

# **The Effects of Classroom Intervention Strategies on Language Learner Motivation**

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## **Abstract**

This article reports on a study that deals with learner motivation in adolescent language learning. Specifically, it focuses on the impact on motivation following the introduction of two intervention strategies into the adolescent classroom: *delegation of material and task selection to the student* and *promotion of self-evaluation*. The study involved 32 students learning Spanish as a foreign language in a secondary school in Ireland. One teacher from the school helped facilitate the study. The results indicate that motivation levels increased significantly among those students who participated in learning using the intervention strategies. The findings suggest that adolescent learners should actively participate in the learning process and would gain from the implementation of these or similar intervention strategies in the classroom context.

Keywords: learner motivation, autonomous learning, second language acquisition, intervention strategies, classroom-based research

## **Introduction**

The study of learner motivation in the field of language acquisition has shifted direction over the past fifty years. With initial focus being on defining and categorizing motivation into different types, researchers now view motivation as a variable of *Additional Language Learning* (L2 learning) which can be usefully manipulated using classroom *Intervention Strategies* (ISs) (Kelly & García Ortiz, 2019; Ushioda, 2019). Research in the field of L2 acquisition has shifted towards considering motivation as a process that is pertinent to classroom contexts (Ushioda, 2016, 2019). Greater emphasis on learners' personal and specific needs has led to a rethinking of motivation in the context of "self" (Dörnyei, 2019). The use of ISs to generate motivation is no longer considered the sole responsibility of

instructors, with more focus being placed on self-regulating strategies that learners can use to stimulate their own motivation (Dörnyei, 2019).

Currently, learners are viewed as individuals with their own identities and interests that are relevant in the classroom learning context (Dam, 2018). Experts are calling for the study of L2 motivation to shift focus from large-scale studies, which tend to address motivation at a general level, towards more specific local learning contexts (Ushioda, 2019). Carrying out small-scale research and adopting a more contextualized angle of inquiry will enhance our understanding of how motivation influences L2 learning in different environments.

This article reports the findings of a study that examined the effectiveness of introducing motivational ISs into the L2 classroom. The subsequent sections report on that study which involved a 16-week quasi-experiment carried out in an all-girls' Irish secondary school.

## **Literature review**

### **Motivation Theories in Language Learning**

Motivation has been described as a predictor of achievement in L2 acquisition (Dörnyei, 2009; Gardner, 1985). Researchers in the field have long been interested in studying the role motivation plays in learning, developing theories/models to understand and describe why learners engage, achieve and continue in L2 learning. For instance, Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT), based on the relationship between motivation and the need for autonomy, focuses on the extent to which an individual's behaviour is self-motivated and self-determined. SDT suggests individuals have an innate

need for autonomy in order for them to feel that completing tasks is worthwhile. SDT emphasises the importance of personal choice and self-initiation of tasks (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

SDT characterizes motivation into two different types - extrinsic and intrinsic. Intrinsic motivation pertains to individuals who complete tasks due to experiencing a sense of satisfaction in doing so. Extrinsic motivation comes from the desire to obtain an external reward (Deci & Ryan, 2008). An example of extrinsic motivation in learning would be individuals engaging in learning to pass an exam, while an example of intrinsic motivation would be an individual learning due to the personal sense of joy experienced through doing so. Intrinsic motivation is strongly correlated with satisfaction of the need for autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

In the 1990s, researchers began to move away from differentiating between types of motivation, arguing that strength/intensity of motivation was more important (Dörnyei, 1994; Kelly & García Ortiz, 2019). The focus of research moved towards finding strategies that teachers could use to generate learner motivation. For this reason, researchers began to consider the importance of the specific context in which learning was taking place (Dörnyei, 2001). More consideration was given to the importance of classroom dynamics and how learners' relationships with their teacher and peers affect motivation. The process-oriented model for motivation introduced a framework for motivational strategies (Dörnyei, 2001). The model focused on the teacher's role in generating motivation that could help learners take responsibility for their learning. The model emphasised encouraging learners to self-evaluate by setting learning goals and reflecting on their learning. Thus, the focus was on finding strategies that teachers could use in the L2 classroom to generate student motivation

(Dörnyei, 2001). In the latter part of the 1990s, strategies were developed that learners could use to take responsibility for their motivation (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998).

The twenty-first century saw a shift towards reconceptualising motivation in the context of possible selves. The L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009) developed the theory of “possible selves” and focused on learners as individuals with their own identities. This theory centred on the idea of who learners want to become and how motivation could help close the gap between who they currently are and who they want to be (Dörnyei, 2009). The idea was that visualizing desired and undesired future selves would motivate learners to take responsibility for their learning to avoid failure. This theory promoted autonomy in terms of learners taking charge of their learning to avoid negative outcomes (Dörnyei, 2009).

The terms “self” and “identity” are sometimes used interchangeably in L2 learning (Taylor, 2013). Language learner identity has been hypothesised as multiple, dynamic, contradictory, and evolving (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 417). Motivation is being increasingly re-conceptualised in the context of identity. The interrelationships between motivation, autonomy and identity/self have been explored by experts in the field using a variety of theoretical perspectives (e.g., Dörnyei, 2019; Taylor, 2013; Ushioda, 2019). Giving learners autonomy and the freedom to make choices about their learning can generate motivation and support identity development (Brophy, 2009). This freedom allows learners to personalise their learning which encourages them to engage their “transportable identities” (Ushioda, 2011). Transportable identity refers to identities which are physical or cultural-based characteristics (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, religion) and are transportable from one context to another (Richards, 2006). They are identities that students have outside the classroom which can come into play inside the classroom. Encouraging learners to speak as themselves can trigger their transportable identities. For example, a learner might reveal

through natural conversation that they are a fan of mystery novels or play on a football team. Thus, transportable identities are summoned naturally during authentic classroom conversations (Richard, 2006; Ushioda, 2011). In sum, giving learners the freedom to make choices about their learning can generate motivation and allow them to express their identities.

### **Motivational Classroom Strategies**

In the 1990s, addressing claims that there was a need for practical advice that teachers could follow to generate motivation in language classrooms, researchers began proposing motivational strategies that could be used by teachers (e.g. Dörnyei, 1994). Recommended techniques included setting personal learning goals, redesigning the curriculum/syllabus, and varying learning tasks/materials.

Although Gardner and Tremblay (1994) acknowledged it was helpful to recommend strategies for teachers to use, they argued that they should be tested to confirm their usefulness in generating motivation. In response, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) tested several motivational strategies used by English language teachers. After analysing the results of their study, they developed a list of motivational strategies which they considered to be the most effective to generate motivation.

Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) tested the effectiveness of motivational strategies by reproducing the study by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998). They concluded that not all of the strategies were suitable for different cultural contexts. Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) also reproduced Dörnyei and Csizér's study (1998) and found that teachers' motivational practice is linked to learners' increased motivation. Many researchers suggest teachers can motivate learners by giving them more autonomy in the form of the freedom to make decisions about

their learning materials and to set individual learning goals (Dam, 2018; Fumin and Li, 2012). This motivates learners by allowing them to pursue topics that engage their individual identity as learners (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

A study by Dam (1995) also suggests learners who are given autonomy feel more motivated as a result. The study took place in a Danish secondary school and used techniques which helped students become more autonomous learners. The teacher used the target language to instruct the class, and learners evaluated the learning process on an ongoing basis in the form of teacher, peer and self-assessment.

There appears to be a paucity of research focusing on introducing motivational ISs into L2 classrooms to examine their impact on motivation (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). There is also a well-documented need to find ways of increasing classroom engagement and motivation in order for learning to be meaningful (Hiver et al., 2021; Osborne, 2019). Engagement is an essential part of motivation and achievement; learners need autonomy to actively participate in the learning process in order for it to be personally motivating (Hiver et al., 2021). Ushioda (2019) calls for more studies examining how motivation evolves individually and collectively, arguing that each learner brings individual motivations to the L2 classroom and that these motivations can be influenced by the type of task they are completing and their relationships with peers. Ushioda suggests it could be useful to investigate how learners can collectively develop motivational strategies to think through problems in their learning when working in groups (2016, p. 571). Furthermore, Ushioda (2019) calls for research to be more context-based and for more studies to take place in local learning contexts.

## **Research Design and Methods**

### **Educational Context and Participants**

The study took place in an all-girls' secondary school in Ireland. The participants in this study were 32 students (female) aged 15-16 years old and studying Spanish as a foreign language. They were required to attend three 35-minute classes each week. The student sample was divided into two groups: a treatment group (18 participants) and a comparison group (14 participants). A quasi-experimental design was used; thus, some elements of true experimentation were omitted. For instance, the groups were not created through random assignment as it was not practical since the school had assigned pupils to class groups on the basis of the other subjects they studied. The researcher identified two groups that were similar enough to compare in terms of age and the length of prior L2 study. Thus, the groups were non-equivalent in design, meaning that there was a comparison rather than control group. The 18 participants in the treatment group were taught using two ISs (Section 3.2), while the 14 comparison group students were not.

The school was selected using opportunity sampling, and quota sampling was used within the school to select participants. The quota for this study were as follows: student participants were in Transition Year (TY) and had studied Spanish since their first year of secondary education. TY is an optional programme offered by Irish secondary schools which is available to students who have completed the first three years of study. TY places emphasis on self-directed learning. The study required that students be in TY as it meant they were not in a year that was preparing for national examinations.

Permission to carry out the study was granted by the school's principal and ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at Dublin City University. Each

of the participants consented to take part and their parents/guardians also gave their approval. The teacher also consented to participate as a facilitator of the study.

### **Intervention Procedure**

The two ISs—1) delegation of material and task selection to the student (IS1); and 2) promotion of self-evaluation (IS2)—were introduced with the goal of investigating if and how they influence learner motivation. The teacher's role was to act as a facilitator, making her knowledge available to learners, offering advice and supporting them in various tasks; thus, the teacher had to depart from her traditional responsibilities. She did not explain any language concept unless asked to do so by a group of students and she gave the instruction to only the group that had requested it. The teacher was asked not to depart from her traditional approach to teaching with the comparison group and to continue teaching the L2 through direct instruction and structuring lessons around the content in the textbooks. Both groups simultaneously covered content relating to the same learning objectives. However, learners in the comparison group did not select materials, plan learning tasks, assess their learning or set goals.

The participants did not receive formal training regarding the use of ISs. However, the teacher facilitating the study was requested to read two articles (Dörnyei, 1994; Zhuang, 2010) to get a better understanding of her role and what she would be expected to do in a classroom that encourages autonomous learning.

#### ***Delegation of Material and Task Selection to the Student (IS1)***

IS1 involved the students searching for and selecting their own learning materials, and planning and organizing in-class activities. IS1 is based on Dam's (1995) model of autonomy



used in Danish secondary schools, which follows national curricula guidelines, while allowing students to exercise greater autonomy by making decisions about their learning. The learning objectives (LOs) listed in the students' Spanish language textbooks were used to guide learners in choosing materials (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Learning Objectives (LOs) as specified in the textbook*

LOs (Weeks 1-7)	LOs (Weeks 8-16)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk about yourself</li> <li>• Talk about your holidays and your plans for the New Year</li> <li>• Give and ask for personal information</li> <li>• Introduce people</li> <li>• Use “usted” (formal you)</li> <li>• Talk about your family</li> <li>• Describe people and animals</li> <li>• Talk about nationalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk about school subjects and timetables</li> <li>• Talk about your school, classroom and uniform</li> <li>• Talk about what you do every day and at the weekend</li> <li>• Talk about what you are doing at the moment</li> <li>• Talk about what you did yesterday and during the weekend</li> <li>• Describe your town/village</li> <li>• Talk about your house/flat and areas where you live</li> <li>• Talk about your house and your room</li> <li>• Describe places in the past</li> </ul>

The starting point in their search for materials was to find resources that corresponded to the LOs. The students had the option to use materials provided by their teacher or to do their own online searches for learning resources. The teacher was available at all times should any student have requested her guidance during this process or her opinion on materials chosen by them. After individual students had chosen their materials, they got into groups of three and shared them. In their groups, they planned how and when to use their chosen materials. Students worked in their groups for the entire 16-week experiment.

### ***Promotion of Self-Evaluation (IS2)***

IS2 involved students setting individual learning goals and evaluating their progress towards accomplishing them. Both ISs were introduced at the same time. The treatment group was required to complete a Goal-setting and Evaluation Record (Appendix A) and a Student Reflection Record (Appendix B).

The Goal-setting and Evaluation Record is based on the goal-setting form designed by Iowa State University (Tutoring Services, n.d.). The treatment group was encouraged to connect their goals to the learning content by using the LOs stated in their textbook as a guide. The LOs for the first seven weeks differed to those for the remaining nine weeks (Section 3.2.1); therefore, learners completed the record on two separate occasions. They used “can-do statements” to phrase their learning goals, as per the approach used by the European Union’s Commission when developing European Language Portfolios and, subsequently, by the Language Online Portfolio Project (Bruen & Sudhershnan, 2009).

The Student Reflection Record is based on one devised by the University of Hong Kong (Benson, 2011). They were used to encourage students to reflect on their learning progress. The treatment group students were required to complete the record on four occasions (weeks 4, 8, 12 and 16).

### **Data Collection Methods and Data Analysis**

This study used a quasi-experimental design with the treatment being the two ISs which were implemented simultaneously. Their influence on motivational levels was measured using a motivation questionnaire and individual interviews. The questionnaire collected quantitative data while the interviews collected qualitative data. The study

addressed the following research question: Do the ISs influence learner motivation and, if so, how?

### ***Learner Motivation Questionnaire***

The questionnaire was adapted from that designed by Gardner (1985). It contained 10 items related to motivational levels. Responses were graded as 1, 2 or 3. The value “1” represents a low degree of motivation towards learning the L2; the value “2” signifies a moderate degree and “3” indicates a high degree of motivation (Appendix C)

Both groups completed a pre- and post- motivation questionnaire in order to investigate and categorize their levels of motivation (low, moderate or high) towards learning Spanish. A follow-up questionnaire was administered to the treatment group seven months after the 16-week experiment was completed; thus, the treatment group completed it for a third time. The third administration of the questionnaire was carried out to assess whether any gains observed following the treatment in levels of motivation were maintained. At the time of the follow-up questionnaire, the students were four months into their next academic year; they had a different teacher and were no longer engaging with the ISs.

Paired t-tests ( $p < 0.05$ ) were used to compare the treatment group's pre- and post-motivation to determine if levels were significantly higher or lower following exposure to the ISs. A paired t-test ( $p < 0.05$ ) was also carried out to determine if the comparison group's motivational levels differed significantly on the post-tests. Furthermore, an independent t-test ( $p < 0.05$ ) was performed to compare the values between the two groups' levels of motivation, to determine if there was a significant difference between their mean difference scores ( $\mu d$ ). The mean difference scores were calculated by subtracting the pre- means from the post- means for each group.

A final paired t-test ( $p < 0.05$ ) was performed, using the data collected in the follow-up questionnaire of the treatment group, to determine if any gains observed in the treatment group's motivational levels were maintained seven months after the experiment ended.

### ***Interviews***

The interviews took place during the final three weeks of the experiment (weeks 14-16). They were open-ended and guided by an interview form (Appendix D). Each member of the treatment group was interviewed individually for approximately five minutes and asked to reflect on their experience of the ISs. They were asked seven questions designed to elicit their opinions on topics relating directly to the ISs including: (a) selecting learning materials, (b) planning learning tasks, (c) setting learning goals, (d) self-evaluating, (e) the teacher's role in an autonomous classroom; and (f) using the ISs in future.

Since the data collected via interviews was qualitative in nature, the researcher extracted key themes emerging from the data and analysed them using a content-based thematic approach, which is “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). The verbal data resulting from the interviews was transcribed and then analysed in terms of the research question (do the ISs influence learner motivation and, if so, how?). Each group's data were analysed separately.

## Results

### Learner motivation questionnaire

#### *Comparing pre- and post- results*

The results on motivational levels indicated that the majority of participants from the treatment group had moderate-level motivation prior to and at the end of the period in which the ISs were implemented. The results of the treatment group showed that low-level motivation decreased, while moderate- and high-level increased (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Treatment Group: Pre- and Post- Results for Motivation (n = 18)*

Item no.	1		2		3	
	Pre- %	Post- %	Pre- %	Post- %	Pre- %	Post- %
9	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	0.00	0.00
10	61.11	55.56	33.33	38.89	5.56	5.56
11	5.56	5.56	11.11	11.11	83.33	83.33
12	38.89	22.22	38.89	44.44	22.22	33.33
13	16.67	16.67	50.00	38.89	33.33	44.44
14	22.22	11.11	61.11	55.56	16.67	33.33
15	27.78	16.67	44.44	50.00	27.78	33.33
16	27.78	16.67	50.00	61.11	22.22	22.22
17	61.11	44.44	27.78	44.44	11.11	11.11
18	27.78	22.22	44.44	50.00	27.78	27.78
TOTALS	33.89%	26.11%	41.11%	44.44%	25.00%	29.44%

*Note.* 1 = low-level category; 2 = moderate- level category; 3 = high-level category.

Following the implementation of the ISs, the total percentage of high-level responses increased from 25.00% to 29.44%. The percentage of moderate-level responses also increased from 41.11% to 44.44%, while low-level responses decreased from 33.89% to 26.11%. The moderate category continued to have the highest number of responses. Out of 10 items, low-level responses stayed the same for three items (9, 11 and 14), and decreased for the other seven items. The changes to low-level responses only occurred in one direction, as the response frequencies to three items went down and none went up. Moderate-level responses stayed the same for two items (9 and 11), increased for six items (10, 12, 15, 16, 17 and 18) and decreased for two items (13 and 14). High-level responses stayed the same for six items (9, 10, 11, 16, 17 and 18) and increased for the other three items (12, 14 and 15). There was no decrease in high-level responses for any of the items.

A paired t-test ( $p < 0.05$ ) was conducted to determine if the treatment group's motivational levels were significantly higher or lower following the treatment. The t-test results indicated that the post- mean ( $\mu = 20.33$ ,  $SD = 3.29$ ) was significantly higher than the pre- mean ( $\mu = 19.11$ ,  $SD = 3.43$ ) for motivational levels,  $t(17) = -3.61$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , thus indicating that there was a significant increase in the treatment group's levels of motivation following the use of the ISs.

The comparison group's post- questionnaire data indicates that high-level responses decreased from 22.14% to 21.43%. While low-level responses also decreased (from 32.86% to 29.29%), the percentage of moderate-level responses increased from 45.00% to 49.29%. The moderate-level category continued to have the highest response frequency (62.29%) for individual items (item 18). Table 3 shows the comparison group's pre- and post- results.

**Table 3***Treatment Group: Pre- and Post- Results for Motivation (n = 14)*

Item no.	1		2		3	
	Pre- %	Post- %	Pre- %	Post- %	Pre- %	Post- %
9	21.43	21.43	35.71	35.71	42.86	42.86
10	35.71	28.57	42.86	57.14	21.43	14.29
11	21.43	28.57	50.00	42.86	28.57	28.57
12	35.71	35.71	42.86	42.86	21.43	21.43
13	21.43	21.43	57.14	57.14	21.43	21.43
14	35.71	21.43	35.71	50.00	28.57	28.57
15	42.86	42.86	42.86	42.86	14.29	14.29
16	35.71	28.57	42.86	50.00	21.43	21.43
17	42.86	35.71	42.86	50.00	14.29	14.29
18	35.71	28.57	57.14	62.29	7.14	7.14
TOTALS	32.86%	29.29%	45.00%	49.29%	22.14%	21.43%

*Note.* 1 = low-level category; 2 = moderate- level category; 3 = high-level category.

The results of a paired t-test ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicated that the post- mean ( $Mu = 19.21$ ,  $SD = 4.74$ ) was not significantly higher than the pre- mean ( $Mu = 18.93$ ,  $SD = 4.75$ ) for motivational levels,  $t(13) = -1.30$ ,  $p = 0.22$ . These results indicate that there was no significant change in the comparison group's levels of motivation at the end of the period in which the treatment group was engaging with the ISs.

### ***Intergroup Comparisons for Motivational Levels***

The results of the independent t-test indicated that there was a significant difference between the treatment group's ( $Mu = 1.22$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) and the comparison group's ( $Mu = 0.29$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) levels of motivation,  $t(28) = 2.32$ ,  $p = 0.03$ , indicating that the increase in the treatment group's levels of motivation, following the use of the ISs, was significant.

### ***Comparing Post- and Follow-up Results***

The results from the third administration of the questionnaire to the treatment group indicated there was very little change in their motivational levels seven months after the experiment concluded. The data collected in this follow-up questionnaire was compared to the post- results which were collected in the final week of the experiment. The total percentage of high-level responses (28.33%) decreased by 1.11%. The percentage of low-level responses (27.22%) increased by 1.11%, while moderate-level responses (44.44%) remained unchanged. The moderate category continued to have the highest number of responses. The treatment group's post- and follow-up total scores are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Treatment Group: Post- and Follow-up Scores for Motivation (n = 18)*

Item no.	1		2		3	
	Post- %	Follow-up %	Post- %	Follow-up %	Post- %	Follow-up %
9	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	0.00	0.00
10	55.56	55.56	38.89	38.89	5.56	5.56
11	5.56	5.56	11.11	16.67	83.33	77.78
12	22.22	22.22	44.44	50.00	33.33	27.78
13	16.67	16.67	38.89	38.89	44.44	44.44
14	11.11	16.67	55.56	50.00	33.33	33.33
15	16.67	16.67	50.00	50.00	33.33	33.33
16	16.67	22.22	61.11	55.56	22.22	22.22
17	44.44	44.44	44.44	44.44	11.11	11.11
18	22.22	22.22	50.00	50.00	27.78	27.78
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>26.11%</b>	<b>27.22%</b>	<b>44.44%</b>	<b>44.44%</b>	<b>29.44%</b>	<b>28.33%</b>

*Note.* 1 = low-level category; 2 = moderate- level category; 3 = high-level category.

The results of a paired t-test ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicated that the post- mean ( $\mu = 20.33$ ,  $SD = 3.29$ ) was not significantly higher than the follow-up mean ( $\mu = 20.11$ ,  $SD = 3.51$ ) for motivational levels,  $t(17) = -1.46$ ,  $p = 0.16$ , indicating that there was not a statistically



significant difference between the post- and follow-up means. These results indicated that, overall, the gains in the treatment group's motivation (observed from the beginning to the end of the experiment) were maintained seven months after the experiment was completed.

### **Student Interviews**

Most students in the treatment group provided positive feedback regarding their experiences of the ISs. More than two-thirds, and in most cases more than three-quarters, of students were positive regarding the following: (a) selection of learning materials; (b) planning learning tasks; (c) goal setting; (d) self-evaluating; and (e) using the ISs in future.

Fifteen out of the 18 students (83.33%) provided positive comments regarding selecting materials. One student said, "I was able to find stuff that suited me and stuff I cared about", suggesting she selected materials which corresponded to her personal preferences/interests. Two students (11.11%) expressed negative attitudes regarding selecting materials. One student said, "I just didn't find websites that I like yet. I never really stuck to one website. I didn't know how or where to begin", suggesting she found it difficult to decide where to begin her search for materials.

Regarding self-evaluating, 15 out of the 18 students (83.33%) provided positive comments. One student said, "you can see if you're improving or if you need to improve", indicating that reflecting on her learning allowed her to assess her progress. Three students (16.67%) expressed concerns regarding self-evaluating. One student stated, "I would've liked more ... correcting and tests from the teacher", indicating that she wanted her teacher to be more involved in evaluating her learning.

Fourteen students (77.78%) were positive towards setting learning goals. One student stated, "it's something that you do yourself and if somebody else isn't meeting their goals

then it's not your problem; so, you're just thinking about your own", indicating that setting goals allowed learners to focus on meeting personal instead of group targets. Two students (11.11%) expressed negative attitudes towards setting goals. One student said, "I thought we couldn't really set goals that we wanted to because it all had to meet what the teacher said we had to do". The student was expressing concern that the teacher's instruction to use the LOs from the textbook to guide them in setting their goals was limiting their freedom because students were not involved in the creation of the LOs.

Thirteen students (72.22%) spoke positively about the process of planning learning tasks. One student stated, "you get to do stuff that really suits how you learn" and another remarked, "we did things that relate to what we're into". These comments indicate that this process allowed learners to incorporate activities that fit their personal interests and preferences. Two students (11.11%) expressed negative attitudes towards planning tasks. One student said, "I don't like students planning, it's not right", indicating that she felt that learners should not assume this responsibility.

Regarding using the ISs in future, 12 students (66.67%) provided positive feedback. One student suggested she wanted to continue with the approach because she enjoyed having more autonomy, stating "I do like having more power over what we do". Another student indicated that she wanted to use them in future because the approach had made her feel more motivated about learning. Six out of the 18 students (33.34%) expressed concerns regarding continuing with the ISs. One student said, "if we didn't do those things in our other subjects, I'd be annoyed at having to do them in Spanish, even though I know it is a better way to learn", indicating that, while she believed the IS approach was superior to the traditional approach, she did not want to continue with it as it would be inconsistent with her overall learning experience at the school. Another student suggested she preferred the teacher to

resume her traditional role when she moved into the next academic year because she would be preparing for state examinations.

### **Discussion**

The first important finding of this study is that there was an increase in post- treatment motivation levels. More than half of the treatment group's levels of motivation increased and more than a quarter of students moved into a higher category of motivation because of these changes. Thus, there were decreases in the low-level category of motivation and increases in the moderate- and high-level categories. While we cannot say for certain that exposure to the ISs generated the increase in motivation in the treatment group, the fact that there was no corresponding change in motivation in the comparison group during the same period suggests the ISs were responsible. The increase in the treatment group's motivation levels was observed directly following exposure to the ISs which were designed to promote autonomous learning; thus, this finding supports the premise of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985) that motivation is strongly linked to the need for autonomy. The students' levels of motivation did not change in a statistically significant manner between the end of the treatment and the follow-up test seven months later. It may be that engagement with the ISs impacted on motivation at a sufficiently deep level to ensure that the changes observed in the motivation levels were maintained over time. Alternatively, the fact that these students had a different teacher, had moved into a new academic year and were preparing to sit state examinations within the next 18 months may have influenced the results. This result may, of course, be a consequence of a combination of these factors.

A second important finding is that most students in the treatment group were positively disposed towards the two ISs. Students expressed positive opinions about selecting

materials suggesting it allowed them to express their individuality and incorporate their personal interests into learning activities. This finding supports the notion that making choices about their learning allows students to personalise their learning (Richards, 2006; Ushioda, 2011). This finding also supports Dam's (2018) claim that teachers can motivate their students by giving them autonomy to make decisions about their learning materials and to set learning goals. According to Ushioda (2011), the freedom to make choices about their learning increases the likelihood of learners having authentic classroom conversations which can generate motivation and allow them to express their identities. It may be that personalising their learning in this way was motivating because it allowed students to express their transportable identities, allowing them to learn as themselves rather than as generic students (Dam, 2018; Richards, 2006; Ushioda, 2011).

Two students, however, expressed concern about the limited freedom they experienced when setting learning goals. Their comments suggested they were frustrated because they believed they did not have complete freedom when it came to choosing what was covered in the Spanish classroom in general terms. They would have preferred to have been completely unconstrained.

The third major finding is that two-thirds of the treatment group expressed a desire to continue using the ISs in the future. Students indicated that they wanted to continue due to experiencing a sense of enjoyment in having more control over their learning and increased motivation. This finding supports the view that autonomy and motivation are interdependent or related (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001, 2019; Ushioda, 2019) because students displayed lower levels of motivation before engaging with the ISs and increased levels of motivation after engaging in autonomous learning activities. Furthermore, it supports Dam's (1995) assertion that learners who are given autonomy feel more motivated.

One-third of students, however, preferred a more traditional learning approach, expressing concern about using the ISs when preparing for state examinations. Perhaps they felt it was a dangerous time to be testing approaches. They also expressed a concern that their Spanish learning approach would be inconsistent with the overall approach at the school, suggesting they envisaged conflict between their identity as a Spanish learner and their broader identity as a student. If students were introduced to the ISs at the beginning of their secondary education, it could potentially counteract fears about the inconsistency of their approach to learning Spanish versus the teacher-centred approach to which they are accustomed.

This study has potential limitations. First, the relatively small sample size makes it more difficult to generalise the findings, especially in relation to the quantitative results which require researchers to make statistical generalisations. However, this study replicates the results of a pilot study carried out prior to this study which gives the findings greater validity. Furthermore, this study collected qualitative data from each of the treatment group participants via interview in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the value of the ISs; this would not have been feasible with a larger sample due to time constraints.

A second limitation is that all of the participants were female. However, Ryan (2009) suggests that significant gender variation is not common among secondary school learners with a greater consistency among attitudes toward L2 learning at this level. Furthermore, Kissau (2006) suggests gender differences in L2 motivation can occur because textbooks tend to recommend conversation topics which are more female-oriented and, thus, less interesting to male learners. Kissau argues that learners' loss of interest can be counteracted by giving them freedom to make choices about their learning; thus, the ISs used could mitigate potential gender differences in motivation.

A third limitation of this study is that students' learning success was not measured using language tests. Testing the students could have helped assess the impact of the ISs on academic performance and determine if the ISs facilitated L2 acquisition.

A fourth limitation is that the two ISs were implemented simultaneously which may make it more difficult to be sure that the findings are attributable to one or to both of the ISs. However, the interview questions were designed to elicit the participants' opinions on a number of topics relating directly to each of the ISs and the analysis of the resulting data tends to confirm that both ISs contributed to the increased levels of motivation.

A fifth potential limitation is that the comparison group did not participate in the third administration of the questionnaire. The decision to re-test was based on analysis of the pre- and post- data which indicated that the treatment group's levels of motivation had increased. Thus, the third administration of the questionnaire aimed to assess whether any gains observed in levels of motivation immediately following the treatment were maintained.

Finally, a sixth potential limitation is that ISs were introduced into a TY classroom. Teachers and students who are preparing for state examinations may be less willing to depart from the traditional teacher-centred approach, so their willingness to experiment with the ISs could be because they were not preparing for state examinations.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study indicate that the ISs were effective in generating learner motivation in that there was a significant increase in the treatment group's levels of motivation following engagement with the ISs. The findings also suggest that the participants were primarily positively disposed towards using the ISs with two-thirds of them expressing a desire to continue using them.

This study contributes to the process of closing the gap between theory and practice in this field, since much of what has been written is theory based as opposed to evidence based (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). There has been scant research investigating the effectiveness of strategies designed to enhance L2 motivation particularly among adolescent learners in compulsory education. This study investigates ways of generating motivation among this group by implementing particular ISs in the L2 classroom. As such, it extends our understanding of practices that enhance levels of motivation. Indeed, there is a well-documented need (e.g. Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Osborne, 2019) to find ways of increasing classroom engagement and motivation among teenagers in secondary schools, particularly in language classrooms. Therefore, the findings of this study have potentially important implications for secondary level language curriculum and syllabus design, as the results appear to confirm the effectiveness of an approach centred around the use of these ISs in positively influencing adolescent participants' levels of motivation. Specifically, these findings support the argument that allowing students to have greater input into the learning process can increase their interest in L2 learning in a secondary school setting and could, therefore, be considered for inclusion in secondary schools as a strategy for tackling low levels of motivation. At the very least, the case-study could function as a guide to evaluating motivation in secondary L2 classrooms in a systematic manner.

Also of note is that two-thirds of the treatment group expressed a desire to continue using the ISs in future. The IS approach caused a shift in the traditional teacher-student identities. The students' levels of motivation increased during a period in which they assumed a new identity, allowing them to become agents in charge of shaping their individual and collective language learning experiences. This phenomenon was frequently referred to as an

important motivating factor by the students and has commonly been associated with enhanced motivation (Dam, 2018; Fumin & Li, 2012).

The findings of this study tend to confirm the view that autonomy and motivation are highly interrelated, co-existing along a continuum (Ushioda, 2011), because it was difficult to distinguish between autonomy and motivation and to detect examples of either one in isolation. For example, it was impossible to determine if students were motivated because they were engaging in autonomous learning or if they were engaging in autonomous learning because they were motivated. We have also discussed how researchers are becoming increasingly concerned with linking motivation and autonomy to identity (Dörnyei, 2019; Taylor, 2013; Ushioda, 2011). This study contributes to our understanding of the relationship between the three variables in question since it lends support to Ushioda's (2011) claim that autonomy and motivation are both linked to learner identity. In particular, the findings suggest the ISs allowed learners to personalize their learning and that autonomous learning played an important role in motivating students and shaping their identities, supporting Brophy's (2009) assertion that learning content which is self-relevant can stimulate identity dynamics.

All of the areas discussed above merit further research; bearing in mind the limitations of this study outlined in the discussion section, this study proposes five recommendations for future research. First, it would be advisable to include male and female participants in future studies. Second, a larger scale study could produce more generalisable results and make a more substantial contribution to our knowledge about the influence of ISs on learner motivation. However, experts are calling for research to be more context-based like this one, shifting the focus from large-scale studies towards more specific local learning contexts arguing that learners bring several individual motivations to individual and collaborative task



engagement (Ushioda, 2019). Third, language motivation research could benefit from greater use of qualitative methods such as focus groups and semi-structured interviews, drawing on identity research in L2 learning. Fourth, because performance in examinations is an important aspect of secondary level education, it would also be advisable to measure students' success in learning via written, aural and oral testing. This would allow us to assess the impact on academic performance when examining the effectiveness of the ISs in improving classroom engagement. Finally, future research should also consider the implications of introducing the ISs at an earlier stage, for example in the first year of secondary education or, in an appropriate form, even at primary level.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Goal-Setting and Evaluation Record*

#### **Part One: Goal Setting**

THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS

List 3 realistic goals that you want to achieve in \_\_\_\_ weeks' time.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

Describe how you will achieve each of these goals.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

## Part Two: Assessment of Goals

Review your personal goals. For each goal, indicate if you are meeting it.

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

If you are meeting that goal, describe ways in which you will continue to do so. If you are not meeting that goal, indicate what you will change to make sure that goal is met.

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

Please make any changes to your goals or adjust them if necessary. Please write your redefined goals below:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

**Final Session:**

Were the goals met?

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

Why or Why not?

(THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS)

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

What can you do differently in future and what will stay the same for you?

(THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Feedback:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Appendix B: Student Reflection Record*

**What I have done**

(Describe activities you have taken part in)

**What I have learned**

(Summarize what you think you have learned in a few words)

THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS

**Reflections**

(Comment on how useful and enjoyable the activities were. Any problems?)

THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS



*Appendix C: Motivation Questionnaire*

**Please tick [✓] the appropriate box.**

1. I actively think about what I have learned in my Spanish class:

- a) Very frequently..... ☐
- b) Hardly ever..... ☐
- c) Once in a while..... ☐

2. If Spanish were not taught in school, I would:

- a) Pick up Spanish in everyday situations (i.e., read Spanish books and newspapers, try to speak it whenever possible, etc.) ..... ☐
- b) Not bother learning Spanish at all..... ☐
- c) Try to obtain lessons in Spanish somewhere else..... ☐

3. When I have a problem understanding something in Spanish class, I:

- a) Immediately ask the teacher for help..... ☐
- b) Only seek help just before the exam..... ☐
- c) Just forget about it..... ☐

4. When it comes to Spanish homework, I:
- a) Put some effort into it, but not as much as I could..... ☐
- b) Work very carefully, making sure I understand everything..... ☐
- c) Just skim over it..... ☐
- 
5. Considering how I study Spanish, I can honestly say that I:
- a) Do just enough work to get along..... ☐
- b) Will pass due to sheer luck or intelligence because I do very little work..... ☐
- c) Really try to learn Spanish..... ☐
- 
6. If my teacher wanted someone to do an extra Spanish assignment, I would:
- a) Definitely not volunteer..... ☐
- b) Definitely volunteer..... ☐
- c) Only do it if the teacher asked me directly..... ☐
- 
7. After I get my Spanish assignment back, I:
- a) Always rewrite them, correcting my mistakes..... ☐
- b) Just throw them in my desk and forget them..... ☐
- c) Look them over, but don't bother correcting mistakes..... ☐

8. When I am in Spanish class, I:

- a) Volunteer answers as much as possible..... ☐
- b) Answer only the easier questions..... ☐
- c) Never say anything..... ☐

9. If there were a local Spanish language TV station, I would:

- a) Never watch it..... ☐
- b) Turn it on occasionally..... ☐
- c) Try to watch it often..... ☐

10. When I hear Spanish song on the radio, I:

- a) Listen to the music, paying attention only to the easy words..... ☐
- b) Listen carefully and try to understand all the words..... ☐
- c) Change the station..... ☐

### Scoring Keys for Items of the Learner Motivation Questionnaire

Item no.	Scoring Keys for Responses		
	1 Low-level Motivation	2 Moderate-level Motivation	3 High-level Motivation
1	Hardly ever	Once in a while	Very frequently
2	Not bother learning Spanish at all	Pick up Spanish in everyday situations	Try to obtain lessons in Spanish somewhere else
3	Just forget about it	Only seek help just before the exam	Immediately ask the teacher for help
4	Just skim over it	Put some effort into it, but not as much as I could	Work very carefully, making sure I understand everything
5	Will pass due to sheer luck or intelligence because I do very little work	Do just enough work to get along	Really try to learn Spanish
6	Definitely not volunteer	Only do it if the teacher asked me directly	Definitely volunteer
7	Just throw them in my bag and forget them	Look them over, but don't bother correcting mistakes	Always rewrite them, correcting my mistakes
8	Never say anything	Answer only the easier questions	Volunteer answers as much as possible
9	Never watch it	Turn it on occasionally	Try to watch it often
10	Change the station	Listen to the music, paying attention only to easy words	Listen carefully and try to understand all the words

*Appendix D: Interview Form*

**Treatment group questions:**

1. How do you feel about...
  - a) ...selecting learning materials?
  - b) ...planning learning tasks?
  - c) ...setting learning goals?
  - d) ...self-evaluating?
2. You've done something different in your Spanish lessons over the past 4 months. What do you think your teacher's role has been?
3. How would you feel about continuing with this learning approach next year?
4. Would you change anything about the learning approach?