Theoretical Article

Self-Determination Theory: A Proposed Framework for Self-Access Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

The field of self-access language learning (SALL), which is an established way of supporting language learners outside the classroom through the provision of resources and spaces, spans more than five decades and is currently in a phase that Mynard (2019a) refers to as the 'basic psychological needs and wellbeing' phase. This is a turning point in SALL wherein the focus has shifted towards the need for (more explicitly) facilitating an autonomy-supportive environment outside the classroom. This focus supports language learners' needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence, and as such, aims to provide the conditions needed to foster language learning in an environment in which they can thrive and grow in psychologically healthy ways (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In this theoretical article, the authors make a case for using self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017) as an overarching framework for future developments in the field of SALL. The article gives an overview of four key SALL support systems, showing how they can fulfil students' basic psychological needs. These four key support systems are: advising in language learning; structured awareness raising; conversation lounges; and interest-based, student-led learning communities.

Keywords: self-access language learning, self-determination theory, basic psychological needs, wellbeing

BACKGROUND

The focus of this theoretical paper is on ways of supporting language learning outside the classroom. This has recently become a growing area of interest (Reinders & Benson, 2017; Reinders et al., 2022), and we are particularly interested in the kinds of resources and activities that language learners meaningfully engage in and the ways in which we as educators can support this process. In this paper, we draw on the well-established field of self-access learning (SALL) to not only summarize existing research and practice but to make a case that SALL should be explored through the theoretical lens of self-determination theory (SDT). We suggest that the main purpose of SALL is to provide a supportive learning environment in which learners can not only study and practice language but also to thrive as human beings (Mynard, 2022). In order to apply this theory to practice, we highlight four key SALL support systems and explore them in detail from an SDT perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Access Language Learning (SALL)

SALL has had a range of definitions since its inception in the late 1960s, but in this paper we refer to it as language learning that takes place outside a formal language classroom with some kind of support. As we will discuss, it is this support which has the potential to activate learners' proactive and growth-orientated nature, leading them to agentically engage with, shape, and adapt their environment so that it continues to provide the support they need (Vansteenkiste et al., 2019). The synchronicity which develops, connecting the environment, the learner's engagement, and their psychological need satisfaction, initiates a learning dynamic which in turn nurtures a learner's interests, curiosity and further engagement within the learning environment. This ultimately facilitates a learning climate (beyond the classroom) within which language learners can flourish and experience an increased sense of wellbeing (Reeve, 2016, 2022).

Within the field of SALL, support has been provided through the provision of a self-access learning center (SALC), which is typically a physical space which contains learning resources; learning spaces; support for learning such as opportunities to practice the target language; and advice on the language learning process from teachers,

learning advisors and/or peer advisors. The field of SALL has existed for more than five decades and has passed through several phases in line with the development of the field of second language acquisition more generally (Mynard, 2019b, 2022). With each decade, the focus and understanding of the role of SALL has shifted in order to incorporate different ideas into an increasingly complex ecosystem (Mynard, 2019a, 2022). For example, in the 1970s, the focus was on individualized, self-directed learning; in the 1980s, it incorporated communicative language learning, task-based and project-based learning. In the 1990s, we saw the inclusion of computer-assisted language learning, and more recently, SALCs have become social learning spaces (Murray, 2011, 2013; Mynard et al., 2020) that also incorporate mobile-assisted learning (Mynard, 2019a). SALCs can be considered to be "complex learning spaces, comprising cognitive, metacognitive and social functions" (Thornton, 2020, p. 159) and, as such, could benefit from deeper theoretical explorations.

We feel that the field of SALL has reached a turning point. Whereas previously the main focus was on the development of language proficiency, the new phase focuses more on basic psychological needs and wellbeing (Mynard, 2019a). In this phase, we increasingly focus on the emotional side of learning (Hobbs & Dofs, 2018) and on supporting learner wellbeing (Hobbs & Dofs, 2018; Mynard, 2019a, 2022; Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2020b) alongside language learning.

Basic Psychological Needs and Wellbeing

The new era of SALL focuses on how we can support language learners' needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence, and as such, aims to provide the conditions needed to foster language learning in an environment in which they can thrive and grow in psychologically healthy ways (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2020). Central to its organismic view of human development (Ryan & Deci, 2017), SDT maintains that people are inherently inclined towards positive learning experiences, the development of close and caring relationships, and feelings of proficiency and prowess. However, it stresses that this healthy psychological development and integration should not be seen as self-executing, but instead is highly dependent on the supportive conditions present within a social (learning) environment, to which people are drawn to interact and

engage within to experience feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, 2020). When any of these needs are denied fulfilment through the actions of people or other affordances within the environment, there are costs which are manifest in ill-being and a loss of motivation (Vansteenkiste et al., 2019).

From an SDT viewpoint (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Niemiec et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2020), autonomy can be understood as the psychological freedom to act in accordance with one's beliefs and interests, leading to a sense of control or ownership over one's actions and experiences, through reflective self-endorsement. Autonomy is thwarted through feelings of being controlled externally, whether through threats of punishment or the promise of rewards. Competence is associated with feelings of growth and efficacy and a sense of interacting effectively with one's environment. Competence can be particularly cultivated within those environments which provide structure and appropriate scaffolding, optimum challenge, opportunities for positive feedback and pathways for growth. It is important to note, however, that for this sense of competence to be truly nourishing, "people must feel ownership of the activities at which they succeed" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 95). Relatedness refers to feeling socially connected and being involved in close, caring relationships in which belonging and inclusion are reciprocally experienced. Relatedness is closely intertwined with autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017), and thus, these feelings need to be perceived as unconditional and authentic. The three needs are interdependent with one another, and when any of them are undermined, this negatively affects one's wellbeing and motivation. Thus, our focus on SALL environments and ways in which they can be optimized is linked closely to the theory of basic psychological needs underpinning SDT and the extent to which the affordances made available support or frustrate the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

SDT and Self-Access

The guiding philosophy for the field of SALL has, so far, mainly been informed by sociocultural approaches to learning and, in particular, the field of language learner autonomy. Language learner autonomy as a field has its origins in adult language education rather than educational or even mainstream psychology (see Benson, 2011 and

Little et al., 2018 for an overview). Until now, only a limited number of studies have been conducted in SALCs from an SDT perspective, but this interest is growing. For example, a volume edited by Mynard and Shelton-Strong (2022) explores examples of autonomy support outside the language classroom and features chapters dealing with advising in language learning, student learning communities, out of class technology use, and self-access learning. In her chapter in the same volume, Mynard (2022) draws on what we have learned from how SDT has been applied in the connected fields of language learning in classrooms (e.g., Cheon et al., 2019; Reeve, 2009, 2016), learning in spaces such as laboratory environments (e.g., Sjöblom et al., 2016) along with some initial work in self-access (e.g., Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2020b), and makes a case for reconceptualizing SALCs from an SDT perspective. Mynard argues that although learners can be gradually prepared for SALL to a degree within classroom environments, support is particularly important when learners use a SALC as there are generally no teachers or requirements for students to use the spaces.

In a study in the SALC at an institution in Japan conducted by a large number of researchers (including student research assistants), data from 108 interviews and 280 survey responses were analyzed in order to understand how autonomy supportive the SALC was (Asta & Mynard, 2018; Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2020a, 2020b; Yarwood et al., 2019). Generally, the researchers found the SALC to be autonomy-supportive, but the study highlighted a few areas for attention. These included providing further support for learners needing to overcome psychological barriers for entering the SALC initially, for providing additional language support and guidance so that users could feel a deeper sense of competence, and for more proactively creating a prosocial environment where users take responsibility for not only their own learning but support others as well and by doing so, increase the sense of relatedness that users experience. This study also showed that SDT could be a practical and useful framework for evaluating and enhancing the supportive features of a SALC.

Drawing on the SDT literature, Mynard (2022) identifies features of an autonomy-supportive SALC where learners' basic psychological needs are supported and inner psychological resources are prominent. The full discussion of these features is not provided in this paper, but Figure 1 shows a summary.

Figure 1. *Features of an Autonomy-Supportive SALC. From Mynard, (2022) Drawing on Davis and Bowles (2018) and Reeve (2016)*
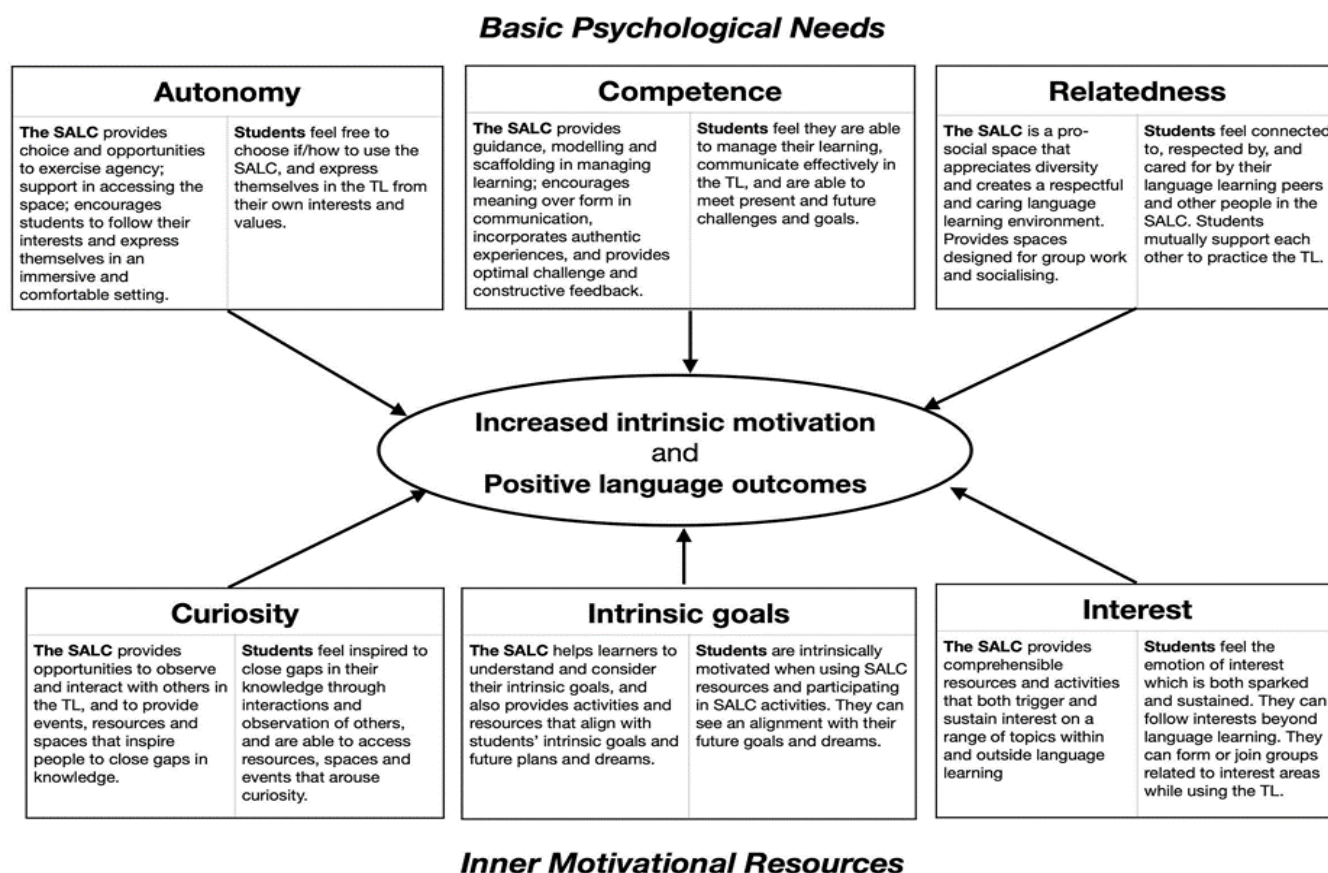
As we can see from Figure 1, SALL may be supported in different ways, but in this paper we focus on four key SALL support systems: Advising, structured awareness raising, conversation lounges, and student-led learning communities. We have chosen just these four for logistical reasons, but each of them is an example of an accepted and widespread feature of SALCs worldwide. For each of the support systems, we provide: (1) a definition along with some supporting research, (2) a description of how it works in practice, and (3) some ways in which each one supports learners' basic psychological needs. This treatment could be applied to other features of SALL as well.

Autonomy Support in Self-Access: Key SALL Systems

Advising in Language Learning

Advising in language learning (advising) is a robust and developing discipline which plays an important role in providing interpersonal support for language learners normally outside the classroom (Mozzon-McPherson, 2019; Mynard, 2019b). As other researchers point out, the growth and development of advising as a professional discipline currently spans more than three decades (Kato & Mynard, 2016; Mozzon-McPherson & Tassinari, 2020; Mozzon-McPherson & Vismans, 2001; Mynard, 2021; Mynard & Carson, 2012; Riley, 1997; Rubin, 2007; Tassinari, 2016). Currently, there is a growing interest in looking at how the

psychology of language learning, positive psychology, and specifically SDT can inform our understanding, our practice, and the ways we conduct advising to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our students in the fullest way possible (Shelton-Strong, 2020).

Definition. Advising is a "process of dialogical interventions" (Mozzon-McPherson, 2019, p. 96) or conversations about learning, the core of which is the intentional reflective dialogue (Kato & Mynard, 2016) co-constructed between the advisor and the advisee to promote and deepen reflection, focused on the learner's personal learning experience. This reflection is directed towards, and occurs within, the cognitive, metacognitive and affective realms of learning in order to raise awareness of each person's unique learning needs, to support the learner's capacity to make informed decisions, and facilitate a transformation in learning whereby individuals come to feel a sense of ownership of the process (Mozzon-McPherson & Tassinari, 2020; Mynard, 2021). Advising has been defined as "the process of helping someone to become an effective, aware, and reflective language learner" (Kato & Mynard, 2016, p. 1), which advisors pursue through an "intentionally structured dialogue designed to promote learner autonomy" (Mynard et al., 2018, p. 55). In other words, the underlying aim of advising is to facilitate an experience of autonomy while learning (Kato & Mynard, 2016; Shelton-Strong & Tassinari, 2022). Essentially, advising is a process which entails working together closely with a language learner using dialogue to guide reflection by use of a range of discursive advising strategies (i.e., positive feedback, restating, powerful questions). Advising aims to facilitate the informed and autonomously motivated agency necessary to engage and interact successfully with the learning environment, to experience a sense of progress, and to promote a sense of ownership within the learning process and the direction taken.

How Advising Works in Practice. Advising normally takes the form of a one-to-one conversation between a language learner and an advisor, which the learner has arranged and attends voluntarily. Learning advisors undergo specific training and draw on a range of theoretical frameworks (see Kato & Mynard, 2016; Mozzon-McPherson & Tassinari, 2020), including sociocultural theory (Lantolf et al., 2015), humanistic psychology and counselling (Rogers, 1951), as well as aspects of coaching (English et al., 2019; Rogers, 2012). This training and

knowledge is used within the advising dialogue to assist learners in reflecting on their learning and in uncovering for themselves strategies, resources, and approaches to learning to successfully address their personal needs and the challenges they face. Advising takes a whole person approach to accomplishing these aims, including attention to the affective states and holistic wellbeing of the learner (Kato & Mynard, 2016; Mozzon-McPherson & Tassinari, 2020; Tassinari, 2016). Specifically, an advisor will aim to exhibit openness, receptiveness, and an unbiased position based on attentive listening and respect, as it is the relationship initiated and built up between the advisor and the learner that is at the core of successful advising. Advising may differ in practice depending on various cultural, institutional, and logistical factors.

How Advising Supports Learners' Basic Psychological Needs. Autonomy support, at its most fundamental, is about taking the learners perspective or internal frame of reference (Reeve, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This requires a non-judgmental approach to the advisee and his or her situation and feelings. With careful and empathetic listening allowing for a fuller appreciation of the learner's needs, motivations, and values, the advisor unconditionally validates the learner and galvanizes interest and awareness into reasons for change (Ryan & Deci, 2019).

Due to the interpersonal nature of advising, its success is highly dependent on creating an open and trusting environment where an authentic exchange between the advisor and the learner is cultivated and remains fluid and genuine. *Autonomy* and *relatedness* are closely interlinked within SDT. When an open and trusting relationship is endorsed by reciprocal freedom and volition, *relatedness* is more fully satisfied.

To experience *autonomy* implies a sense of freedom to act and to be authentic when doing so. Within the advising dialogue, the learning advisor uses particular strategies to maximize the experience of being listened to and in promoting reflection on personally meaningful aspects of the learning experience. These strategies include repeating, restating, summarizing, empathizing, complimenting, challenging, experience sharing, asking powerful questions, intuiting, using metaphor, linking, and encouraging accountability (Kato & Mynard, 2016; Kelly, 1996). Effective use of these strategies can lead to recognition, clarity, choice, actions, and behaviors that are fully self-endorsed and valued. Through careful listening and the

intentional use of language (through dialogue and strategies), the advisor helps the learner to share, plan, reason, reflect on, and understand themselves from a self-informed and non-controlling perspective.

Competence can be facilitated through offering informative feedback and meaningful guidance, assisting in goal setting and raising awareness of the need to break down bigger goals into smaller achievable steps (Ryan & Deci, 2019). This is one of the main areas advisors work within with language learners (see the following section on structured awareness raising; Shelton-Strong & Tassinari, 2022). Of course, all three needs are interrelated, and to be effective, competence support needs to be delivered within an autonomy-supportive approach and viewed as non-controlling.

There are many ways that advising and advisors support *autonomy*, *competence* and *relatedness* within a learner's personal experiences, and a recent study (Shelton-Strong, 2020) shows that learners are aware of these as well. In addition, there are several classifications of advising strategies, techniques, and behaviors which can be linked to need-supportive actions (Aoki, 2012; Carette & Castillo, 2004; Gremmo, 1995; Kato & Mynard, 2016; Kelly, 1996; Mozzon-McPherson & Tassinari, 2020) with a recent classification aligning these behaviors specifically with basic psychological need support (Shelton-Strong & Tassinari, 2022).

For optimal support, language learning advisors make every effort to take the learner's perspective and frame of reference. Exploring, attuning to, and accepting the learner's viewpoint, priorities, and affective experiences (without pressures) facilitates a respectful and open setting which promotes trust. Remaining non-judgmental, acknowledging negative affect and the challenges learners face, facilitates mutual understanding allowing for an exploration of pressures, or non-autonomous motivation, which may help in identifying barriers or obstacles so these can be recognized/accepted. Facilitating awareness and choice through reflection on personal values, the learning experience and using this to identify and plan for distal and proximal goals allows advisors to provide appropriate informational feedback and guidance. Advisors use invitational, non-controlling language to do this and provide (or elicit) meaningful rationales when making suggestions and when offering feedback, which is effectance relevant

and based on their actions and efforts. Effectance-relevant feedback refers to the interpersonal events and communications providing support towards a learner's sense of competence through a focus on the effectiveness of their actions and choices. SDT theorizes (Ryan & Deci, 2000a) that this (also, optimal challenge, non-demeaning appraisement) can lead to learners' adoption and internalization of goals and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation when accompanied by a sense of autonomy. Advisors strive to be authentic in their relationship with learners and take an unconditional interest in them. These specific behaviors within the advising context aim to provide support for learners' basic psychological needs, facilitate autonomous motivation, and cultivate wellbeing.

Structured Awareness Raising

Drawing on the field of language learner autonomy (Benson, 2011; Little, 1991) and self-directed learning (Hiemstra, 1994), we might look at ways in which learners can be equipped to take charge of their own learning. This will include helping them to develop the strategies and awareness of language learning (and of themselves) so that they can plan, implement and evaluate their own personalized and meaningful learning activities. The basic goal for structured awareness raising is to help students to develop the awareness needed in order to direct and regulate their own learning. Depending on the degree of metacognitive awareness that a learner possesses, the awareness raising might include providing specific and fairly structured guidance, or it may mean simply being available to them so that they can articulate and improve their learning plans (Kato & Mynard, 2016).

Definition. Structured awareness raising is a term that was suggested by Kato and Mynard (2016) to refer to the process of helping learners to develop appropriate knowledge about themselves and their learning. Previously, more teacher-centered terms such as 'learner training' or 'learner development' have been used, but the implication here is that the teacher 'owns' the knowledge and provides information about strategies and resources in a top-down way via a predetermined curriculum. The term structured awareness raising takes a different stance; it is the learners themselves who decide *what* they need to know (also *when* and *why*), and in turn, learning advisors and teachers help them to uncover personally relevant strategies and resources

in order to realize their goals. The ways in which the learners then learn about the strategies and resources would not be provided as a set curriculum, but "ideas might come from learners or peers, or might be introduced (either explicitly or implicitly) by teachers or learning advisors in a number of ways" (Kato & Mynard, 2016, p. 243). A structured awareness raising approach incorporates individual learners' preferences, ideas, interests and experiences. There are three overlapping areas within structured awareness raising: i) awareness of facilities, roles and resources; ii) awareness of self; and iii) awareness of approaches to language learning. Research by Curry et al. (2017) looked at a program where learners were introduced to resources and strategies in line with a structured awareness raising approach. The findings indicated that after one semester of following their own self-directed learning plans, students were able to initiate the development of strategies for managing their own learning.

How Structured Awareness Raising Works in Practice. Structured awareness raising might be incorporated into a language classroom, offered as a stand-alone course, or appear in the form of pamphlets, posters or optional workshops in a SALC. Offering this kind of input in a flexible way means that it is sensitive to each individual's learning trajectory. The process is likely to begin with a goal that is set by an individual learner. A learning advisor can help the learner to articulate the goal by helping them to explore their needs, interests, motivations, previous experiences and so on. This will then lead to the planning stage, where a learner will decide which resources and strategies are appropriate for achieving that goal and for evaluating their progress. It is likely that a SALC has various resources—including human resources such as learning communities—but if not, a learning advisor can help the learner to discover how they might find the various resources elsewhere, such as online or in the wider community.

How Structured Awareness Raising Supports Learners' Basic Psychological Needs. In SDT terms, equipping students with this kind of practical knowledge greatly enhances their sense of autonomy and competence in particular. In terms of *autonomy*, the learner decides what is to be studied, the method and the timing, and these can be completely personalized to fit one's goals and motivations. Actually, the learner needs to decide whether to study at all; this kind of learning is unlikely to be effective if forced.

Instead, learners can be encouraged to talk about their dreams, goals and inner motivations and usually, a sense of purpose and a plan begins to emerge. This is why advising in conjunction with structured awareness raising is important.

Structured awareness also fulfils the psychological need for *competence* as the activities that the learner is engaging in have been designed to fit their needs exactly. For example, if a learner has the goal of being able to give an academic presentation in a foreign language, the strategies and resources that they choose will help them to gradually develop the knowledge and skills needed to do this task and to engage in the optimal amount of practice needed to develop confidence in giving presentations. In addition, they are ideally engaging in ongoing reflection facilitated by advising and keeping a diary or log as a natural part of this process. In the previously mentioned study (Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2020a, 2020b; Yarwood et al., 2019), some participants felt a lack of competence in using English despite the abundance of suitable facilities and support services for learning in the SALC. These students clearly needed further support, and a structured awareness raising approach would be an appropriate way to offer such support as it is responsive to learners' psychological need for competence.

Finally, the psychological need for *relatedness* can be fulfilled within a SALC environment due to the presence of like-minded learners and supportive peers, teachers and advisors, so that language learning does not feel like a solitary task. Ideally, structured awareness raising should be a prosocial endeavor. For example, through sharing plans and talking about strategies and progress with peers, a shared responsibility towards each other's learning and a mutual feeling of care develops. Ideally, the SALC provides access to events, communities, and activities that are easy for learners to participate in and to feel connected to the community of learners.

Conversation Lounges

In the 2010s, the field of SALL entered a crucial stage in its evolution. Mobile devices were becoming commonplace, and students started to bring their own devices in the form of smartphones and tablets to places where they studied. Whereas students traditionally needed to come to the SALC

in person in order to access language learning materials, now that a wealth of resources were available on their own devices meant that a physical SALC was becoming less relevant. However, even though students would be able to access resources, they did not necessarily know how to use these resources appropriately for learning purposes and still needed pedagogical support (Curry & Mynard, 2014). In addition, educators in the field were beginning to realize the increased social role that SALCs could adopt. In other words, this era marked a time of re-evaluation of SALCs and a reinvention of the focus (Thornton, 2020). It was time to break the constraining walls (Reinders, 2012; Rubesch & Barrs, 2014) and broaden the scope of self-access. Mynard (2019a) terms this phase in the evolution of SALL as the 'mobile and social phase,' and it was seen as a time to enhance ways in which we supported learners. Along the way, we have realized how important social and community opportunities are for learning which has made the presence of conversation lounges and learning communities vital elements of any SALC.

Definition. Conversation lounges are a common feature of a SALC, especially since the social and community potentials of SALCs have become more understood. They were originally intended to provide opportunities for learners to practice using the target language in a supportive—and often scaffolded—environment. On the surface, conversation lounges seem to serve a simple purpose, but the dynamics and the psychological processes underlying how (and whether!) learners make use of such lounges can be quite complex (Murray, 2017, 2020; Mynard et al., 2020). Various factors can influence the dynamics of such a space: For example, its location; whether there is a language policy; staffing decisions such as whether to have teachers on duty; expectations, needs, goals, experiences and beliefs of potential users; sociocultural context; and the nature of emergent communities in the space.

How Conversation Lounges Work in Practice. In order for a SALC to provide a conversation lounge, all is needed is a space and some comfortable furniture (although more recently, online spaces have become important too, especially when physical spaces have been closed due to the Covid-19 global pandemic), but some thought needs to be paid to the audience, the purpose, and the underlying philosophy. The type of conversation lounge appropriate to an institution will vary greatly and will affect the dynamics

of the lounge, but consideration needs to be given to the following:

- Consider the needs, motivations, beliefs, and language proficiency levels of the users. What scaffolding might they need? What artifacts might be placed in the space to support the interactions? What orientation might they need?

- The purpose of the lounge is likely to be to provide speaking practice, so consider who the speaking partners will be. For example, teachers, peer students recruited to fulfil the role of language practice partners, or teaching assistants? What kind of orientation will they need?

- What guidelines should be provided? Will a language policy be enforced? How will users be made aware of the rules?

How Conversation Lounges Support Learners' Basic Psychological Needs. The highly social nature of conversation lounges means that they have the potential to fulfil all three basic psychological needs. They fulfil the need for *autonomy* if lounge attendance is an active choice and fits with learners' inner motivations. As many researchers have found (e.g., Hughes et al., 2012; Murray, 2017; Murray & Fujishima, 2013, 2016; Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2020a, 2020b), conversing with others in the target language is a great source of autonomous motivation for using a SALC, but it can also be perceived as a challenge.

A conversation lounge offers the potential for learners to develop confidence in using the target language, which may fulfil the need for *competence*. However, this can be hindered by students' perceptions of their language ability. As Mynard and Shelton-Strong (2020a, 2020b) and Mynard et al. (2020) found, students may feel that they do not have sufficient skills to be able to go to a conversation lounge. They may have a belief that they need to 'perfect' the language *before* attending the lounge, not realizing that by practicing the language they are learning is likely to greatly help them to master it. Mynard et al. (2020) suggest ways to help learners to challenge their beliefs or to scaffold initial visits to a conversation lounge in order to help them overcome their reluctance to engage in the activity.

It may seem a 'given' that a conversation lounge fulfils the psychological need for *relatedness*. However, Mynard et al. (2020) found that this was not necessarily the case. In

their two-year ethnography, Mynard et al. (2020) found that some learners actively avoided the conversation lounge in a SALC in a university in Japan as they felt that they did not belong to the community of learners who frequented it. These regular users were perceived by other students to be highly proficient and confident, and slightly intimidating. In fact, the regular users had themselves experienced feelings of anxiety and lack of confidence. In addition, participants felt that it was not appropriate to talk to people outside their own social group, which may be a cultural factor to consider. The two-year ethnography (Mynard et al., 2020) highlighted that users of the lounge transitioned through a trajectory from non-use to frequent use. The key factor that supported this transition was the community support from other learners. As they had been welcomed and supported by other students, regular users perceived it to be their role to, in turn, help others to feel comfortable in the space and to feel accepted and part of the community. In other words, to fulfil the need for relatedness.

Staff working in SALCs can support the autonomy-supportive nature of conversation lounges by providing orientations for conversation partners (i.e., welcoming users is an important part of the role); by holding 'mixer' events such as tea parties which might serve to break down pre-existing social barriers; and by helping learners to identify ways that would be comfortable for them to attend. In the ethnographic study by Mynard et al. (2020), the frequent users were also encouraged and supported by teachers and learning advisors as they performed a very important role in the SALC community.

Student-Led Learning Communities

Some of the advantages of a SALC environment are the spaces, resources and opportunities available to make it possible to follow one's interests while learning a second or additional language. This can include using one's interest as a resource itself, which can be explored with like-minded student-language learners. This can lead to informal groups being formed, through which connections and friendships are made, norms are established, and where the vehicle of expression becomes the shared language being learnt. These interest-led groups can then bring about discoveries in regard to the content of the interest itself (i.e., a sport, travel, the arts, an academic subject, a social movement, etc.), as well as new understanding regarding oneself as a learner,

the benefits/drawbacks of intergroup communication, how the language is used, and how to use it to communicate with others.

Informal learning communities can arise and disappear in natural ways through attrition of interest, schedule conflicts, or other motives. However, with additional support from the SALC (student workers, learning advisors, SALC staff), these can be lifted into view of the greater student body through promotion and organization, thus becoming more accessible and potentially more effective as dynamic, interest-based learning communities which are led and run by many learners themselves, but with some support from the SALC, learning advisors and teachers (Watkins, 2022).

Definition(s). Extracurricular, student-led learning communities provide opportunities for language learners to develop their language use and further aspects of language proficiency, within a (safe) social arena of peers, through shared interests while simultaneously developing as language learners within the relationships that develop. Learner-led communities have much in common with communities of practice (CoP; Wenger, 1998), and these could be defined as communities which represent a CoP. However, in practice, it operates more as a knowledge-building community whose purpose is designed for aims related to language learning, based on inquiry and shared interest (Hoadley, 2012).

How Communities Work in Practice. First of all, as learner-led and managed groups, the absence of a "teacher" persona must be handled in a way that meets the expectations of the group members. In reality, what often happens is that student-leaders will emerge (Hooper, 2020), whether due to natural inclination and personality, because they initiated the idea and invited others, or because they are good organizers and want to develop their own leadership skills. In these informal communities, learner membership can be fluid, and people come and go with regularity. The core, or central members will often become, by default, those who take on the role of community leader, organizer and/or peer-instructor. Successful leaders help to minimize barriers to social relationships among learners and to sustain the momentum needed to enhance the learning experience (Watkins, 2022). Community meetings are scheduled (i.e., once a week), and here community members engage with one another, develop their relationships, their shared interests, and normally the target language if it is used as the

language of the community. While there may be a product (e.g., a pamphlet or video, sharing information), which could be the goal of the ongoing project, it is more often the process of the interaction and the sharing of interests which brings about need-satisfaction.

How Student-Led Communities Support Learners' Basic Psychological Needs. These communities are natural social experiences, so clearly, there is an opportunity for need-satisfaction to occur. *Autonomy* is the need to experience a sense of ownership in one's actions and behaviors. As community members decide whether or not to attend a meeting, what, how much, and to what extent they want to contribute, who they choose to interact more closely with, and to learn what they choose to, based on interest, they will feel this sense of satisfaction. As Watkins (2022) found in her study, the shared interest and goals of the community members led to a feeling of *relatedness* (intertwined with autonomy) as they willingly supported one another's efforts and enjoyed being together. In addition, it was found that by teaching each other, displaying patience with one another, and communicating freely without social or age-related barriers, a reciprocal sense of freedom and community was developed. Because the learners are those who determine the shape and agenda, personal or group goals within the community, the decisions they make will likely be in congruence with their inner values and self-determination. While peers can obviously act in controlling and need-frustrating ways, they can also provide "peer- and peer-group autonomy support" (Reeve, 2022) which can be as beneficial as that provided by a teacher or other in a similar role. Community members experience learning and discovery as they grow together, and while they are autonomously motivated to pursue the shared goals and interests of the group. Through this, opportunities for experiencing *competence*, or the sense of making progress, through gaining mastery and confidence, are likely to occur, as the learners build on shared knowledge, experience the joy of discovery and helping one another, take risks, and engage with the environment of the community which they are responsible for creating, and acting within.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have made a case for the need to envision a SALC as an autonomy-supportive learning environment where need supports can be facilitated beyond the classroom through the provision of purposefully initiated activities and specific affordances. We have provided an overview of how advising in language learning, structured awareness raising, conversation lounges and student-led learning communities can be supportive of language learners' basic psychological needs and ways in which these are conducive to autonomous motivation and increased wellbeing. Other common features of SALL, such as materials/resources, language support/tutoring, staff development, workshops, and events could also be examined through the same lens. However, what is needed to unlock and gain access to these autonomy-supportive affordances is the initiative and agentic involvement of the learners themselves. Explicit training as the first step to modelling and bringing to the surface what it takes to be more agentically engaged has been proposed by Reeve et al. (2021), who show that students can learn to be more effective in recruiting greater autonomy support from their environment. Similar workshops could be held with SALC staff and the students who work there. By providing support to increase the agentic engagement of the learners, staff, and student employees in the SALC, the learning environment becomes more need-supportive and provides more need satisfaction for the learners (Reeve, 2022).

Clearly, research in SALL from an SDT perspective is in its infancy, and much of the evidence we have shared in this paper has come from the same institution. Ideally, other institutions could contribute to the ongoing research by examining aspects of their SALCs using an SDT framework.

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