessions, *Let's Talk!* is non-compulsory, and students may decide their own schedules. These steps were taken during the planning process to potentially reduce lower-level learners' anxiety about participating in the session.

Although students are asked to complete the *self-introduction* worksheet before moving on to others, after doing so, they can select either any worksheet of their choice or a topic they

would like to discuss in *free-talk*. Doing so allows the teacher to check the student's level. It also acts as an opportunity to build rapport, as the interaction is focused on the student and their interests. Such a focus is repeated throughout the programme, as having been based on their peers' suggestions, the other worksheets may also reflect students' interests or be topics they will likely want to discuss. Before attending the session, students can help themselves to physical versions of the worksheets at two locations in *Global Commons* or access digital versions online. These steps may help eliminate anxiety about what topics will be discussed in *Let's Talk!* as they allow students to prepare the topics themselves. Thus, the programme was designed to replicate Reeve's (2016) framework for autonomy-supportive teaching in numerous ways. Chiefly, students can mould the programme to their individual needs and are given autonomy over their learning as they dictate whether or not they use a worksheet and what topic they would like to talk about, encouraging students to think about what they would like to learn and allowing them to make decisions about their learning. Furthermore, it might be reasoned the programme was designed with at least some of the student's perspectives in mind, as Reeve (2016, p. 137) and Mynard (2022, p. 234) advise, since the student-staff helped select the topics used in the programme. Finally, the selected topics focus on the student and their interests, aiming to build rapport. Therefore, relatedness may be nurtured through *Let's Talk!* as students feel they are recognised as individuals. Consequently, these factors may positively influence learner motivation, enabling them to continue their studies.

During *Let's Talk!* sessions autonomy-supportive teaching is utilised through an emphasis on communication. Mynard (2022, p. 235) suggests this focus during L2 practice might help learners feel competent. While worksheets are used in *Let's Talk!* to focus the interaction, the sessions are continually framed as conversations where communication is valued over 'correct' form. Indeed, this emphasis on communication occurs from the start of the

students' session, as interactions often begin with casual conversation before moving on to the worksheet or selected topic. Moreover, since the sessions are framed as conversations, these are allowed to take place naturally, meaning that topics not covered in detail on the worksheet are also discussed, and genuine questions are asked, indicating the teacher has a real interest in the student. This emphasis on communication may carry several benefits. Foremost of these is that as students can communicate their intended meaning, both their confidence and competency-based needs may be positively influenced, reinforcing their motivation. Additionally, students may feel their relatedness-based needs satisfied as the teacher seeks to construct a "warm" teacher-student relationship that is "characterised by mutual concern, liking, and acceptance" (Reeve 2016, p. 140). Finally, as the student progresses through the programme and is exposed to more *natural*, non-worksheet-based conversation, they may rely on the worksheets to a lesser degree, which may positively impact their competency-based needs as the student realises they can communicate without relying on prepared answers. During the sessions, there are also moments where the approach of the learning support teacher is crucial in supporting students' needs. The design of *Let's Talk!* assists the teachers in this, as the one-on-one nature of the programme enables the learning support teachers to borrow strategies used for advising in language learning, such as mirroring body language to help students relax (Kato & Mynard 2016, p. 21). Such strategies may also play a role in developing rapport, in turn promoting relatedness.

At the end of *Let's Talk!* sessions, students are asked whether they have any questions for the teacher. Typically, students use this as an opportunity to ask questions related to the topic, however many use it to ask questions related to language study. In addition, students are given a chance to reflect on their learning in the final part of the *Let's Talk!* session. Here they are usually asked how they felt the session went, whether it was an enjoyable experience or, if they have done several sessions, how the

programme is going for them. In these cases, the teacher may also take on a role similar to a learning advisor, as they are required to engage in reflective dialogue about how the student perceives their studies thus far. Throughout such situations, the learning support teachers attempt to communicate positively and encourage students to think deeply about their own studies. These interactions may emulate Shelton-Strong and Tassinari's (2022) recommendation of using non-pressuring language and "making suggestions instead of giving instructions, asking learners for their opinion and letting them make the decision regarding their learning" (p. 193) in L2 learning advising sessions. These behaviours aim to reinforce the positive relationships the teachers create with students, to satisfy their relatedness-based needs, potentially developing relationships where teachers and students are 'in-synch' Reeve (2016, p. 130-133) to, ultimately, motivate learners.

Therefore, multiple areas exist where the behaviours recommended in autonomy-supportive teaching may be utilised in *Let's Talk!*. These behaviours may nurture the psychological needs identified in SDT, possibly fulfilling the factors this framework states activate L2 learner motivation or giving learners the feeling of control and congruence related to their L2 learning, moving them towards more desirable types of motivation. Nevertheless, these behaviours, which I have promoted in *Let's Talk!* might be viewed as 'best practices' rather than guidelines guaranteeing L2 learner motivation. While these behaviours, if engaged, may positively impact L2 learners' motivation, L2 motivation is a complex phenomenon. Individual differences may mean autonomy-supportive teaching impacts some learners more than others, affecting teachers' abilities to generalise how effective autonomy-supportive teaching is. Moreover, learners having more immediate priorities over L2 learning, momentary frustration from being unable to communicate an intended message, or even tiredness may influence their motivation, so it is constantly changing rather than stable. Thus, while the learning support teachers

at *Global Commons* may attempt to increase L2 motivation, other factors teachers cannot control may also influence it. Furthermore, the teachers may even struggle to adopt some behaviours from autonomy-support teaching or demonstrate them inconsistently, dampening attempts to improve learners' L2 motivation. Consequently, although I have argued that autonomy-supportive teaching may assist the learning support teachers running *Let's Talk!* in increasing L2 motivation, the extent to which it may do so is difficult to predict. Numerous external factors, not only autonomy, competency, and relatedness, may influence L2 learner motivation.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have explained how a new English conversation programme was designed to motivate L2 learners. While several models explain how L2 motivation might be generated, viewing L2 motivation theories as context-sensitive and appropriate to specific learning contexts may be helpful. With this in mind, I have examined SDT as it may be relevant to *Global Commons*, due to the centrality of autonomy in SDT and self-access language learning. In examining SDT, I have argued supporting learners' autonomy, competence, and relatedness may help to facilitate L2 motivation. I have suggested autonomy-supportive teaching, an approach derived from SDT that primarily focuses on taking the students' perspective so negotiations over learning can occur, may help teachers improve learners' motivation. This motivation style has been adopted in *Let's Talk!*, a new service at *Global Commons*, and is utilised at various stages of the programme by promoting student ownership over learning, nurturing relatedness-based needs, and focusing on L2 communication to make learners feel competent; fulfilling the framework SDT outlines for motivation. However, L2 learners are complex individuals who may be impacted by numerous variables constantly affecting their L2 motivation levels. Therefore, while it may be possible that *Let's Talk!* has been

designed to satisfy L2 learners' needs and promote L2 motivation, it may be difficult to predict the extent to which the motivation of individual learners using the service may be impacted consistently. Thus, future research that examines the students' perspectives on this issue may be necessary to clarify whether autonomy-supportive teaching is effective in *Let's Talk!*.

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ため、自律的な外国語学習に有効である可能性がある。本稿では、京都産業大学の「グローバルcommons」での新しい英会話プログラムの設計に自主学習の支援がどのように組み込まれ、また、英会話プログラムを利用する言語学習者のやる気を引き出すために各セッションでどのように自主学習の支援が実践されているのかを検証する。

キーワード：自主学習の支援、自己決定理論、自律的な外国語学習

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2023年12月5日受理

1 京都産業大学 教育支援研究開発センター (現所属：大阪工業大学 国際交流センター ランゲージラーニングセンター)

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## 自律的な外国語学習環境の英会話プログラムにおける自主学習の実践

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フェルプス・クリストファー<sup>1</sup>

自主学習の支援は、自己決定理論における3つの心理的欲求(自律性・有能感・関係性)を満たすことによって第二言語学習者のモチベーションを高めるアプローチである。このモチベーションを高めるアプローチは学習者の自主性を重視する

