

# Advising in language learning and the support of learners' basic psychological needs: A self-determination theory perspective

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/ltr](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ltr)**Scott J. Shelton-Strong** 

Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

## Abstract

In this article self-determination theory (SDT) is used as a framework to explore ways in which 'advising in language learning' (advising) can be understood to support language learners' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. These are defined in SDT as nutrients essential for integration, growth, healthy development and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT posits that social learning contexts in which learners' basic psychological needs are supported facilitate and sustain autonomous functioning, more effective learning and performance, strengthen adaptability, promote awareness, and foster greater wellness (Reeve, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2019). While a growing body of research provides insight into ways advising promotes and is supportive of autonomous language learning and transformation (Kato & Mynard, 2016; Mynard, forthcoming), more specific studies are believed to be needed to develop a deeper understanding of the potential of its supportive role in this area. To address this gap, this study investigates how learners' perceptions of their experiences in advising can be understood from an SDT perspective. Findings from a qualitative analysis of a self-reporting questionnaire suggests that participation in advising has potential to provide support for the satisfaction of language learners' basic psychological needs. Drawing on the theoretical underpinnings of SDT to interpret this evidence within the context of one-to-one advising, the author argues that advising in language learning can play an important role in providing an autonomy-supportive climate which can foster satisfaction of learners' needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness.

## Keywords

advising in language learning, autonomy, basic psychological needs, change and transformation, positive affect, self-determination theory, well-being

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## Corresponding author:

Scott J. Shelton-Strong, Kanda University of International Studies, 1-4-1 Wakaba, Mihama-ku, Chiba, Chiba-shi 261-0014, Japan.

Email: [strong-s@kanda.kuis.ac.jp](mailto:strong-s@kanda.kuis.ac.jp)

## I Introduction

This article explores self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017) as a framework to understand whether, and to what extent, ‘advising in language learning’ (advising) can be understood to support language learners’ basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. SDT is an empirically based theory of motivation and also a practical framework to understand and evaluate the social conditions which facilitate or frustrate people’s motivation, well-being and potential to flourish (Ryan & Deci, 2019). The theory is centred on the premise that there are three basic psychological needs which, when satisfied, foster high-quality learning and motivation, curiosity and engagement, foster resilience and adaptive coping strategies in response to change (Vansteenkiste et al., 2019, p. 55; Ryan & Deci, 2017). This relates specifically to the present study, as advising aims to support students in managing their learning successfully and autonomously, as well as adapting to the demands of their degree courses, and university life in general.

Within the context of this study, advising is (primarily) a form of out-of-classroom, interpersonal support provided for language learners, and integrated within a university self-access learning centre (‘the SALC’). More specifically, advising is defined as an intentionally structured dialogue through which a learner is prompted to focus on personally meaningful aspects of his or her learning by means of the skilful listening and intentional use of language employed by a learning advisor to promote a deeper awareness of the learner’s capacity for autonomy and self-directed learning (Kato & Mynard, 2016; Mynard, forthcoming; Mynard, Kato & Yamamoto, 2018). This dialogue aims to gradually lead the learner to realize and embrace this potential for self-regulation, and to reflect and act on this within the processes of his or her own learning journey.

There is a growing body of research within the fields of self-access learning and advising (which are often intertwined), from which an increasingly complex picture is emerging of how the dialogic and reflective nature of advising can impact on a learner’s approach to language learning, his or her learning trajectory, and prompt a deeper understanding of the learner’s role within this process (Mozzon-McPherson, 2019; Mynard, forthcoming). However, there is relatively little known regarding how advising functions on an intrapersonal level, and how those involved perceive their participation in advising or value it as a psychological nutrient or support.

In response, the present study investigates how learners in a Japanese university context understand their experiences as participants in advising encounters, and the significance of these perceptions in determining the extent to which these can be conceptualized as supportive of SDT’s basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The aims of this study are to contribute to a deeper understanding of the support advising can provide for learners who participate in advising sessions, and to widen our awareness of the ways in which advising can be understood from an SDT perspective.

The article begins by providing a brief overview of advising and its conceptualization within the context of this study, followed by a review of the basic tenets underpinning SDT and its mini-theory of basic psychological needs. Following this, the methods are discussed, after which the results, and a brief discussion of these in relation to the research questions will be presented. In conclusion, limitations and ideas for future research in this area will be noted. The outcomes of this study suggest that participation in advising

holds potential to provide basic psychological need support for language learners. Overall, it is argued that advising can play an important role in generating an autonomy-supportive climate which fosters support for learners' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

## **II Background**

### *1 Understanding advising in language learning*

Advising in language learning has been defined as 'the process of helping someone to become an effective, aware, and reflective language learner' (Kato and Mynard, 2016, p. 1) and more specifically as an 'intentionally structured dialogue designed to promote learner autonomy' (Mynard, Kato, & Yamamoto, 2018, p. 55). This unique dialogue can be viewed as a form of social scaffolding and has been influenced by the fields of coaching, counselling, and psychology (Karlsson, 2012; Mozzon-McPherson, 2012; Mynard, 2019a; Tassinari, 2016). One of the primary goals of advising is to promote and foster language learner autonomy, which implies a 'readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purpose (and) the willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person' (Dam et al., 1990, p. 102). Scaffolding language learner autonomy is often understood as providing support for enhancing 'the capacity to take control over one's learning' (Benson, 2011, p. 2). To illustrate further, Sinclair (2008, p. 243) links this capacity to a developing awareness of a body of metacognitive knowledge concerning 'one's self as a learner (one's learning context; the subject matter to be learnt; the processes of learning)', and envisions the willingness to act autonomously as a result of intrinsic motivation, which fluctuates over time and task (for a recent review, see Little et al., 2017).

When referred to in this article, advising describes the dialogic interactions which occur when a student voluntarily arranges to meet a learning advisor to discuss aspects of his or her learning, in what are generally private conversations of approximately 30 minutes. These meetings can continue to take place over time (semesters, years), with close relationships often developing out of the regular contact. Learning advisors in the context of this study are specially trained professionals who are employed full time, receive specific training, and hold at minimum a Master's degree in language teaching or education, complemented by a strong background in teaching and learning.

### *2 Advising for learning and learner autonomy*

Language learning can be said to be one of the many pursuits in life which can cause immense satisfaction and terrible frustration, in equal measure. Motivation and in particular, the persistence needed to overcome obstacles along the way, are fundamental aspects recognized as crucial in learning a second or additional language (Dörnyei, 2018). This effort includes the need for effective self-regulation of not only the cognitive and metacognitive aspects of learning, but importantly the affective states as well, in order to be successful (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Through the intentional use of language in advising, learning advisors aim to help learners to understand and discover ways in which they can direct their own pathway towards achievement, for example

through prompting reflection on the learning processes and emotions involved in their learning. This reflection can then lead to an awareness of how these processes and feelings can be more consciously self-regulated, which in turn can prompt more autonomous action as they continue to develop in their role as an active agent in the learning process (Kato & Mynard, 2016; Mozzon-McPherson, 2018). Developing and exercising language learner autonomy is increasingly recognized as necessary for effective language learning to take place both within and beyond language classroom environments (Benson, 2011; Everhard, Mynard, & Smith, 2011; Mynard, 2019b; Shelton-Strong, 2018; Tassinari, 2016).

As noted earlier, one of the main objectives of advising is to support learner autonomy, particularly within the context of self-access learning and self-directed learning courses (Karlsson & Kjisik, 2011; Mynard, 2019a). To do this, learning advisors draw on skills used in counselling and life-coaching, which aim to promote awareness, reflection, change and development (Hobbs & Doffs, 2015; Mozzon-McPherson, 2017; Mynard & Carson, 2012). This is primarily facilitated through the skilled use of dialogue within the advising sessions, albeit often in an indirect manner (Mynard, 2018). Through the use of specific advising strategies, this intentional use of language aids the learner to engage in self-reflection, decision making, goal setting and striving, planning and self-evaluation, and encourages learners to engage in autonomous actions that reflect their own personal values and interests. The purposeful use of language and specific advising strategies in this context aim to focus the learner's thinking, while at the same time encourage choices towards novel, experimental or previously untried avenues. The goal of this is helping the learner to self-develop a greater capacity and awareness of not only how they approach learning, but also ways to direct and manage this through self-endorsed action and decisions (Kato & Mynard, 2016; Mozzon-McPherson, 2018).

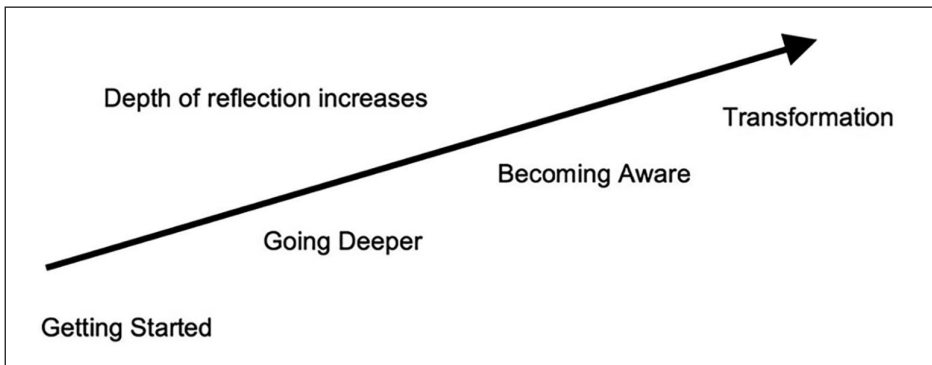
Drawing on sociocultural theory (Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2015) and the recognition of the crucial role the tools of language and semiotics play in scaffolding and mediation in learning, 'a learning advisor intentionally promotes deep, reflective processes and mediates learning through the use of dialogue and other tools' (Kato & Mynard, 2016, p. 1). What is important to note here is that it is the learner who is tasked with making the decisions, and learning to control, self-regulate and organize his or her own learning priorities, activities and processes. The learning advisor provides guidance and support to facilitate this process, by scaffolding reflection on learning and the processes involved, through the use of tools, (primarily language) as well as supporting their affective needs. Learning to manage the affective factors in language learning has an important role to play in stimulating and promoting learner autonomy and lifelong learning (Dewaele, 2015; Mynard, forthcoming; Oxford, 2017; Tassinari, 2016).

While the term 'advising' can bring to mind the use of controlling language, indicating what a learner should('nt), ought (not) to, must('nt) or need('nt) do, in practice, a learning advisor will instead attempt to identify the underlying reasons for a request for help, and the needs a learner may have, but which may not be readily expressed. Identifying needs and negotiating ways a learner might attend to these are sought through a process of cooperation, negotiation and dialogue rather than entirely through an 'expert–novice' relationship, with the learner and advisor working in partnership instead (Bradley & Karlsson, 2017; McCarthy, 2009). However, as each learner brings a unique cultural and learning background, and readiness to exercise (more) autonomy, and

responsibility for decision making and action in their learning, an attentive advisor will take this into account when deciding on the level of scaffolding needed, and make appropriate adjustments within the dialogue, and as the relationship develops (Mynard, 2011).

One of the more effective ways this gradual shift in control and awareness can be realized is through ‘Intentional Reflective Dialogue’ (Kato, 2012, p. 80). This is the dialogue developed within the advising encounters with the learning advisor listening and responding in a variety of personalized and intentional ways, which aids the learner to engage in reflection and broaden his or her self-awareness (Mozzon-McPherson, 2018). The aim of fostering autonomy, confidence and self-awareness within this reflective dialogue is pursued and aided by specific advising strategies. Among these are: repeating, summarizing, empathizing, the use of metaphor and powerful questions, sharing experiences, complementing, silence, and promoting accountability, among others (Kato & Mynard, 2016).

The practiced use of these strategies can prompt changes in a learner’s self-awareness by leading them to reflect on and challenge beliefs they hold concerning language learning, or about their own capabilities (Curry, 2014; Kato & Mynard, 2016). These incremental changes, in turn, can then lead to a shift in how students view themselves as language learners and the (more active) role they can play in the process. This has been referred to as ‘becoming aware’ in the literature (Figure 1) and is likely to occur, depending on the learner, after a point in time when he or she has begun to feel more at ease describing their own learning and less reliant on the learning advisor for direction (Kato & Mynard, 2016, p. 156). A study conducted by Yamashita (2015) reports on this process in detail, focusing on the affective dimension of a learner and how a focus on her emotions led to a new awareness.

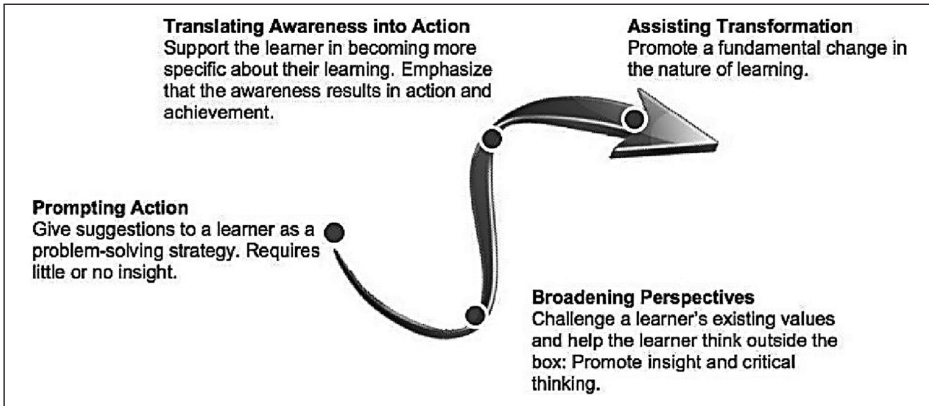


**Figure 1.** The learning trajectory.

Notes. Kato & Mynard, 2016, p. 13.

This process and the trajectory a learner typically follows towards this transition has been called ‘Transformational Advising’ (Kato & Mynard, 2016, pp. 9–19). This represents an approach which begins with ‘prompting action’, often involving suggestions for problem solving, with the next step being ‘broadening perspectives’, when a learner’s beliefs may be challenged in an effort to promote insight and a critical view of the learning process. This is followed by ‘translating awareness into action’, where the learner is

supported in becoming aware of the connections between awareness, action and results, and finally, ‘assisting transformation’, when the learning advisor promotes a shift in perspective about how learning occurs and the person’s role within this process (Kato & Mynard, 2016, p. 10). This trajectory is not meant to imply a linear progression, but rather represents the aim of successful long-term collaboration between an advisor and advisee, and can be viewed as cyclical and interconnected over time (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Approaches in transformational advising.

Notes. Kato & Mynard, 2016, p. 10.

While an experienced advisor may intuitively feel progress and change are being enacted, within and across advising sessions, particularly when rapport and relationships are fluid, because of the unique nature of advising in language learning as discussed earlier, this may not be explicitly expressed, nor are the immediate or post-session affective states of the learner often easily accessible (Reinders, 2008). Explicit, immediate developments are seldom easily discernible, as the subtle shifts in thought and behaviour as a result of the intentional use of dialogue in advising are less readily apparent, due to the often non-observable, and slow to manifest, psychological nature of change. It is this lack of explicit feedback which underpins this research, in an attempt to understand more clearly learners’ feelings and understanding concerning their involvement in advising sessions, and what this can tell us about the effectiveness of the work of advisors in prompting autonomous engagement, change, growth and development. This has important implications for the way in which advising is perceived as a tool to support language learners, for as Ryan and Deci (2017, p. 7) signal, ‘it is at the psychological level that change can often be more readily leveraged.’

### 3 Self-determination theory (SDT) and basic psychological needs theory

*a Self-determination theory (SDT).* SDT is an organismic meta-theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 229; Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 4) of human motivation and well-being, which ‘begins with the assumption that people are by nature, active and engaged’ and orientated towards growth and development (Deci & Ryan, 2016, p. 10). Basic psychological



needs theory is one of the six mini theories that make up SDT and maintains that need support through environmental and social scaffolding, enables our inherent human capacity for healthy development, self-regulation and social integrity to flourish and thrive.

Basic psychological needs theory is based on the identification of autonomy, competence and relatedness as psychological needs, which are recognized as basic and ‘essential to integrative functioning and wellness’ (Deci & Ryan, 2016, p. 15), much in the same way that our physiological needs (such as air, water and food) are necessary for healthy physical growth and development. From an SDT perspective (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Niemiec, Ryan & Deci, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2017) basic psychological needs are defined briefly as follows: ‘Autonomy’ is understood as a form of volition, a feeling that one’s actions are congruent with one’s own values, interests and beliefs, and refers to having a sense of control, or ownership over what one does and experiences, with these actions being reflectively self-endorsed. ‘Competence’ refers to the experience of interacting effectively with one’s environment, and is associated with optimal challenge, effort, mastery and self-efficacy. Importantly, for this perception of competence to be truly nourishing, ‘people must feel ownership of the activities at which they succeed’ (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 95). The need for ‘relatedness’ refers to feeling socially connected with others, and the experience of being involved in close, caring relationships where a reciprocal sense of belonging and inclusion are noted, and where respect for one’s perspective is mutual. For this care and acceptance to function as need-supportive it needs to be perceived as unconditional and authentic, being closely interdependent with autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Basic psychological needs are closely intertwined and interdependent with one another, considered universal across age and culture, and are defined as nutrients essential for growth, integrity and well-being to be sustained (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 10). Support for these needs is considered essential for greater internalization and increased self-regulation of behaviour, and for autonomous motivation and well-being to be fostered and sustained (Deci & Ryan, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, when these needs are thwarted through a lack of autonomy, or in environments where competence or relatedness are thwarted, this implies costs to a person’s full functioning and well-being, leading to a loss of motivation and diminished wellness (Vansteenkiste et al., 2019).

*b Basic psychological needs and autonomy-supportive environments.* In practice, when support for the satisfaction of all three basic psychological needs is present, this is argued to foster what is collectively referred to as an autonomy-supportive environment (Reeve et al., 2014, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2019) in which optimal development and healthy psychological functioning are fostered, sustained by the behaviors, actions and attitudes of the social agents (i.e. teachers, learning advisors, etc.), and other affordances which exist within a given social learning environment (Reeve, 2016). Extensive and robust research across many of life’s domains (Ryan & Deci, 2017) has shown that when support for autonomy, competence and relatedness is present, people (language learners in this context) tend to be more autonomously motivated, leading to better and deeper learning and performance, and more positive affective experiences. In addition, need satisfaction is closely associated with vitality and the lowering of anxiety, while need frustration leads to depleted motivation and ill-being (Roth et al., 2019).

Autonomy-support in practice can be facilitated when those who are in a position of influence (e.g. a teacher, or a learning advisor, in this case) intentionally enhance the environment by taking a participative or attuning approach (Vansteenkiste et al., 2019) by taking a student's perspective (Reeve, 2016). Ways to do this include acceptance and acknowledgement of challenges and negative emotions, and ensuring that feelings of value and significance are shared. It is important to provide choice and meaningful options, support initiatives and intrinsic interest, as well as remaining non-judgmental. The use of non-controlling communications, affording opportunities to contribute and give, providing rationales for requests, and patience are others (Reeve et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017). This has clear implications to this study as the use of reflective dialogue within the advising experience aims to be autonomy-supportive, mirroring these actions, and to promote the internalization of these values through dialogue, reflection, and prompting action.

From an SDT perspective, and specifically within the framework of basic psychological needs theory, the social-contextual influences within the learning environment and experience that students encounter are 'need-supportive' (supportive of basic psychological needs) when these afford opportunities to express volition, to interact effectively with the learning environment, and to develop a sense of relatedness with others (Ryan & Deci, 2017). One of the aims underpinning advising in language learning is to inspire students to seek out such opportunities, experiencing and crafting conditions supportive of autonomy, competence and relatedness beyond the classroom, within the advising encounters, and within their wider learning environment.

### **III The research framework and theoretical perspective**

Drawing on SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017) as a research framework, this study explores learner insights and perceptions of their experiences in advising encounters to develop a deeper understanding of the extent to which these interactions with learning advisors can be understood as having a positive effect on learning, motivation and psychological well-being. This is done by way of an interpretive qualitative analysis of students' responses to a (self-reporting) questionnaire using basic psychological needs theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) as a lens to determine whether these responses can be identified as evidence of being supportive of autonomy, competence and relatedness, thus facilitating the development of an autonomy-supportive social learning climate within which advising plays a vital role.

Related studies which have included an aspect of qualitative interpretive content analysis using SDT to determine similar autonomy-supportive outcomes in language learning environments include McEown et al. (2014), Noels et al. (2019), and also Wisniewski et al. (2018), who undertook narrative approaches to examine student role redefinition within non-traditional university courses. The results of these studies were consistent with the far more widely applied quantitative research paradigm within SDT, which attributes environmental and social support for basic psychological needs as effective in generating autonomy-supportive conditions in education contexts, as well as in other life domains (Ryan & Deci, 2017).



## IV The aims of the present study

The present study has two main research aims. The first is to explore the extent to which the self-reported experiences of students who have participated in advising sessions can be viewed as supportive of basic psychological needs, and how this can contribute to facilitating an autonomy-supportive environment. The second and related aim is to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship underpinning the fundamental approach of advising in language learning and the principles which define SDT and in particular, basic psychological needs theory. The research questions are:

1. What are participants' views on, or perceptions of, their experience in advising sessions?
2. To what extent is the advising experience supportive of students' basic psychological needs?

## V Methods

### *1 Context and background*

This study was conducted within the SALC of a private university near Tokyo, Japan, as an approved project within the university's Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education. This university specializes in foreign language education and learning, and serves approximately 4,000 undergraduate students.

The SALC is a socially supportive, purpose-built space with an institutional mission to promote learner autonomy (Mynard, 2019b). In this SALC, there are a range of facilities, services and support systems made available to students (Asta & Mynard, 2018; Mynard & Shelton-Strong, forthcoming), including the opportunity to reserve time and to participate voluntarily in one-to-one advising sessions with a qualified learning advisor. There are 12 full-time advisors who work in the SALC (including the author) ranging in age and experience of professional advising. When a student wishes to meet with an advisor, advising sessions are booked online at a time which suits them (choosing the advisor they wish to speak to), and later take place face to face in the SALC. The language used in the advising sessions is normally English, as all students have English language classes, and are at an intermediate level or above, on average. These advising sessions are popular among students and an advisor might meet with a number of learners on any given day. At the time of this study, there were over 400 students who had reserved and attended at least one advising session in the first semester of the academic year in which the research took place.

### *2 Data analysis procedures*

This study is primarily of a qualitative nature, and uses interpretative coding (Hatch, 2002), while also drawing on some of the principles of a social constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008) as its principal analytical tool. Approaching the data analysis by way of interpretive and emerging qualitative coding enabled the researcher

to harness its usefulness to recognize patterns and make connections to develop a clearer understanding of different ways in which learners' experiences relate to one another, and to situate these within basic psychological needs theory. Initial interpretations were discussed with colleagues who, while not involved as coders, were useful as a reflective sounding board, which aided in initiating reconceptualization or affirmation of my own interpretation. Conducting this research from within an interpretivist paradigm, the purpose was to interpret the phenomena observed from the learners' responses to the open-ended questions in the most rigorous way available. Being the sole researcher, the interpretations made are my own, based on my in-depth knowledge of the context and research framework, enabling me to make relevant holistic and humanistic judgments. While a single coder/research design has its limitations, the inclusion of additional researchers was not used, and as a result, reporting inter-rating reliability was not an option.

The data were initially coded by one (this) researcher to categories which served to group similar instances together, such as activities, viewpoints, keywords and/or concepts. A second coding was later completed by the same researcher after iteratively reading the data for more specific thematic connections. This was to determine if evidence would emerge to suggest that satisfaction for the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are supported within the specific interaction of the advising dialogue, and overall experience of the advising sessions. The data from each of the three questions relating directly to basic psychological needs satisfaction was iteratively re-examined against definitions in the literature to determine the extent and manner in which these were seen to be supported through the lived experiences and reactions described by students in their responses to the questionnaire.

### **3 Participants**

The participants in this study were university-age students of Japanese nationality ( $n = 66$ ) ranging from 18 to 22 years of age, all of whom were enrolled in one of the university's foreign language degree programs. Regardless of their foreign language focus, all participants were also enrolled in English language classes at the university. Recruitment was carried out by contacting all students at the university who had had at least one advising session in the first semester of the year in which this study was conducted, with an invitation to take part in this research by completing an online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and a consent form was provided with an overview of the study in accordance with the ethics policy of the university. All of the students who completed the questionnaire did so after agreeing to participate and explicitly allow their responses to be used in this study. The total number of students contacted numbered just over 400 with 66 students responding and agreeing to take part.

### **4 Methodology / data collection**

The questionnaire was administered online for ease of distribution, and consisted of 17 questions in total aimed at generating responses to how the participants interpreted their experience in advising sessions, and with advisors. This study focuses on only five of the

questions in the questionnaire. The questions which would provide background, and students' perceptions of the value of participating in the sessions were collected first, after which questions which related specifically to basic psychological needs were used to prompt a personal response, with examples.

## VI Results and discussion

### 1 Participant diversity

The initial part of the questionnaire collected basic personal information from the participants in order to understand the diversity of the students involved in this study. The responses indicated that there was a good balance in the level of experience brought to the study, with nearly half having been to between two and five advising sessions, nearly a quarter from six to 10 times, and nearly 20% having attended more than 10 advising sessions. A small number, only 15%, reported having been involved in an advising encounter only once (Figure 3). It is quite possible that these had occurred over a number of semesters, as the question was open in that regard, but all had participated in at least one advising session in the first semester of the academic year in which this study was conducted.

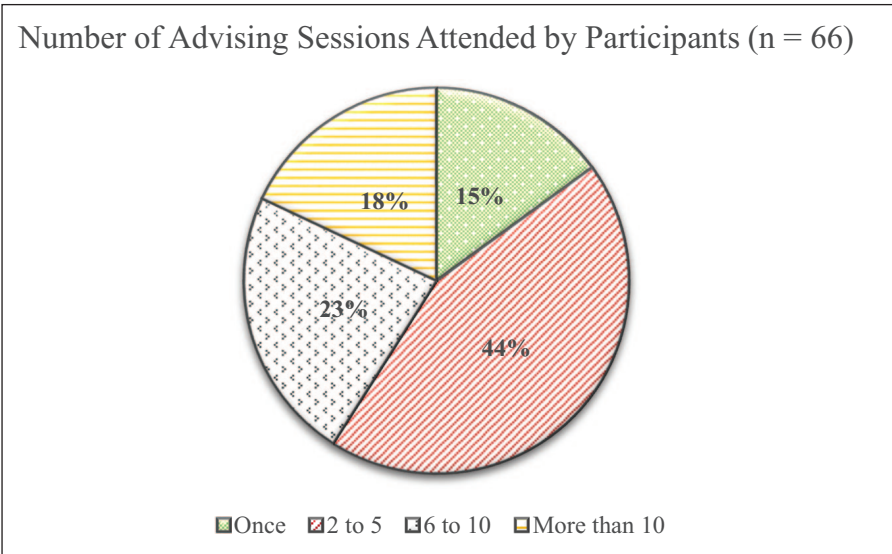
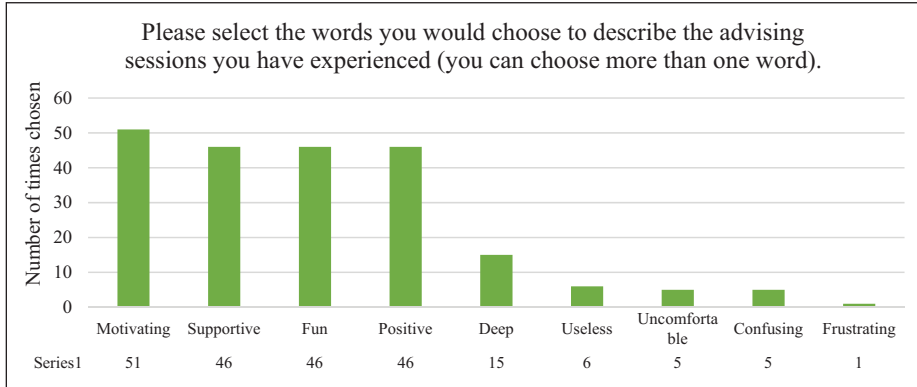


Figure 3. Number of advising sessions attended by participants.

### 2 Perceptions of the value of advising sessions

In order to understand how participants viewed these experiences, learners were asked to choose one or more words, which described their feelings concerning the advising sessions they had attended. The students were instructed to choose as many reasons as they

wished, from a menu of adjectives, both positive and negative. The results are as follows (see Figure 4), with 51 people (nearly 80%) choosing to describe the advising sessions as ‘motivating’, and nearly 46 people or approximately 70 % choosing ‘fun’, ‘supportive’ and ‘positive’, with almost a quarter choosing to describe them as ‘deep’.



**Figure 4.** Learner perceptions of advising experiences.

As Roth et al. (2019, p. 2) explain, ‘emotions signal the relevance and meaning of events relative to a person’s needs, aims, or goals, thereby yielding the potential to enhance individuals’ capacities for choice and authenticity.’ As such, these results would appear to signal that advising can be instrumental in generating a positive frame of mind, and positive affect, possibly having a direct effect on how they feel about themselves, their language learning and the outcomes of the discussion.

However, while overall this response appears to be a positive one, and which validates the strong, supportive nature of advising, there were also a small number of participants who described these encounters in negative terms, such as ‘useless’ ( $n = 6/66$ ); ‘uncomfortable’ or ‘confusing’ ( $n = 5/66$ ), with one person choosing ‘frustrating’. While it is encouraging that the positive responses outnumber the negative, it is important to be aware that not all participants felt the same. Although somewhat unexpected, this is valuable information which signals that there is more that can be done to ensure that more learners receive the attention and support they need. In addition, it highlights the challenge of assessing learners’ reactions to advising within what is quite an intimate setting, but with little opportunity to receive immediate feedback if the participant is reluctant to express their dissatisfaction, either due to cultural or personal reasons.

### 3 Support for basic psychological needs

In order to begin to understand the extent to which advising in language learning is effective in satisfying students’ basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, the questionnaire included three open questions to elicit reasons and examples from students that could indicate whether and in what ways, this may (or not) be the case. The questions the learners were asked to consider follow below.

1. Do you feel that Learning Advisors are helping you to become more autonomous, and more effective in managing your learning? Can you give one example, please? (Autonomy)
2. Do you feel that your experience with Learning Advisors is helping you to become a better language learner? Can you give one example, please? (Competence)
3. Would you say that you feel close to and cared for by the Learning Advisors you have had experience with? Can you give one example, please? (Relatedness)

### 4 Autonomy support

The examples students provided in answer to the first question are examined in this section (see Table 1). When first coded, they were grouped according to the different ways they emerged in terms of activity or action. This initial coding was used to identify patterns or commonalities, which led in a second coding to the emergence of three meta-categories (see Figure 5).

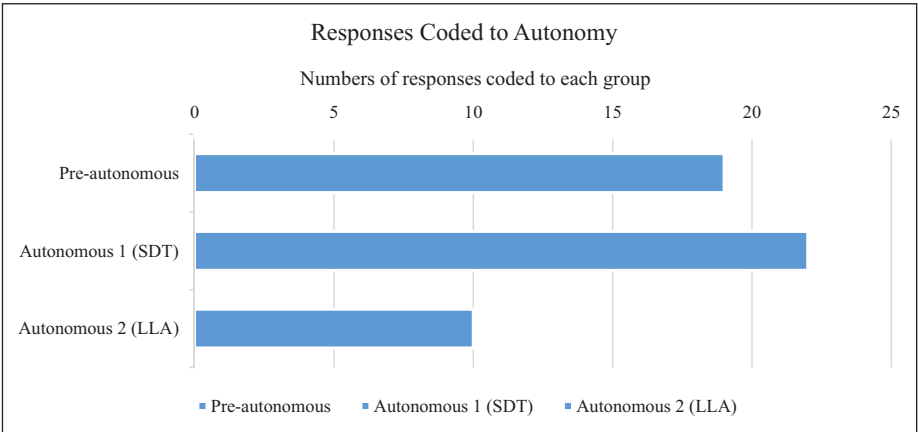


Figure 5. Autonomy support.

The first of these was labeled ‘Pre-autonomous’, which indicated there was a reference to receiving initial support (affective and/or practical) to scaffold a move towards exercising greater autonomy. The second is ‘Autonomous 1’, which represents an SDT perspective of autonomy defined by volition, choice, and interpreted as being congruent with one’s own values and beliefs, while the third was called ‘Autonomous 2’, which refers to the widely accepted (but currently evolving) interpretation of language learner autonomy, referring to the capacity to control one’s learning and related behaviour, and being effective in managing one’s learning (Benson, 2011; Holec, 1981).

While these categories emerged quite naturally and spontaneously from the data, there is some support for looking at autonomy through a dual lens, with recent work

initiating a discussion of how autonomy as understood in SDT interfaces with autonomy as conceptualized from a language learner autonomy perspective, in particular when examining pedagogical implications for the integration of the two concepts of autonomy (Lamb, 2018; Mynard, 2019c; Ushioda, 2019). Sugita, McEown, Noels and Chaffee (2014) extend this discussion further to encompass engagement and motivation in foreign language learning from a SDT perspective with support from a range of complementary theoretical frameworks. With autonomy being central to SDT and language learner autonomy, and by extension to both the practice and theoretical underpinnings of advising in language learning, it is important to bear in mind as Lou et al. (2018, p. 217) do, that the two frameworks of autonomy ‘provide complementary perspectives on a complex phenomenon’ and to refer to these as appropriate for the focus taken in research and practice.

From the perspective of advising, as the learning advisor and the learner engage in the one-to-one dialogue, the aim is to ultimately promote language learner autonomy, after first engaging in reflection on learning (Mozzon McPherson, 2019; Mynard, 2019a). Bearing this in mind, the responses (see Table 1) provided by the language learners in this study display a range of thoughts, intentions, acceptance, actions and metacognitive awareness, all of which were perceived by the learners to represent autonomy from the perspective of motivated enactment of personal experience, with some likely to be congruent with the learner’s thoughts, values and intentions. Without further information from the students involved, it is quite difficult to make a more specific analysis in this regard. However, it is also quite clear that these learners are aware of their role as autonomous learners, express satisfaction in discovering and enacting ways of self-regulating and directing their learning efforts, and are willing to ask for guidance and support. These are represented in the examples given, as varying degrees of autonomy appear to fluctuate across the span of extrinsic regulation (external, introjected, identified) to more (integrated, intrinsic) intrinsically regulated behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2000) with the perceived locus of causality moving from external to internal. It is important to note that SDT views autonomy not only as a phenomenological construct, but also as a functional issue (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

While language learner autonomy might appear to be more closely focused on the recognition of meta-cognitive awareness and self-regulatory action, Ryan and Deci (2017, p. 97) also note specifically that ‘autonomy concerns the regulation of behaviour by the self, and indeed, etymologically it refers to self-regulation.’ What differs perhaps most is that for SDT autonomy is an integral part of the issue of integration, which it links closely to the vitality, flourishing and wellness that accompany it. It may be helpful to note here that SDT recognizes different degrees of autonomy, and that these degrees are largely determined by the extent to which a person has, through careful thought and reflection, ‘identified with and integrated a particular regulation or value’ (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 56). Autonomy has a special role within basic psychological needs theory as it is through this expression and regulation of the self where aspects of personality development are organized, acting as the nexus ‘through which the other psychological needs are actualised’ (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 97). However, it is vital to recognize that autonomy is also dependent on and develops through internal sources such as ‘emotion, impulses, and urges that emanate from within’ (Roth et al., 2019, p. 1).



**Table 1.** Do you feel that learning advisors are helping you to become more autonomous, and more effective in managing your learning? Can you give one example, please?

BPN support for autonomy	Examples of learners' affirmative responses
Pre-autonomous	'Yes. When I was confused about how to study vocabulary, they advised me the good method.'
	'Yes. My advisor listened my problems carefully and gave me a good advice.'
Autonomous 1	'Yes. I often go the conversation area since I talked to advisor.'
	'Yes, they motivate me to do what I really want to do right then.'
	'Yes. They don't teach English but teach how to do things so they help students to be autonomous by not solving a problem instantly.'
	'Yes. When I feel down and talk to Learning Advisors, they can help me to find out the reason through the situation I described.'
Autonomous 2	'Yes. When I used ELM to learn English, the learning advisor helped my strategy become more effective! So I could make my new method of learning about grammar so I feel being more autonomous and effective.'
	'Yes. They taught me some significant points to keep learning effectively - set an achievable goal, evaluate after learning, and more.'
	'Yes, I became to be able managing my time.'
	'Yes, they taught me a lot of way to solve problem then I can choose it flexibly.'
	'Yes. I could find good way to learn for me.'

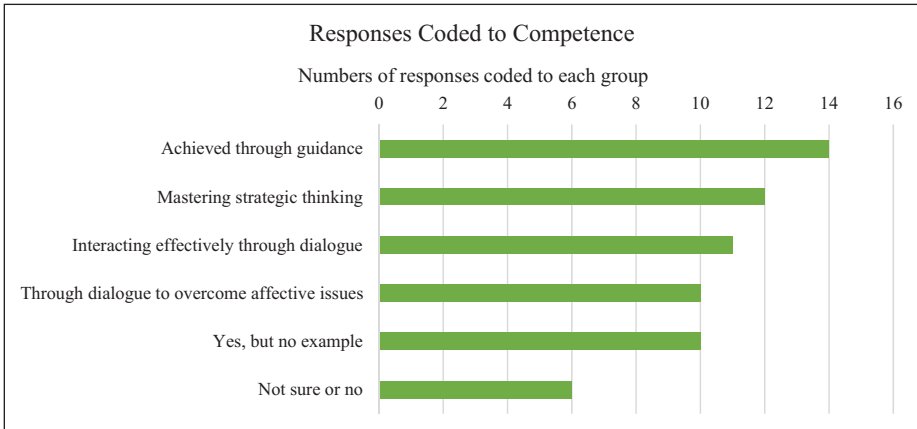
Notes. BPN = Basic Psychological Needs.

While limited space (and data) does not allow for a more concise SDT based analysis here of the learners' responses to the question of whether or not they felt learning advisors were able to help them to become more autonomous, and more effective in managing their learning, it can certainly be appreciated that the learners themselves perceived that this was the case, and were able to provide evidence of their own to support this assertion.

### 5 Competence support

This section examines learners' responses as to whether and how the advising experiences they had participated in had led to feelings of competence as a language learner. Reeve (2016, p. 140) defines competence as, 'the need to interact effectively with one's environmental surroundings – to seek out optimal challenges, take them on, and exert persistent effort and strategic thinking to make progress in mastering them.'

The examples students provided for question two were initially coded as they emerged as representative of the origin of the feeling of competence as reported. Within the second round, using BPNT as a filter, comments were coded into four main areas, differentiated by how feelings of competence were achieved (see Figure 6). In the examples learners provided there was an emphasis on agency, engagement, persistence, affect, and strategic thinking as the learner perceives progress towards new levels of competence or mastery, and highlights the supporting role of the learning advisor and the reflective dialogue. Table 2 gives examples which indicate some of the ways in which dialogue with an advisor and participation in advising sessions helped to support the need for competence



**Figure 6.** Competence support.

through intentional dialogue and reflective engagement. There are instances of learners self-evaluating their circumstances and realizing their role in prompting change, alongside implicit evidence of what a skilled learning advisor can do to help raise this awareness through promoting reflection (Mynard, 2019a; Kato and Mynard, 2016).

**Table 2.** Do you feel that your experience with learning advisors is helping you to become a better language learner? Can you give one example, please?

BPN support for competence	Examples of learners' affirmative responses
Coded to competence	<p>'Yes. They helped me with finding so many ways to improve not only my English skills but skills to connect what I learned with my interest.'</p> <p>'Yes, I had a big problem about classmates and I couldn't study well. Then I told the story to my advisor. She listened my story carefully and thought the solution together. It made me happy and now I can study English well.'</p> <p>'Yes. I strongly agree with this. Having a meeting once every week (for me) made me think how I spend the time each week. I learned that how I could change and how to make a plan for the study.'</p> <p>'Yes. After the conversation, I always feel confidence.'</p> <p>'Yes, These experience became my confidence'.</p> <p>'Yes. They tell us how to study English, but it is not about now. It connect our future studying. For example, time management. I could make a plan more efficiently.'</p>

Notes. BPN = Basic Psychological Needs.

In advising, the support for competence is facilitated through the reflective dialogue, where the aim is a transformation of the learner's thoughts, beliefs and attitudes, which reaches beyond the goal of increased language learning progress and proficiency. This transformation follows a process whereby an individual's beliefs about themselves as a language

learner, or the process and tools best employed to reach their learning goals are supported on the one hand, but also challenged within the dialogue, with the aim of raising awareness of not only their inner selves and existing beliefs, but also of those around them, including the (social) learning environment, and the affordances for learning that exist there.

Competence in SDT is a basic psychological need. It is seen as essential in facilitating functional progress, but also when this need is fulfilled or supported, feelings of efficacy act as a kind of sustenance which nourishes the self. This is supported by positive (informational) feedback. However, conditions which produce feelings of ineffectance bring agency under threat and thwart the ability to engage and organize action (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

In the examples above, a sense of the learners gaining a perception of increased effectance is noted, whether it be feeling supported in learning how to manage time, planning for study and adapting to change, expressions of confidence or understanding the importance of connecting their learning to personal interest. The positive and reinforcing role of the intentional reflective dialogue is also evident in these examples.

### 6 Relatedness support

In this final section, how these students perceived their relationship with learning advisors, and to what extent this fostered a feeling of relatedness, or a warm, caring, reciprocal relationship is observed. Relatedness is defined by Reeve (2016, p. 140) as ‘the need to be involved in warm relationships characterized by mutual concern, liking, and acceptance’. The responses to this third question were first coded to areas related directly to key words such as ‘kindness’, or to concepts such as ‘interest’ or ‘recognition’, and to acts such as ‘casual conversation’, ‘understanding’ and ‘careful listening’.

The second coding led to the creation of two main overarching codes groups, in which the comments were closely aligned to a feeling of being cared for by a show of concern, interest, acceptance, and offers of help, while the other was defined by a feeling of closeness produced by relationship-building and the intimate nature of the one-to-one dialogue (see Figure 7; for examples, see Table 3).

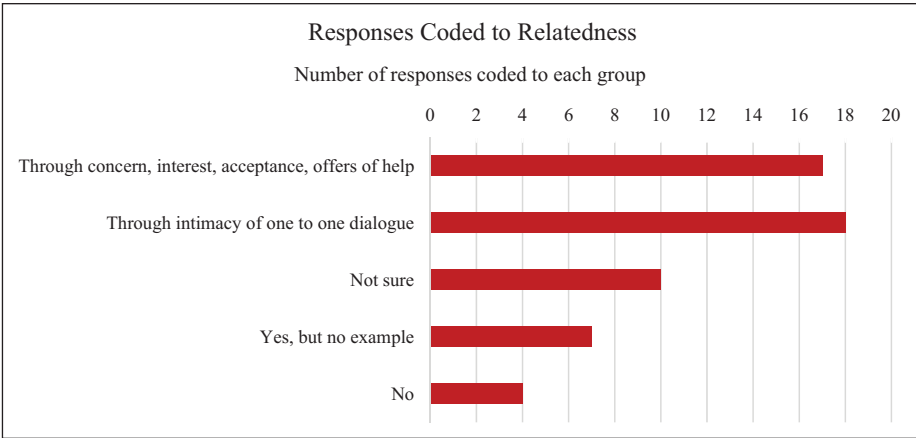


Figure 7. Support for relatedness.

**Table 3.** Would you say that you feel close to and cared for by the Learning Advisors you have had experience with? Can you give one example, please?

BPN support for relatedness	Examples of learners' affirmative responses
Coded to relatedness	<p>'Yes. They helped me with finding various ways to improve my English and broaden my horizons. When I lost myself, they suggested me another way to improve my English and encouraged my dreams.'</p> <p>'Yes. They definitely remember the students and what they talked about with those students even though they don't write down something. I like it, and it makes us feel close to Learning Advisors.'</p> <p>'Yes. When I have conversation with advisors, I feel nervous but compliment from them makes me very strong.'</p> <p>'Yes. They remember each of us and remember our stories so, that makes me happy when we are talking. Giving us our personal advices are very helpful. Thank you :).'</p> <p>'Yes. They make me comfortable so I don't feel embarrassed to speak English with my classmates. They always smile and support me eagerly.'</p> <p>'Yes. When I talk about not only studying but also my life or something.'</p>

Notes. BPN = Basic Psychological Needs.

Despite the lack of total agreement indicating that each student's experience in advising had led them to experience feelings of relatedness, it is important to note that there was a majority of students who responded positively to this question, bearing out the contention that learning advisors and advising sessions do have potential to foster the conditions to support satisfaction for the need for relatedness. Nevertheless, it is also clear from those who were not sure, or who responded negatively, that there is a need for advisors to bear in mind the extent to which gestures and words can make a difference, and to be mindful so that no one feels excluded in this way so that relatedness is supported. This is of importance as frustration of the need for relatedness has been shown to diminish well-being, and can have contingent effects on autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The climate and setting in which advising generally takes place in the SALC where this study was conducted is often the relative privacy of small purpose-built open booths which are distributed throughout the first floor. They can also take place in other parts of the SALC where advisors and learners sit among the other people present. Regardless of where these take place, that the session is private and that it is being attended to voluntarily by the student lends a particularly special atmosphere to the session, where a learner can be listened to without judgment, and share both successes and challenges that range from emotion laden insecurity, to satisfaction at working towards a learning goal though enacting a self-designed learning plan. Within the advising sessions and through the intimacy of the co-constructed dialogue, there are opportunities for students to develop feelings of significance and of being responded to and respected. This is particularly true

for those who return regularly, and the relationship building that takes place is often a key factor in facilitating change and transformation.

SDT acknowledges that through the need for relatedness, people become interested and involved with what others think and do and are open to adopt and accept the views, values and behaviors of others as well. While it is necessary for these to be integrated and internalized to become truly autonomy-supportive (Ryan & Deci, 2017), fostering a climate of caring and acceptance in advising can help to support learners as they will be likely to exhibit a readiness to take on new challenges and experiment with new directions if they feel they are supported unconditionally. The examples above (see Table 3) indicate a climate of caring, closeness, appreciation and respect was cultivated by the learning advisors in the advising experiences being referred to, and that this was noticed and valued by the students involved.

## **VII Conclusions, limitations and future directions**

This study was guided by two research questions aimed at (1) learning more about how students perceived their experience in advising sessions, and (2) to what extent the advising experience could be viewed as providing support for the student's basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The following points emerge from the analysis and results in support of these.

In response to the first question, we find the majority of the participants reported positive feedback concerning perceptions of learning advisors and the advising sessions they had attended, describing them as being largely motivating, supportive, enjoyable and positive. Secondly, it is also noteworthy that the dialogic and reflective nature of advising in language learning appears to have immense potential to provide effective and wide-ranging support for the satisfaction of the participant's basic psychological needs. This is evidenced in the results of how learners responded to the basic psychological needs-focused questions, where a range of explicit examples of how these needs were supported is noted, and examples provided. This evidence, as detailed in the analysis of learner responses and perceptions, lends credibility to the assertion that for this particular student population, learning advisors and advising in this context has demonstrably had a positive impact on the development of the learners' self-awareness and motivation in their language learning endeavors. There is evidence that suggests advising is instrumental in scaffolding the challenges that arise as these students strive for success as language learners, and provides support to foster increased experiences of autonomy, feelings of effectance, and affordances for relatedness. From the background literature, to the supporting details which emerged from this study, it would seem reasonable to suggest that advising, when conducted in a thoughtful, caring and intentional way, does indeed have strong potential to act as an autonomy-supportive agent or tool, which can lead to those who participate in advising to experience greater effectance and engagement, more positive affective experiences, and increased vitality and well-being.

There are a number of limitations to this study, however. As a self-reported instrument, the questionnaire allows for only one interpretation of a participant's response. In future studies, follow up interviews could focus on particular aspects or feelings that

were revealed, or areas which could benefit from further clarification. This would enrich the data and provide for deeper connections to basic psychological needs to be made. While interpretive qualitative coding worked well with a sole researcher, there are limits to such an approach and future studies could gain in depth by having additional coders to cross examine the data to ensure that the interpretations are as consistent as possible. Nevertheless, taking these limitations into account, the study was conducted rigorously and the results bear out a number of exciting implications for further research in this direction.

These future directions could be anchored in the development of learner profiles and the extended use of transcribed dialogue so that inner connections can be made that extend to BPN satisfaction and clear examples predictive of personal growth and well-being. Other ideas lead in the direction of forming focus groups, which could be instructed in basic psychological needs and learn to identify them and instances of satisfaction and frustration that occur in their lives. This could lead to reporting on the effectiveness and outcomes of this awareness in semi-structured interviews in order to gain a new perspective on self-regulation, internalization and self-awareness.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that advising in language learning as a form of social scaffolding and psychological support for language learners has an important role to play in providing support for SDT's basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. As a result, it is my hope that this research can aid in creating an interest in further exploring ways that SDT can be instrumental in developing a deeper understanding of how advising in language learning can both help to create the conditions in which learners can flourish and thrive, and as a measure to determine the extent to which it is successful.

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## ORCID iD

Scott J. Shelton-Strong  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8786-6012>

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