Student perceptions on the motivational pull of Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS): a self-determination theory perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores a group of secondary school students' feelings about Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) using a self-determination theory (SDT) lens. It adds to the limited, existing literature on TPRS and is the first to study it from a purely motivational perspective. The paper analyses the extent to which students perceived that TPRS satisfied SDT's three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. It employs a case study approach, using data from classroom observations, background group interviews and focus group interviews. The findings conclude that TPRS is a decidedly motivating and engaging method for foreign language (FL) learners. The three needs of SDT were found to be highly interrelated with satisfaction of one influencing positively on the others. The findings suggest that the autonomous nature of co-creating stories with the teacher, result in a heightened sense of personal ability and belongingness to the group. The results reinforce conclusions from other studies, suggesting that activities that are perceived as fun, interesting, novel and different are most likely to develop intrinsic motivation in FL learners. The findings have implications for increasing intrinsic motivation in FL classrooms around the world.

Introduction

The importance of motivation for successful second language (L2) learning is widely recognised by researchers in both social psychology and education (Gardner 1985; Noels et al. 2003). Boo et al. (2015) note the vast surge of research surrounding L2 motivation in their meta-analysis of over 400 publications between 2005 and 2014. Nonetheless, how L2 motivation is actually fostered in the classroom remains a highly contested and complex domain, around which there is little consensus.

Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci 2000) provides a motivational lens through which L2 motivation can be explored. SDT posits that intrinsic motivation, participating in a task out of sheer enjoyment and interest, is enhanced when learning activities satisfy the basic needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence. While SDT has been elaborated by various scholars (Niemiec and Ryan 2009; Noels et al. 2003) and successfully employed in a variety of contexts such as sports, medicine, coaching, and education (Muñoz and Ramirez 2015), its application in L2 motivation remains low. Even less research exists around the construct from the students' perspectives.

Empirical investigations focusing on motivational teaching strategies are scarce in L2 research, with some notable exceptions (e.g. Dörnyei and Csizér 1998; Guilloteaux and Dörnyei 2008; Moskovy et al. 2013). In their seminal work, which explored motivational teaching practices as a whole, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) called on other L2 researchers to investigate more narrowly defined foreign language (FL) teaching methods within a motivational framework. The present study responds to this call by investigating the motivational impact of Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) using an SDT lens. Its purpose is to consider how SDT might inform understanding of students' L2 motivation, and, more particularly, how TPRS relates to the theory.

TPRS

TPRS is a language teaching approach developed by Blaine Ray in 1997 (Seely and Ray 1997) focusing on acquiring language through storytelling, reading and personalisation of themes (Dziedzic 2012). TPRS is based on Krashen's (1981) theory of 'comprehensible input' (CI) which hypothesises that in order for language to be acquired, learners require vast amounts of understandable 'inputs' (Gass 2008). Payne (2011), among other critics of Krashen's CI hypothesis, argues that it is flawed and unpractical in the 'real' language classroom. Nevertheless, the theory is widely known and used by FL teachers.

Steps in TPRS

(1) *Show*: First, the teacher selects three to four high frequency, target language structures as the central component for the story. For example, a beginner or novice story may use the three target structures: *went to, forgot* and *gave her*. Meaning is then established by gesturing, acting and translating.
(2) *Ask*: In TPRS, the teacher 'asks' rather than 'tells' a story (Ray and Seely 2015). A pre-written script is used as an outline, but specific details such as the characters' names and locations, are contributed by the class as the story progresses (see Appendix). A specific method of questioning, called 'circling', allows for repetitions of the target structures in various formats to maintain student interest.
(3) *Read*: After listening and contributing to their story, students then read various versions of it and may also write it. Students will also read other stories with a similar plot and the same target structures as their story, but details will have changed.

When learning activities fail to engage students through interest or novelty, they experience boredom and disengagement (Collins and Halverson 2009). TPRS stories aim to be 'compelling', as this intense interest helps learners focus only on the message they are hearing or reading (Krashen and Bland 2014). Linking closely to constructivism, the co-creation and participation in fun, interesting and bizarre stories allows students to 'acquire' rather than 'learn' the highest frequency language structures needed for communication.

The research around TPRS, however, remains scant. Most existing studies focus on achievement outcomes, comparing TPRS to more traditional language instruction, with little or no mention of its role in motivation. In many cases, publications are only available in the form of non-peer-reviewed book sections or theses and are often biased towards the approach and lacking in academic rigour (e.g. Dziedzic 2012; Varguez 2009; Watson 2009). Foster (2011) is critical of this dearth in empirical research, arguing that evidence supporting TPRS's success is purely anecdotal. Lichtman's (2015: 376) overview of all existing TPRS research, citing published descriptive articles, empirical studies and unpublished theses, concludes that 'TPRS is at least as effective as, and often more effective than, other second language teaching methods'. Her summary, however, is descriptive in nature and appears only as an appendix in Ray and Seely's (2015) TPRS instructional manual. Moreover,

the synopsis cites only five published empirical studies, three publications with no control group and seven descriptive articles. Lichtman claims only Alley and Overfield (2008), which she notes is not an empirical study, is critical of TPRS. In their chapter, the authors problematise TPRS as being overly teacher-centred, with non-authentic stories that possess minimal cultural content.

Nonetheless, the few studies that mention TPRS's role in motivation and engagement report positive findings. Teachers perceive TPRS to be highly motivating for students, resulting in total engagement, excitement, and eager participation (Campbell 2016; Espinoza 2015). Blanton's (2015) thesis concludes that students score TPRS higher on all areas of motivation than the popular 'Communicative Language Teaching' approach. Despite being critical of the 'made-up' stories themselves, he links students' increased intrinsic motivation to the autonomy afforded to them via the TPRS approach, offering support to Perna's (2007) findings that students enjoy and like the TPRS class more than other language classes. While not specific studies on motivation itself, Beal (2011), among others, posits TPRS's ability to lower what Krashen and Terrell (1983) call the 'affective filter'; the anxiety experienced in language learning that causes inhibition, which is particularly prevalent among adolescents. For Dziedzic (2012) this is largely thanks to the target language consistently being made 'comprehensible' in TPRS.

The active learning in TPRS appeals to learners, students report feeling validated and included as they co-create the story with their teacher and 'TPRS is fun' (Davidheiser 2002). Many studies highlight its positive effect on student engagement, autonomy, self-confidence, and enthusiasm for learning (e.g. Bustamante 2009; Espinoza 2015; Wenck 2010). Foster (2011) highlights that the approach emphasises the creativity of both teacher and students, making it entertaining for everyone involved. 'Having fun' through stimulating, engaging activities has also been found elsewhere in language learning research as an important driver of motivation (Yurtseven et al. 2015).

While dissertations and theses are valuable sources of data, the lack of published, empirical work around TPRS in peer-reviewed journals highlights the need for further research. In addition, there is little qualitative research relating to TPRS and its role in L2 motivation.

L2 motivation

Several seminal publications in the field offer a detailed overview of what L2 motivation involves and how understanding of the construct has evolved (e.g. Csizér and Magid 2014; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011; Ushioda 2013). Nevertheless, its multifaceted nature and wide range of variables has resulted in a surge of related research with little congruity other than an acceptance that its conceptualisation is complex and fraught with difficulty (Boo et al. 2015; Muñoz and Ramirez 2015). Until recently, the principal focus of L2 motivational studies has relied on theories developed within the field itself, concentrating primarily on the internal traits of the learner (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011). Relatively few empirical studies have investigated the role of the learning environment and specific teaching approaches on student motivation.

Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) 'Ten Commandments for Motivating [FL] Learners', highlights the importance of creating a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, developing good relationships, increasing the learner's self-confidence, making the classes interesting, personalising the learning process and promoting learner autonomy. In the sparse studies that attempt to add to this work by providing empirical data on the effectiveness of such motivational strategies, the teacher and their teaching practices have consistently been found to be highly influential (e.g. Cheng and Dörnyei 2007; Guilloteaux and Dörnyei 2008; Moskovy et al. 2013).

Building specifically on Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) and Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) research, Ruesch et al. (2012) reinforce the tenet that teachers and teaching practices that emphasise the macro-strategies of rapport, positive classroom climate and engaging tasks, will result in students who feel more motivated in the FL classroom. Language teachers who provide stimulating and engaging tasks through a fun, supportive classroom will lower language anxiety and influence the quality of FL student motivation (Oga-Baldwin et al. 2017).

Theoretical framework

In their meta-analysis of L2 motivation, Boo et al. (2015) highlight the central role of broader psychological theories of motivation in the field. SDT is one of seven theoretical frameworks employed in their analysis but is still relatively under-researched (see Figure 1).

Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT postulates that satisfying the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness leads to enhanced intrinsic motivation and when thwarted can result in diminished motivation. Autonomy is concerned with choice, opportunities for self-direction and student ownership of their learning (Ryan and Deci 2000). Competence includes students' perceptions about their capacity to achieve success, (Fried and Konza 2013) while relatedness refers to a sense of belonging, support and inclusion in the classroom (Ryan and Deci 2000).

Intrinsically motivated activities are associated with positive feelings of excitement, engagement, aptitude and self-determination (Deci and Ryan 1985). They are sought in the absence of reward contingency and people choose to freely participate in them out of pure enjoyment and interest rather than due to any external forces. Extrinsic motivation refers to motivational orientations that are driven by factors outside the activity itself (Muñoz and Ramirez 2015).

Whilst extrinsic forms of motivation can result in desirable outcomes, intrinsically motivated students typically elicit higher levels of self-confidence, task persistence, desire towards learning and sustained positive learning behaviours (Cerasoli and Ford 2014; Muñoz and Ramirez 2015; Niemiec and Ryan 2009). SDT asserts that one's position on the 'extrinsic-intrinsic' continuum (Ryan and Deci 2000) is fluid and through the process of 'internalisation', it is possible for students to move towards the top of the motivation scale, which is purely intrinsic (Niemiec and Ryan 2009). By utilising teaching approaches that satisfy SDT's needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy, educators can boost participation and engagement, leading students to more intrinsically motivated behaviours (Cerasoli and Ford 2014; Jang et al. 2016).

SDT is increasingly being selected by FL researchers over other theories as its three psychological needs are deemed universal and consequently, applicable across cultures and contexts (Kaplan and Madjar 2017). The intrinsic and extrinsic subtypes of SDT are increasingly being employed as a valid research
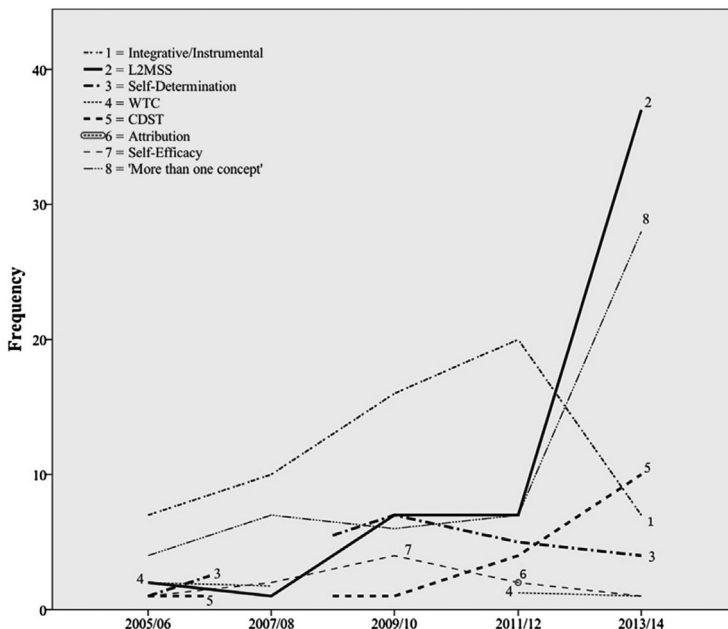

Figure 1. Overview of theoretical trends in L2 motivation research (Boo et al. 2015, 154).

tool for assessing L2 motivation (Noels et al. 2003; Oga-Baldwin et al. 2017). Researchers, however, bemoan the lack of empirical FL research, particularly qualitative, that explores the link between the language teacher, and their approaches, and L2 motivation (Dörnyei 2003; Oga-Baldwin et al. 2017). McEown and Takeuchi (2014) make a direct call for further research using SDT as a framework to explore the relationship between language teachers' motivational strategies and students' L2 motivation.

Contrary to many other L2 motivation theories, SDT recognises that, within educational settings, the catalyst for behaviour is often external to the individual (Ryan and Deci 2000). SDT therefore enables exploration and analysis of FL teachers' motivational strategies and each student's experience of them (Fried and Konza 2013) and so provides a useful theoretical framework and motivational lens, through which to explore students' perceptions of TPRS, leading to the following research questions:

(1) Do students perceive TPRS to be a motivating method for language learning?
(2) To what extent does TPRS satisfy SDT's basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence?

Method

Research design

Given that the primary research aims were to explore students' feelings and experiences, a qualitative, 'within-site', single case study was selected, comprised of students experiencing TPRS for the first time. The value of a qualitative case study approach when attempting to understand phenomena in education related to relationships and social processes is widely recognised (Denscombe 2014). Practical elements such as time constraints, working conditions and availability led to a multi-method design with triangulation achieved through semi-structured background group interviews (BGI) followed by classroom observations (CO) and focus group interviews (FGI).

The research design was consistent with Millward's (2012) position that in selecting group data collection methods, it is important that participants have some common characteristics and have something to say about the focus of the research. Group interviewing has been noted as an effective method of data collection in education as students challenge and extend each other's ideas, resulting in a wider range of responses than individual interviews (Gray 2014). This is particularly evident when a group have been working together or towards a common goal (Cohen et al. 2011).

Context and participants

The educational setting was an English-medium international school, comprising of approximately 500 secondary students in Switzerland. Students were generally willing participants in the educational process. FL class sizes were usually between eight and 16 students. While this study was not consistent with the typical 'Action Research Cycle' (Denscombe 2014), the researcher was also the teacher. At the beginning of the data collection process, I had been teaching the participants for four weeks. I was experienced with TPRS and had been using it periodically in my practice for three years.

Selection of participants

As a key objective was to collect data from students who had never previously been taught with TPRS, a purposeful sampling strategy (Gray 2014) was employed. First, I confirmed that no other language teachers in the school had used TPRS in their previous classes. As it is not a widely utilised teaching strategy, it was envisaged that students who were new to the school would also be new to TPRS. This was not controlled for, however, as it was felt that asking students about storytelling in advance may impact the data collection phase. Students who met the following criteria were invited to participate:

(1) In Year 10 (aged 14–15) and studying Spanish with the teacher-researcher.
(2) Either new to the school or new to my classes.

Information was provided to all participants regarding the ethical standards, including assurances of anonymity and confidentiality and respect for their right to withdraw at any time. An ethical consent form and letter outlining the scope of the study and commitment required were signed by all participants and their parents.

A focus group of 12 students, comprising six boys and six girls, was established. This number was consistent with the conventional focus group size whilst also accommodating the recommendation to over-recruit so as to allow for absentees (Millward 2012). All participants had vast prior experience of FL learning, with Spanish being their third or fourth language.

Data collection

A longitudinal approach to the data collection was employed in order to explore how students felt about TPRS at the time it was being taught and whether these feelings remained sometime after. A two-month timeframe was used as changes in students' motivation, coming from a teacher's motivating style, tend to stabilise after this time (Jang et al. 2016).

Stage 1: semi-structured background group interviews (BGI)
Participants were first interviewed as a group before they had been in any TPRS classes via two 30-minute semi-structured BGIs. The objectives were to develop an understanding of how they conceptualised language learning and to detect examples from previous FL classes in order to generate comparisons with TPRS in later interviews. Participants were encouraged to talk about their personal histories with FL through open-ended questioning, giving them freedom to elaborate on their feelings. This method was also employed to develop my rapport with the participants so as to elicit deeper responses in discussions (Cohen et al. 2011).

Stage 2: classroom observations (CO)
To study the behaviours and actions of the student participants, four 80-minute classes, where the participants were being taught with TPRS for the first time, were video recorded. The efficacy of CO in educational research is well documented, particularly 'when studying small groups' or 'specific activities that lend themselves to being observed' (Cohen et al. 2011: 456) and when combined with other qualitative methods such as interviews (Denscombe 2014). Video recorded CO enable the researcher to look at behaviours that otherwise might have gone unnoticed (Cohen et al. 2011) and also help to reduce 'selective recall and perception' (Denscombe 2014).

The CO took a 'semi-structured observation' (Gray 2014) approach as I was looking for general signs of visual engagement, motivation and enjoyment but was not noting each behaviour quantitatively through a structured, systematic observation (Flick 2009). LeCompte and Preissle's (1993) guidelines for observation of specific events provided a framework for the CO.

Participants, who were mixed with other non-participant students who had been taught previously with TPRS, were told the class was being recorded but no other details were given. Although the impact the presence of a video camera can have on behaviours is noted in the literature (Borg 2006; Flick 2009), the advantage of allowing for cross comparisons between what participants said in interviews and what they actually did outweighed the potential weaknesses.

Stage 3: semi-structured focus group interviews (FGI)
Two FGI took place after the participants had been taught using TPRS; the first, within three days of the TPRS classes and the second, eight weeks later. The time elapsed between the CO and first FGI was minimised so that feelings, perceptions and behaviours were still fresh in the participants' minds

(Borg 2006). The second FGI aimed to explore whether the emotions associated with TPRS were maintained over time.

FGI hold a 'well recognised status' within the qualitative research paradigm (Morgan 1998) and their use in educational research is growing (Cohen et al. 2011; Millward 2012). The interaction process in FGI stimulates memories and debate meaning they often generate a more in-depth understanding of an issue through natural conversation and discussion (Wilkinson 2003). A progressive focusing approach was utilised (Morgan 1998). The strong positive relationships I had with the participants allowed me to cultivate rich discussion among the group, with questioning becoming gradually more focussed towards SDT's psychological needs as participants felt more at ease in the process.

Although Millward (2012: 416) posits that FGI are 'not suitable to the formal testing of hypotheses', Stanton et al. (1993) successfully used 'protection motivation theory' to frame a group discussion with adolescents about sexual risk, while Fried and Konza (2013) used FGI to study engagement in schools through an SDT lens. Indeed, employing theory as the focusing vehicle in FGI has been found to be highly effective (Stanton et al. 1993).

Data analysis

BGI, FGI and CO were analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis; including transcription, coding and collating data into themes. The participants' conceptualisations of language learning in general (from the BGI data), their stated feelings and experiences about TPRS (from the FGI data) and their classroom interactions and behaviours (from the CO data) were compared for validity and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Given that this study took a theory-driven approach (Gray 2014), the starting point was coding for the psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence in SDT. The data chunks associated with these three themes were then recoded for the study's research questions, using a theoretical thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Employing a specific theory, however, can be problematic when the researcher drives the conversation towards constructs from the model, thus inhibiting other avenues of discussion around the topic (Gray 2014). In recognising that all qualitative research and analysis requires some degree of interpretation and subjectivity (Cohen et al. 2011; Gray 2014), I acknowledged my 'active' position (Braun and Clarke 2006) in the research process, comprehending that whilst other themes might surface, they could not merely 'emerge' by themselves.

Results

SDT now provides a theoretical framework and motivational lens to analyse the findings. Firstly, students' conceptualisation of language learning offers a background for examination of their feelings and motivations regarding TPRS. Findings are then presented according to SDT's needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness. Fictitious names are employed to denote the students' responses.

Students' conceptualisations of FL learning

Importance of speaking

FL were principally perceived as a mechanism which 'granted communication' (Kevin BGI1) and this in itself was a motivating factor to learn them (Amy; Kevin FGI2; Prue BGI1). While students acknowledged the various forms of communication, the verbal element was widely considered as the most important among the group. For Amy, 'the goal of a language is to be understood by different people who speak' it (FGI2), while for Derek, 'the most important part' was 'actually speaking it' (BGI2). If Kevin were a FL teacher, he 'would do more speaking exercises' as 'you don't have to be able to write it to be able to communicate' (FGI2). Students also aligned their competence in FL with their oral fluency.

Gwen: If you're able to speak it, you're able to do much more; the vocabulary which you've learned from speaking, you'll be able to use it [in writing] (FGI2)

Orla: My friends [have] been learning Spanish for four years and they know all the grammar. But I notice that I can speak just as good Spanish as them in actual conversations. (FGI2)

Participants felt 'the most important thing [in a FL class] is just to have fun' (Steven BGI2) as 'you can learn through it and it helps you stay engaged and not lose your focus' (Aidan BGI2) or 'get bored' (Arthur BGI2). 'Fun' activities were mainly those that were 'active' and involved lots of speaking (BGI1; BGI2).

Previous FL learning

Despite the broad consensus on the importance of speaking, the participants reported very few oral activities in their prior FL classes. When asked to describe a 'typical FL lesson', Prue's immediate thought was a 'fill in the blanks' written exercise (BGI1). This sentiment was echoed by others whose previous FL learning comprised 'tons of papers' and conjugation exercises (Aidan BGI2), or 'lists of vocabulary, quizzes and writing' (Sara BGI2). Although they were viewed as useful (Kevin; Derek; Sara BGI2), writing exercises were widely remembered in a negative light due to their passive, individual nature which was in direct conflict with the students' conceptualisation of FL as something that had to be spoken. 'Worksheet stuff' was deemed 'just so painful' (Amy BGI2) as 'everyone just sits down at their desk and writes' (Derek BGI2). For some, this emphasis on texts rather than speaking directly impacted their motivation:

Orla: It got really boring and you really didn't care anymore, you'd just write down the notes […] you'd stop engaging (BGI2).

The only previous FL speaking practice activities that were mentioned were reading written work aloud in class (Sara BGI2) or 'discuss with your partner' (Orla FGI1) exercises. Matt stated that 'you start by speaking mostly in your mother tongue' (BGI1) which Prue felt was because 'people who had never spoken it before wouldn't understand' (BGI1). This importance of comprehension in FL surfaced frequently in the data.

Experiences of TPRS through an SDT lens

The students' self-reported experience with TPRS was overwhelmingly positive and the method was widely acclaimed by all participants. Their feelings of satisfaction were also maintained eight weeks after its use (FGI2). Utterances in the FGIs were backed up by the CO data that showed visible signs of excitement, enjoyment and engagement as the storytelling unfolded. The inter-connectedness of SDT's three psychological needs became apparent as students repeatedly emphasised how the perceived satisfaction of one need would simultaneously impact positively upon the others.

Autonomy

A highly motivating factor of TPRS in the students' eyes was the ability to 'contribute any idea' and 'it'll make this story' (Kevin FGI2). The fact that students could 'steer the learning' (Gwen FGI2) and 'effect what would happen next' (Prue FGI2) in the stories, made them highly autonomous and was acknowledged positively multiple times by the participants (FGI1; FGI2).

The students highlighted how TPRS allowed them to include vocabulary they were knowledgeable about (Prue FGI2), hence increasing their perceived competence and indicating the aforementioned inter-connectedness of the three SDT needs. For others, the autonomy to lead the story produced heightened feelings of spontaneous satisfaction that we associate with intrinsic motivation: 'when you give an idea and it gets accepted you feel really good' (Donna FGI2), while others also 'felt better' when they could 'add to the class' (Prue FGI1). When asked if it 'felt good' to create the story together there was such a positive reaction that individual student voices could not be determined.

One student announced 'it felt amazing' while another proclaimed 'Yes! That was me, that was me!' and another 'dabbed' (a movement with the arms used to show satisfaction) (FGI1).

The constructive sense of autonomy arising from TPRS was also manifested through the students' comparisons to prior, negative FL learning experiences. In traditional FL classes, students felt there was 'nothing they could do to change anything' (Prue FGI2). Orla echoed this sentiment, reporting 'feeling motivated' in the TPRS class as 'you're more involved and more in control of your own learning' (FGI1). For Kevin, contributing and having your own ideas accepted meant 'you feel unique' (FGI2). This ability to 'control where it was going' (Prue FGI1) resulted in students reporting feelings of excited anticipation, interest and engagement as in the stories 'you never really know what will happen next' (Amy FGI2):

> **Prue:** You come into this class and you're on the edge of your seat already and it's like, 'Oh goodness, what's going to happen now?' and it just gets you in anticipation before the class just to see how it's going to play out (FGI2).

As Matt recognised, 'whoever had the craziest and the most creative idea' would be accepted as 'that's the one' by the teacher (FGI1). The bizarre and strange 'plot twists' meant that 'everyone was really into what's happening' and this led to perceived learning occurring (Amy FGI2).

> **Amy:** I don't know what's going to happen but I know I'm going to learn something from it and it's going to be a lot of fun (FGI2).

The interplay between SDT's needs was again evidenced, as the autonomous, student-directed nature of the stories was highlighted as a key factor in their ability to recall the language structures. This resulted in raised feelings of competence, suggesting a positive link between autonomy and cognitive processing.

> **Gwen**: If you're able to control where it goes you'll remember things better (FGI1).

> **Aidan**: Since you're creating the story you are remembering what you create but if it's created for you, you might not necessarily remember (FGI1).

Throughout the data, a key success factor of TPRS for the students was the fact 'it was different from other classes' (Arthur FGI2). TPRS was perceived as highly motivating due to its novel and compelling nature, arising principally from the students own ideas and autonomy during story creation.

Competence

Students recurrently stated that storytelling was 'useful' and 'helpful' for their learning (Prue; Aidan FGI1; FGI2). TPRS was reported as 'way more effective' (Matt FGI1) than other methods and 'better than just sitting down learning vocabulary' (Diana FGI1), as it greatly improved their competence 'for speaking' (Prue FGI1).

> **Matt:** Since the story helps the most with speaking […] you learn more about how you would actually use it in real life (FGI1).

As students' conceptualised FL as something that is 'spoken', TPRS immediately met their need of 'competence' as it encouraged lots of oral utterances as a group. This increase of verbal activity in the classroom led students to feel their proficiency was now higher.

> **Amy:** I believe that through storytelling I improved *a lot* (FGI1).

Nevertheless, some contradictions emerged in their view of speaking versus writing activities. While storytelling augmented students' perceived oral competence, Prue highlighted that you couldn't 'just run classes on stories because there are other things that you won't pick up' (FGI1). This suggested that while the prominence given to speaking in TPRS was a distinct advantage, its resultant lack of emphasis on writing was perceived as a shortcoming given that this is how some of the participants conceptualised 'real' or 'serious' learning at their age.

The participants also made frequent cases for the stories being easy to remember (Gwen; Aidan FGI1; Steven FGI2). The increase in their ability to recall information imbued a heightened sense of perceived competence. The stories 'helped memorise what we were going to say' (Donna FGI1). The inter-connectedness of the three SDT needs was again apparent as students reported that it 'felt amazing' (FGI1) when their individual ideas were inserted into the story. The fact that 'everyone likes contributing' (Steven FGI2) to the stories meant 'your vocabulary gets really rich' (Prue FGI2), suggesting that the autonomous nature of the stories resulted in increased feelings of personal ability. This led to classes the students felt were fun, interesting, engaging but that you 'learn some-thing from it as well' (Steven; Amy FGI2).

This was in contrast to their previous FL classes, when students reported a lack of comprehension causing them to feel 'terrified' and 'really scared' (Arthur BGI1), 'excluded' (Orla BGI1), 'stupid' (Aidan BGI2) and 'intimidated' (Donna BGI1). Others explained they would 'just nod' as 'it seemed like every-body else understood' except you (Derek; Aidan BGI2). This lack of comprehension led to feelings of low competence and had a direct impact on motivation resulting in a sense of apathy and dislike for the subject:

> **Matt:** Once that happens enough you're just like, 'I don't care about this class anymore. I don't learn here' (BGI2).

On the contrary, TPRS's goal of 100% comprehension meant 'you do understand it better' (Gwen FGI2) thus raising their feelings of proficiency. The fact that the stories were so well understood resulted in their 'affective filter' being decreased, engendering feelings of personal capability and motivation.

With TPRS, the group dynamic, or relatedness, involved in the story creation meant no-one feared doing it 'wrong' as 'everybody was making mistakes and participating' (Donna FGI2). It erased their anxiety of 'saying the wrong thing' (Steven FGI2), thus raising students' confidence by reducing their 'affective filter', which resulted in perceived higher states of competence.

The interplay between needs was again evident as the fact that 'everyone contributes' (Aidan; FGI1), meant participants felt 'they'll be heard so their confidence will really be built' (Kevin FGI1). Stu-dents compared this to traditional FL classes which were 'completely silent', maintaining a feeling of fear as you felt 'like if you raise your hand you're going to draw attention from everyone' and 'if no-one else asks then everyone else understands' (Prue FGI2). This idea that asking a question equated to a lack of ability was in direct contrast to the open, discursive nature of TPRS classes where students' perceived competence was augmented thanks to the safe, contributory group environment it created.

In addition, students reported that the compelling, unexpected element of TPRS made the classes fun, pleasurable and enjoyable, which in turn, positively impacted their perceived competence.

> **Amy:** You learn very quickly and very easily because of how entertaining it is (FGI1).

> **Matt:** It's easier to learn when you're entertained and having a good time. When we have super-weird stories that go off on random tangents then it keeps you entertained and keeps you listening (FGI1).

Since TPRS is based on the CI hypothesis, the idea that the captivating nature of the stories kept students engaged and 'listening' is highly relevant. Moreover, other students argued that 'if you're more entertained' you 'feel more eager to participate', thus also increasing perceived competence for language output (Prue FGI1).

Relatedness

Students felt the vibrant nature of an entire class co-creating a story together also fostered a sense of relatedness, both to their classmates and their teacher (FGI1, FGI2). The use of words such as 'every-one', 'together' and 'everybody' were employed repeatedly throughout the data. Once students had experienced TPRS, the 'one-on-one' question and answer method in a traditional, 'quiet', FL class was perceived as 'not as engaging' (Orla FGI2).

The fact that the stories were 'very extroverted' meant 'everybody feels included' (Kevin FGI1) and 'everybody gets to participate' (Donna FGI1). By acting out roles and constructing the plot together with the teacher, the *affective filter* was reduced, growing their togetherness and imbuing a sense of inclusion. It allowed students to 'be silly' as everyone was 'so energetic' and contributing ideas, meaning 'you don't get judged' because you are 'doing it as a group' (Prue FGI2). This increased enthusiasm that TPRS generated helped to cultivate relationships within the group.

> **Orla:** When you're more motivated and excited, you tend to listen to people more so everybody builds connections (FGI1).

The inter-connectedness of SDT's needs was again apparent as participants felt that the opportunity to co-create the stories with the teacher built connections leading to a heightened sense of perceived togetherness.

> **Aidan:** [Storytelling] is less scary because everybody is sharing their ideas and modifying them to form the story so everybody is a part of the story (FGI2).

> **Kevin:** Every little bit was made by somebody […] with the class. I think that's the motivator (FGI2).

Students frequently highlighted that 'everyone participating towards the creation of the story' (Orla FGI1) produced a feeling of cohesion and belonging as 'everyone was laughing and 'really into it' (Amy FGI1). Others recounted that 'in storytelling', everyone was 'so open and talkative' (Prue FGI2), which 'makes you more motivated and more eager to learn' (Orla FGI1). The reported feelings of comfort, energy and enthusiasm in the TPRS classroom, were also evident in the CO data, with all students contributing and showing visible signs of engagement and enjoyment as the story unfolded.

The fact that TPRS also allowed students to develop a strong bond and relationship with their teacher was reported as a highly motivating factor. The teacher was seen as the person who ultimately 'kept the ideas going' through questioning and maintained interest with 'completely random' twists to the story (Amy FGI1). Indeed, in the BGIs, participants highlighted that by being 'personable' (Aidan; Arthur BGI2), 'enthusiastic' (Amy; Derek BGI2) or simply by being 'themselves' (Kevin BGI2), FL teachers could inspire and motivate their students. TPRS allowed these traits of the teacher's personality to come through and this augmented students' motivation: 'The teacher has to be into it as well because if you're not having fun then neither am I' (Matt FGI1). An example of a previous motivating teacher was provided as someone who 'told stories about himself' (Arthur BGI2), suggesting how stories were perceived as both motivating and relationship building between students and teachers before they had ever even experienced TPRS.

Discussion

While we cannot assume direct cause and effect relationships, the findings are consistent with SDT's theoretical prediction that increased perceptions of ability, freedom of choice and belonging are linked to more self-determined forms of motivation. This study supports Niemiec and Ryan's (2009) conclusion that teachers and tasks that are perceived as satisfying the basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence, allow intrinsic motivation to flourish. In addition, the results reflect Noels et al. (2003)'s contention that in the FL classroom a lack of autonomy and perceived low competence are indicative of higher levels of apathy and 'amotivation' towards FL learning.

The interdependency and connectedness between SDT's three basic needs reported in the literature (Fried and Konza 2013; Muñoz and Ramirez 2015, Ryan and Deci 2000) is also prevalent in this study. According to the students, TPRS instantaneously satisfied all three of SDT's needs and by doing so, each need positively impacted the others. The autonomy provided by the stories imbued student ownership over their learning while simultaneously increasing their competence as their own ideas were selected and used in the plot. Constructing a story together encouraged a sense of belonging and cohesion both to their classmates and the teacher, thus satisfying all of SDT's basic needs.

This is the first study known to apply SDT to TPRS and one of very few investigating the motivational impact of the approach rather than achievement outcomes. It provides strong corroboration for Krashen and Bland's (2014) argument that stories should be 'compelling' and fun in order to maximise student engagement, allowing students to acquire language with little conscious effort. Furthermore, it offers support for Ryan and Deci's (2000) contention that within an SDT framework, activities with the appeal of novelty, challenge and interest foster the greatest intrinsic motivation.

This paper adds to the emerging body of research contending that teachers and their pedagogical strategies play a significant role in developing more intrinsically motivated students (Cheng and Dörnyei 2007; Guilloteaux and Dörnyei 2008; Moskovy et al. 2013). However, for TPRS to be a success, the data suggest that students must perceive the stories as being presented within a motivating style. TPRS allows teachers' personalities to shine and flourish. It is recommended that teachers stay true to their own, innate character, be that more introvert or extrovert, when delivering a TPRS story, as this builds stronger bonds with the students.

This analysis aligns broadly with Muñoz and Ramirez (2015) who found that teachers' potential to cultivate motivation is principally centred on relatedness, and without strong teacher-student relationships, even the most motivational strategies will not promote intrinsic motivation. Although self-determination motivation is an individual-centred process (Ryan and Deci 2000), the results suggest that its advancement also depends on supportive social conditions, provided by the teacher in this context.

By exploring the under-researched method of TPRS through the students' eyes, this paper makes a timely contribution to the L2 motivation field and broadens the limited current literature around the use of SDT within the FL classroom. The study recognises its 'limited generalisability' (Yin, 2009) due to its qualitative exploratory research design. However, the value of this methodological approach is its ability to offer nuanced and detailed insights about learning FL through storytelling by the subjects themselves.

While the results here substantiate findings from studies conducted in other contexts, where TPRS was perceived as fun, engaging and motivating (Beal 2011; Blanton 2015; Campbell 2016; Espinoza 2015; Perna 2007), it is important to note that it may be challenging to reproduce the results in a non-English-medium school.

Additionally, other methodological limitations must be realised. As I was the only teacher in the school using TPRS, there was no option other than employing an 'action research' model where data were reported to the same teacher who was delivering the classes. While the importance of total honesty and explanations regarding anonymity were emphasised to students, some responses may have inevitably been effected.

The implications of this study are significant, and its findings will be of particular interest to FL teachers working in similar international school contexts, with small classes and multilingual students. While the results presented here suggest that students' perceptions of TPRS were overwhelmingly positive, cultivating feelings of ability, inclusion and contentment, it is important that the study is replicated by external researchers rather than teachers working with their own classes. Longitudinal studies, carried out in diverse educational contexts, focusing on TPRS and its ability to sustain motivation for language learning over time would be a good direction for future research in this field.

Disclosure statement

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