

Summary

Understanding the motivation of students and playing a part in enhancing that motivation is surely one of the most rewarding aspects of being a teacher. The first step towards achieving this must be to understand motivation itself, and a crucial part of this is acknowledging that teachers can only do so much. Teachers do not motivate learners by trying to control them or direct them towards particular outcomes; motivation comes from within learners themselves. Attempting to force learners into directions they do not wish to go in is an approach doomed to failure and one that can only result in stress and disaffection all round. On the other hand, working with learners, getting to know them and their dreams, and helping them to realize those dreams must surely be one of the most rewarding occupations available.

- 1 What role, if any, can teachers play in motivating students to learn a language?
- 2 What can you do as a teacher to help learners set goals and develop motivating visions?
- 3 As a teacher, your own motivation will fluctuate over time. What are the specific things that cause you to feel demotivated? What can you do to combat these feelings of demotivation?

Suggestions for further reading

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2011). *Teaching and researching motivation*, second edition. Harlow: Pearson Education.

This is the second edition of the standard work in the field. This book provides a general overview of theories of motivation from educational psychology, a detailed account of the various approaches to understanding the motivation of language learners, and a discussion of some of the practical considerations for teachers.

Dörnyei, Z., & Kubanyiova, M. (2014). *Motivating learners, motivating teachers: Building vision in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This is a teacher-friendly summary of new perspectives on motivation, with a particular focus on vision and its motivational role. What is noteworthy about this book is that it pays attention to the motivation of both learners and teachers.

Schunk, D. H., Meece, J. R., & Pintrich, P. R. (2014). *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications*, fourth edition. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

The latest edition of this classic text offers a comprehensive yet accessible summary of some of the key themes discussed in this chapter. The book does not address any of the specifics relating to the motivation to learn a language, but it should still be considered one of the most authoritative, and most readable, accounts of motivation in educational contexts.

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Marion Williams, Sarah Mercer, Stephen Ryan
(2015). *Exploring Psychology in Language Learning and Teaching*. UK: Oxford University Press.

AGENCY AND SELF-REGULATION

Introduction

So far in this book, we have focused on what learners bring to the learning process—their perceptions of themselves, their beliefs, feelings, and motivations, and the significant influences these have on language learning. We now move on to consider how learners actually carry out their learning—the actions they engage in as they navigate their way through learning a language, and the ways in which they regulate these processes and develop a sense of **agency**. As we have seen in previous chapters, agency is the feeling that one can act and have control over one's actions. We first focus on the strategies learners need in order to learn effectively and autonomously, and then discuss other aspects of **self-regulation**, such as goal setting and achieving. Finally, we examine the area of **metacognition**, which involves the processes used to plan and regulate our learning.

Agency

Successful language learning does not depend solely on the teacher, although teachers play a central role in creating the conditions conducive to learning. What is also needed is the activity, initiative, and engagement of the learner (van Lier, 2008). In this respect, learners need to feel a personal sense of agency—a belief that their behaviour can make a difference to their learning in that setting. This feeling of agency emerges from the interaction of many of the psychological facets covered in the book so far.

Firstly, in order to develop feelings of agency, learners actually need to believe that they are capable of learning a foreign language. They need to believe that they have the ability to do it and that this ability can be developed. They also need to see that their attributions for their past successes and failures are within their control. This takes us back to the key role of beliefs, in particular self-beliefs, and how optimistic learners feel in respect to their language learning. (See Chapters 3 and 4.) Secondly, learners need to be willing and motivated to take action to develop their language skills. If learners are motivated to work on their language skills, they need to feel able to do this and view it as a worthwhile undertaking, anticipating some kind of improvement or outcome worth pursuing.

A useful concept here is that of **engagement**. We talk about learners being engaged when they are passionate and enthusiastic about their learning; when they are invested personally in the process; and when they show an inner drive to learn and improve, taking pride and interest in what they do. We all recognize learners who are visibly engaged in their learning, but we must remember that not all learners will 'display' their engagement in the same way. Some may be shyer and more reticent to speak up in class, but this is not to say that they are not interested or do not feel engaged or a sense of agency—they may simply choose not to play an active role in certain tasks or activities. Nevertheless, in language learning, we acknowledge that in general learners improve through practice and using the L2, and so we would clearly want to encourage learners to actively use the language. As teachers, we need to find the balance between pushing all learners to the boundaries of their comfort zones so that new learning can take place but also permitting them a sense of security and comfort by allowing them to take a less visibly active role where appropriate. Fundamentally, we wish to avoid having learners who are disengaged—who, in other words, lack a connection to language learning and are apathetic, overly passive, anxious, or bored.

Agency and engagement are also interconnected with contextual factors, as already outlined in Chapter 2. Being engaged or feeling a sense of agency are not solitary, individual experiences; rather, they are social and contextually situated. This means our sense of agency can stem from feelings within a group or from our relationships with peers or teachers. We can become more engaged when sharing ideas and working with others, 'catching' their enthusiasm and motivation through processes of **contagion**. The setting we learn in, both physical and psychological, can also promote or inhibit our sense of agency and engagement. Some settings may be perceived as offering more resources and more opportunities for personal choice and freedom than others.

The idea of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (see Chapter 1, page 13) is helpful in understanding how learners' agency and engagement can be promoted. Learners are most likely to feel a sense of agency when they are able to reach their full potential or a state of self-actualization—finding meaning in what they do and expressing their sense of self. Certain settings and teaching approaches are more likely than others to arouse learners' curiosity and interest, prompting them to become more engaged, think more deeply, and relate more personally to the learning experience. Key pedagogical strategies here include ensuring that learners experience a variety of input and activities, but without overdoing this and causing sensory overload. For example, as teachers, we can vary resources, media, task types, language skills practised, thinking skills required, topics, pace of tasks, working formats of classes, etc.

In this context, an additional concept from Chapters 1 and 2 worth revisiting is that of **affordances**. Van Lier (2004) explains that contexts represent latent potential until learners interact with them—in other words, it is how learners interpret and relate to contextual factors and resources that generates their potential for learning. This is a perspective which emphasizes the idea that learners make their own sense out of what they encounter and use affordances in ways that are personally meaningful and relevant to them as individuals. Therefore, learner agency depends on learners' individual psychology and how they bring this to bear in interpreting affordances in their contexts, within and outside of class. It is learners' perceptions of resources and contexts—as opposed to any inherent characteristic of a particular resource—that contribute most to their agency.

Activity 7.1

Interacting with resources in the environment

Think about the following foreign language learning resources. You may like to focus on those that are available in your own setting. Think also of a class of learners you have worked with. Can you imagine how two or three different types of learners might engage differently with each of these resources? What aspects of their psychology might explain these differences? How might you help learners to broaden their range of potential resources for language learning?

- 1 blogging
- 2 the teacher
- 3 a school library
- 4 index cards for vocabulary
- 5 a collection of foreign-language music
- 6 peers in class
- 7 a social networking site for those learning the language
- 8 a vocabulary app for a mobile phone
- 9 an online grammar quiz
- 10 a foreign-language drama group.

So, for example, one student might use the school library to read a lot of fiction, another might use it as a quiet place to do homework, while another might look up references on the dangers of water pollution for a project. However, others might see it as a place to keep warm in the school break, a place to escape, or somewhere to go to think quietly. It all depends on learners' preferences, styles, mindsets, confidence, motivation, interests, etc. as to what resources they use and in what ways.

Strategies

If learners believe they have the capacity to learn the language, and assuming they are motivated and willing to take an active role in learning, they then need to know what action to take to learn that language. Among other things, this requires a knowledge of **strategies**. Strategies are the conscious actions that learners use to help them to learn or use a language. A strategy might be a technique a student uses to learn a word, structure, useful phrase, or how to ask the way. Let us illustrate this by looking at the actions taken by some different learners in their endeavours to learn a language. The first learner tries to remember a word by finding a word that sounds similar in her first language and linking the two. Another rehearses ways of asking for items in a shop in his head so that he can buy what he needs. Yet another notices how something is expressed by a native speaker and tries to remember this in case she finds a chance to use the same phrase later. These are examples of **cognitive strategies**, which are mental processes learners use to memorize and retain information, rehearse what will be said, analyze how language works, and retrieve information from memory when needed. However, learners also need other types of strategies. When the second learner enters the shop, he might also need to use **social strategies** to help him to communicate with the shopkeeper. These might include asking for clarification of something said—such as the price or the weight of an item. In addition, he might need to use strategies to make up for a lack of language he needs to express himself—such as asking the shopkeeper to tell him the name of an item, or using mime, gesture, or pointing to get a meaning across. Such actions are known as **compensation strategies**, as they compensate for a lack of knowledge of the language. Another group of strategies are called **affective strategies**. These are strategies that learners can use to regulate their emotions, such as breathing deeply to lower their anxiety or encouraging themselves through positive self-talk to make an effort to initiate conversation with a stranger. A final important group of strategies are known as **metacognitive strategies**, and are used to regulate and control the learning process. These might involve learners planning what to do, monitoring their progress, and noticing how they are coping with the process of learning.

The appropriate use of strategies can enhance both learning and using a language. Strategies for learning would include such actions as noticing and analyzing how a language works or memorizing words and chunks of language to retrieve for use in the future. Strategies for use involve learners in using the language that they have at their command—however limited this might be—to achieve a particular goal. Of course, the strategies for use can also result in learning; they may lead to further input of language from the interlocutor, who may provide a missing word or phrase. Thus, there can be considerable overlap between use and learning, although the distinction can be helpful in developing our understanding of different types of strategies.

So what is a strategy? One helpful definition is that strategies are

thoughts and actions consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance. (Cohen, 2012, p. 136)

This definition is useful in a number of ways. First, for action to be strategic, Cohen feels that it must involve the conscious use of strategies, although there is some controversy in the literature as to how conscious actions need to be in order to be classified as strategies. It is perhaps helpful to think about behaviours being 'deliberate', which is the term Oxford (2011) uses instead of 'conscious'. Secondly, Cohen's definition focuses on choice, because, as he says, 'this is what gives a strategy its special character' (p. 136). Individuals choose strategies that suit them and their particular purposes. Thirdly, Cohen suggests that we use strategies at all levels of proficiency, meaning that it is not just beginner learners who need strategies; advanced learners still employ strategies, albeit perhaps different ones. The strategies individuals use are personal to them, and the ways in which they are used can be creative. If you think about the strategies that you employ to learn and use a language, they are probably personal to you and consciously chosen by you. Moreover, they are probably different from someone else's strategies; they may be linked to your culture, your reason for learning, your personality, or your learning style. Hakki Erten's data from students in the UK memorizing English words illustrate the personal nature of strategy choice. Erten (1998) gave his participants several words to remember, and asked them to tell him what they did to remember them. He asked a student to memorize the word 'sibling', and the student found a strategy that linked the meaning of the word to its spelling: 'Sibling, yeah, *SIB* the beginning of sister *S* and *B* in brother, sibling, brothers and sisters.' Another participant was asked to memorize the word 'immerse' and said: 'Immerse I think of the sea because in German it is *meer* so diving into the sea.' The student was using a strategy which involved linking the new word to a word he knew in another language that sounded similar and then creating a mental picture to link the two.

Berry (1998) provides a striking example of the individual nature of strategies in describing how Hong Kong Chinese children struggled to adapt to a UK boarding school environment. A student describes using the following strategy:

I remember once I learnt how to use the word 'pardon'. After my teacher had said something I said 'Pardon' to see her reaction. She repeated what she had said. I said 'Pardon' again. This time I was told off because she had already repeated herself and explained things very clearly. By seeing her reaction I knew I had used 'Pardon' correctly. (Berry, 1998, p. 266)

Activity 7.2

Analyzing strategies

The following statements were made by Hong Kong Chinese children studying at a school in the UK (Berry, 1998). Decide whether they are **cognitive**, **social**, **affective**, or **compensation** strategies.

- 1 'I tried to analyse what people said.'
- 2 'I introduced Chinese food in front of many people. I started speaking in a trembling voice ... I looked at the teachers I knew, which was something I always did in the lessons. I didn't look at the students, I would be very afraid if I did so. I didn't want to see their facial expressions.'
- 3 'I could point to the objects and say this or that to make people understand what I wanted.'
- 4 'I tried to be with the English boys as often as possible. I didn't stay with the Chinese students at all.'
- 5 'I started to notice that the K sound is not necessarily represented by the letter K. Ch may take the K sound as well. All in all, the K sound can be represented by different letters.'
- 6 'When I got stuck in expressing myself I explained it to them in other words. They guessed what I wanted and supplied the missing words for me.'
- 7 'I sometimes asked the English girl sitting next to me for help. For example, I would say "What's going on now?"'
- 8 'I would recall these words. When I succeeded in recalling them from my memory I told myself I could remember them.'

What types of strategies do you notice your learners using? How could you engage your learners in reflecting on the range of strategies that they use and in exchanging ideas with each other?

However, strategies do not always fall neatly into these categories and there is considerable overlap between them. For example, you may have labelled the last statement as affective, as it is concerned with telling oneself that one has succeeded, but there is also a cognitive aspect to it, as it is also to do with recalling words. When discussing strategies with learners, it is worth remembering that the strategies they use are likely to involve elements of different types as well as being highly personal.

Another way in which strategies have been classified is as direct or indirect. In her book *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*, Rebecca Oxford (1990) includes memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies under direct strategies. These strategies deal directly with the language itself, such as remembering, retrieving information, understanding and producing the language, and using the language when there are knowledge gaps. Indirect strategies include affective, social, and metacognitive strategies, and are thus concerned with controlling the emotions, maintaining social relations, and regulating the learning process rather than relating directly to the language itself. Once again, it is worth pointing out that there is a substantial amount of overlap

between these groups, but the distinctions help us to become aware of the wide range of strategies that learners can use when learning a language.

Studies on learners' use of strategies show that they rarely use individual strategies in isolation but generally combinations of strategies. Erten (1998) provides an example of a Swiss student trying to learn the word 'bulk', having been given a definition and an example of its use in the sentence 'I've finished analysing the bulk of my data'. She explains her thought processes:

... the most, the most things ... bulk, bulk, bulk. The bulk, the ball, bulk, ball, sounds similar. It means it is not finished all, but mostly, most of the things but not all of them.

(Erten, 1998, p. 219)

First, she defined the word for herself, saying 'the most, the most things'. Next, she repeated the word, 'bulk, bulk, bulk', and then found a phonemic association between 'bulk' and 'ball'. Finally, she modified her definition as 'most of the things but not all'. Thus, this learner combines several strategies in attempting to learn the word.

Unhelpful strategies

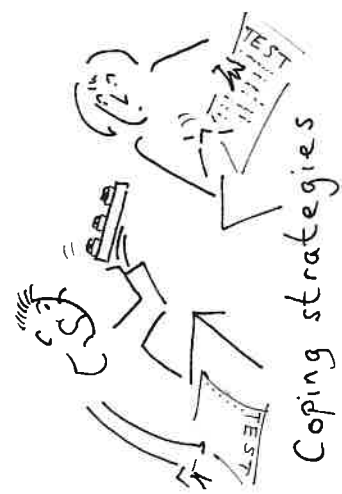
It is important to point out that not all strategies that students use are beneficial to learning. People develop strategies in order to manage a particular situation or cope with a specific problem. Students soon assess the characteristics of a setting and work out ways to survive in it. So, for example, in education systems where passing tests is important, learners will learn to use strategies to pass tests, rather than strategies to learn; these are strategies that are appropriate for 'surviving' in this setting. In a class where correct answers are valued at the expense of critical thinking, children will develop strategies to help give the right answer, rather than strategies of thinking and working things out. In his influential and thought-provoking book *How Children Fail*, John Holt (1982) provides striking examples of the ways in which school children become skilled at employing strategies that are important to their survival in a classroom situation. He calls these 'narrow and defensive strategies'. These are brought into play by pupils to try to make sense of what is going on in the classroom and meet the demands that are made of them. An example is the 'mumble an answer' strategy that he observed children using: believing that teachers are tuned in to hearing the correct answer, pupils mumble a response in the hope that the teacher will think it is correct. Another strategy he observed was children waving hands in the air to make the teacher think they knew the answer even if they did not, since the teacher would pick on those who did not have their hands up. Holt argues that children will often use coping strategies to complete the daily tasks they are given and notes that the really able thinkers in our classes are those who do not feel a strong need to please grown-ups at all costs but who work to improve their skills and abilities. In our teaching, we clearly wish to encourage critically reflective learners who are driven by the desire to learn for themselves and for the pleasure of improving and becoming more competent.

The role of context

As has been stressed throughout the book, the contexts in which learners find themselves influence many different aspects of the learning process, and these include the learning strategies that they use. Teachers therefore need to establish an environment in which there is an emphasis on learning rather than on correct answers—where learners are encouraged to work things out for themselves, ask questions, take risks, and learn from errors. We need to emphasize the importance of analyzing how the language works: of understanding what is behind a text rather than simply being able to answer factual comprehension questions; and of seeking ways of using the language even with limited competence. In this way, learners will be encouraged to employ strategies that foster learning. The choice of strategy will also be influenced by the social setting of the learners. For example, if they are in a country where there are many speakers of the target language, they might be able to use many more social strategies, whereas in an environment offering few such opportunities, they might tend to use social media, films, newspapers, or television.

Pedagogical implications

We have stressed that strategies should be selected and used appropriately. Learners need to choose strategies that are suitable for tackling the task at hand and that suit them as individuals, and they need to use these strategies effectively in combination. Learners who are unsuccessful may use many strategies but not select the most appropriate ones or be flexible in their use. If learners employ strategies appropriately, they can take more control of their own learning and greatly enhance the process in an independent way. Teachers can play an active role in helping learners to become aware of and experiment with a range of strategies. They can engage learners in discussions about the strategies they use, encouraging them to share these with classmates and try out new ones. This can lead to further discussion about how using the new strategies went. Learners can also observe the strategies their peers or teachers use and discuss each other's experiences.



One useful way of getting students to reflect on and discuss their strategy use is to give them a questionnaire that lists different strategies and ask them to reflect on how often they use certain strategies. Examples of this type of questionnaire are provided in Oxford (1990) and Cohen and Chi (2002). Questionnaires such as these serve as a good starting point for discussions about different strategies, learners' own preferences, and other strategies and types of strategies they may wish to explore. As language educators, one of our goals is to help our learners to know how to learn a language and to become independent in doing so. It is in this respect that some form of 'strategy training' can be useful in empowering learners by equipping them with a range of strategies for tackling the complex task of learning a foreign language.

An area related to this is the growing field of teaching thinking skills. If people are taught to think critically, analytically, and creatively, to make decisions, and to solve problems, this will equip them to face the demands of the workplace in an ever-changing world and, more immediately, to learn more effectively. Herbert Puchta and Marion Williams (2011) have explored the teaching of thinking through the second language. Through learning to solve problems, make decisions, or recognize cause and effect, learners develop their second language ability at the same time as their thinking ability.

Activity 7.3

Reflecting on your strategies

Reflect on your preferred strategies for learning a language. If possible, compare your own responses with someone else's.

- 1 How do you go about learning and memorizing new words? For example, do you use index cards, imagery, sound combinations, or memory associations?
- 2 How do you mentally approach language learning tasks? Do you use repetition, look for patterns, compare languages you know, etc.?
- 3 How do you compensate in a conversation when you don't know a word? Do you paraphrase, use gestures, find a synonym, explore other languages for related words, or use other strategies?
- 4 How do you organize your learning? For example, do you set specific goals, use a notebook, use online organizers, or evaluate your progress?
- 5 How do you manage your emotions in learning? Do you try to reduce your anxiety, reward yourself for goals achieved, or talk with others about your feelings when learning a language?
- 6 How do you engage with other people to help you learn? Do you enjoy working with others? Do you seek out opportunities to use the language? Do you ask others to correct you?

Learning styles

Although there is some controversy surrounding the question of whether we really have individual learning styles, it does seem likely that we each have a broad set of preferences as to how we learn, even if these are not rigidly fixed. For ourselves as teachers, having a learning style preference affects the way we teach and we must consciously remind ourselves that others may approach language learning in quite different ways. This means that we need to consciously seek to accommodate different learning styles in the teaching methods that we employ. No learner style is inherently better than any other; they merely represent different ways of going about language learning. Naturally, styles are closely linked to the strategies we tend to use. Depending on our style preferences, we are likely to select specific strategies for particular tasks.

The number of possible ways of categorizing style preferences is considerable. Many different inventories for classifying styles have been developed, generating a 'quagmire' of style constructs (Dörnyei, 2005). For example, style preferences can be organized according to whether learners prefer visual, auditory, tactile, or more kinaesthetic input; whether they tend to be more active or passive, or more analytic or holistic in their approach; or whether they prefer to use their intuition or depend more on highly organized approaches (for example, Oxford, 1993; Reid, 1987; Willing, 1987). While it can be useful to be aware of our own and our learners' preferences, we must take care not to 'pigeon-hole' learners tightly into fixed categories. Instead, as with strategies, we should seek to encourage learners to remain flexible in adopting different styles for different purposes and experimenting with styles beyond their traditional comfort zones.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation is the overarching focus of this chapter and refers to the processes whereby learners control and regulate their own learning. It involves setting goals; taking actions such as using strategies; monitoring and evaluating learning actions and behaviours; and taking the necessary steps to keep ourselves on course to our goals. Self-regulatory learners are aware of themselves as learners. They know their own strengths and weaknesses as well as their preferred modes of learning. They are aware of what goals they wish to achieve, are motivated to work towards these, and have a plan of how to do it. They are able to observe and evaluate themselves as they go about the job of learning a language. Importantly, they feel a sense of control in their ability to regulate their own learning processes.

As teachers, we can support our students in becoming self-regulated learners by attending to these different stages. This means ensuring that they feel engaged and empowered to take control through feelings of agency and competence. As far as possible, we can encourage students to set their own goals, choose tasks and topics, and manage their own time. We can help them to set appropriate goals by raising their awareness of different types of goals, goal-setting strategies, and ways

of monitoring progress towards goals. We can provide opportunities for conscious reflection on various learning behaviours and actions. We can encourage students to reflect on the strategies they use and how these contribute to their own goals. We can promote self-assessment rather than reliance on the teacher's assessment. We can also ask students to think about other behaviour, such as how they engage with and respond to peers, resources, feedback, and tasks.

Activity 7.4

Exploring learning strategies

- 1 Ask your students to tell you some of the strategies they use to learn a language. Then ask them to make a list of the ways in which they personally learn and use the language in three columns:

Ways I learn new language	Ways I communicate in the language	Ways I control my anxieties

- 2 When they have finished their personal lists, put students into groups to look at each other's lists. Ask everyone to choose one or two strategies from other people's lists to try out during the next two weeks. Ask them to make notes in a journal about their experiences and bring the journals to class after two weeks.
- 3 In this next class, ask the students to report back on their experiences to their groups, explaining which strategies they may continue to use and which strategies didn't work for them and why. Ask them to make notes of their group discussion in their journals and submit these journals to you at the end of class.
- 4 Look through the journals of individual learners' experiences and their discussions. What have you learned about your students and their strategy preferences? Were there any surprises? How can you help them to develop their strategy use further?

Goals

Learners tend to have many goals, of which some may be set by the learners themselves and some by others. They may wish to be popular in school; they may wish to work on a task with a specific peer with whom they want to become friends; they may wish to do well in exams to get a place on a prestigious training programme; or they may wish to conquer a specific challenge such as being able to order a meal in a restaurant on their own. Goals may be more short-term in nature, for example, 'I want to read my first full-length novel in the foreign language', or they may be more long-term, for example, 'I want to become a foreign language teacher working in another country'. As teachers, we want to encourage our learners

to achieve their language-related goals; however, it is important to understand that not all goals are desirable. Clearly, we do not wish to support learners towards goals such as failing an exam to spite a parent or cutting one of their peers out of a group activity. Attending to positive, constructive, forward-looking goals is vital. Social goals can be promoted through group cohesion activities, and language goals can be discussed and worked towards with supportive frameworks. A popular acronym used in goal setting is 'SMART' goals¹, which refers to goals which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and relevant, and time-bound (Doran, 1981). Attending to these characteristics of goals makes it more likely that we will achieve them and we can work with learners in helping them to explicitly express their specific goals for a course or academic year in these terms.

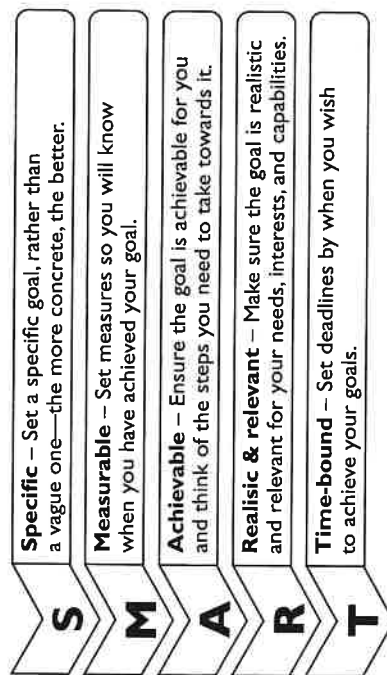


Figure 7.1 SMART goals

An important distinction between different types of goals concerns what are known as mastery goals and performance goals, as we discussed in Chapter 6 in respect to motivation. Mastery goals refer to the types of goals in which a learner wants to 'master' some new skills or knowledge. An example would be a student who wants to be able to understand a favourite TV show in the foreign language and who is willing to work to achieve the idiomatic language frequently used in the show. In fact, this reflects what is known as a **mastery-approach goal**, in which the aim is to 'master' the content for one's own growth and learning. **Mastery-avoidance goals** refer to a learner's desire to master the subject but driven by a need to avoid a possible negative outcome. An example would be a student who wants to learn all the vocabulary in a unit so as not to misunderstand the teacher or the texts and exercises set for homework. Performance goals refer to the kinds of goals in which a learner wants to 'perform' to others. A student who wants to impress her friends on a school trip with how much she can say in an encounter in a coffee shop would be one example. This would also be an illustration of a **performance-approach goal**, in which the

aim is to make a good impression on others and show how good one is to one's peers. The other type of performance goal is a **performance-avoidance goal**, in which the emphasis is on the learner not wanting to look bad in front of others. An example could be a learner who wants to learn to speak in a club so as not to make a fool of himself in front of his friends. Naturally, learners' goals can involve a combination of these goal orientations, which are not mutually exclusive.

Metacognition

Another vital component of self-regulatory behaviour is an ability to plan and control how we learn and think about our own learning, and it is this aspect that we turn to next. Let us consider a student trying to read a document about global warming in a foreign language to gain information in preparation for a presentation on the subject. The student gets her vocabulary notebook and her dictionary and sits by a computer so she can look things up if necessary. She thinks about what she already knows about the subject and makes some notes on a mind map as well as writing down some questions she would like answered. She decides first to read the text quickly to try to understand the gist of the passage and see if the text is suitable for her purpose before she reads it more carefully. She writes some of the new words that she might want to use in her presentation in her vocabulary notebook, looks for ways of remembering their meanings, and looks up the pronunciation of some of the words so she can use them correctly. She then writes some more notes on her mind map, ready to prepare her presentation, and thinks of ways to put her message across convincingly to her audience. This student is engaging in what is known as metacognitive behaviour, a crucial aspect of effective learning.

Metacognition is, in essence, an awareness of one's own cognitive processes in learning. It involves thinking about and understanding how we learn, as well as regulating and controlling our learning. Both of these aspects are important features of metacognition. While cognitive strategies are mental processes concerned with processing information in order to learn, metacognitive strategies involve learners looking at their learning from outside, as it were, in order to see how they are approaching it and plan the strategies they will use to learn. It also involves reflecting on and understanding what we know. In other words, metacognition is concerned with thinking about one's thinking and knowing about one's knowing. Our thinking is cognition, while thinking about our thinking is metacognition. This is a vital distinction. If we use our thinking strategically to complete a task, we are acting cognitively. If we understand, regulate, and control our use of learning strategies, we are acting metacognitively.

Metacognition involves different types of knowing. As Flavell—one of the pioneers of the metacognitive movement—identified, it includes knowing about oneself as a learner, knowing about the task, and knowing about the strategies one can use to carry out the task (Flavell, 1979). These three types of knowledge are essential for acting strategically on a task. So, for example, I know I am nervous as a language user and I like to get things right. My task is to buy a train ticket at a busy station

in a language I am not very familiar with. There is a queue, so I know I need to be fairly quick about my purchase. I first look up the word 'ticket' in my dictionary, and then select the strategy of rehearsing. 'Please can I have a ticket to X?' Next, I go through numbers so that I might understand the price. Finally, I take a deep breath to control my nerves, and ask for my ticket.

Anderson (2012) explains that 'metacognition is the ability to make one's thinking visible. It is the ability to reflect on what one knows and does and what one does not know and does not do' (p.170). He sees metacognition as involving different components or stages. These include planning for learning, deciding when to use strategies, monitoring their use, combining strategies where appropriate, and evaluating their effectiveness. These stages are not linear, but a shifting pattern—moving backwards and forwards from one stage to another—and more than one process might be operating at one time. Metacognition also involves self-assessment and the ability to make changes in how one learns when appropriate. In the example above, the student planned how she was going to work, used different strategies to understand and to learn, and finally reviewed what she had learned. Her mind was engaged in planning and regulating the learning process itself.

There have been many different ways of categorizing metacognitive strategies. Basically, learners first need to focus their attention on the task and the skills required to carry out the task. This involves linking new material with what is already known, a constructivist concept. (See Chapter 1 for a discussion of constructivism.) Next, they need to plan their learning. This includes identifying the purpose of a learning task, organizing their learning, and setting goals. Learners then need to select and use strategies, and for this, they need to understand the range of strategies available. They then monitor their progress and evaluate how effective this strategy was for them.

Clearly, metacognition is a vital component of self-regulation. The evidence from the literature strongly suggests that individuals who use metacognitive strategies are more effective learners, and that training in metacognitive strategies facilitates language learning, as well as developing learner autonomy and agency. It is clear from this discussion that the teacher needs to play a role in helping learners to develop their metacognitive abilities in order to become effective learners. We would argue that empowering learners to know how to learn is every bit as important as imparting subject knowledge. In discussing the role of the teacher, Anderson (2012) stresses that teaching learners to understand and control their cognitive processes is one of the most important skills that teachers can develop in their students. He explains that

[r]ather than focusing students' attention only on issues related to learning content, effective teachers structure a learning atmosphere where thinking about what happens in the learning process leads to stronger learning skills.

(Anderson, 2012, p. 172)

Teachers and coursebook writers can integrate a metacognitive component into their language lessons in many different ways. One way is to engage learners

in reflecting on how they learn. They can keep learning diaries, where, after completing an activity, they reflect on what strategies they used. They can compare their strategy use with others through discussion and decide whether there are any new strategies they would like to try out and add to their repertoires. They can also assess themselves after an activity; teachers can give students the grading criteria that they will later use themselves. In this way, teachers can get an insight into whether learners overestimate or underestimate their abilities and also into learners' perceived strengths and weaknesses. Such reflections lead to greater learner autonomy and control, and, ultimately, to more effective learning.

Activity 7.5

Managing language learning

The following statements were made by different children from Hong Kong who were settling into a school environment in the UK (Berry, 1998). They all spoke English as a second language. These are descriptions of how they tried to manage their studies in English. What does each statement tell us about the child's metacognitive behaviour? What differences can you see between these children?

- 1 'I listened a lot. I also read a lot. I read anything such as leaflets, etc. I watched English films.'
- 2 'I talked a lot with my room-mate. I rehearsed what I wanted to say in my mind before I spoke.'
- 3 'I only checked those new words which appeared frequently in the book because they might reappear later.'
- 4 'I chose story books which were only one level above my English standard. Then there were only a few words I didn't know from the text.'
- 5 'I talked to my room-mates. If they didn't talk to me I would take the initiative and talk to them. I wouldn't just wait for my room-mates to talk to me. Every evening I spoke at least a few times in English.'
- 6 'I thought about my cousin who is now over 20 years old. I imagined myself as my cousin and tried to see things from her point of view ... She should know things better than I do. I could really sort things out.'
- 7 'I plan to improve my grammar by doing as many English exercises as possible.'
- 8 'In order to help understand the book, I bought a guide book and watched the film *Romeo and Juliet*.'

So, for instance, the child in Example 1 liked to have language input to process; the child in Example 2 liked to communicate and found that rehearsal was a useful strategy; and the child in Example 7 had plans to study grammar by doing focused exercises. These represent very different, but effective, ways to go about learning.

Summary

In this chapter, we have explored the ways in which multiple facets of learner psychology combine to generate learners' sense of agency. This sense of capability, engagement, and willingness is vital for them to feel empowered to take control and self-regulate their own learning as autonomous learners. We have considered

the importance of contextual resources for language learning and the need to understand how learners interpret the relevance of resources, rather than seeing the materials themselves as having inherent beneficial characteristics. We then discussed different types of strategies that learners can employ to learn and use a language, and considered how these strategy choices can reflect style preferences. We also looked at other components of self-regulation, such as goal setting, and the core skills for directing one's own learning that stem from metacognition and using metacognitive strategies. We conclude that teachers need not only to teach their learners the language but also to support them in knowing how to learn and how to manage their learning, equipping them with the skills to become independent and potentially lifelong language learners.

Questions for reflection

- 1 Consider the classes you teach. How much opportunity is there for learners to exercise agency and feel in control of their learning? Could you make any improvements in this respect within your institutional and cultural constraints?
- 2 Learners benefit from discussing the strategies they use and trying out and evaluating new ones. What specific ideas do you have for doing this with your students at different levels and ages?
- 3 In what ways could you help your students become more metacognitively aware in their learning? How can you help them to plan their learning, select how they will go about it, and monitor their progress?

Suggestions for further reading

- Mercer, S., Ryan, S., & Williams, M. (Eds.). (2012).** *Psychology for language learning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- This edited volume provides an overview of current theory and research in psychology in foreign language learning. In Chapter 10, **Cohen** provides a comprehensible summary of the latest thinking on learning strategies. In Chapter 12, **Anderson** summarizes the subject of metacognition and provides good examples of how to integrate metacognitive training into the curriculum.
- Griffiths, C. (2013).** *The strategy factor in successful language learning*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- This readable book examines the link between strategy use and successful language learning, considering elements such as frequency and choice of strategies. It contains an excellent section exploring pedagogical concerns and discussing how strategy training can be conducted, as well as factors to consider in strategy instruction. It also includes useful questionnaires for student reflection.
- Cohen, A. D., & Macaro, E. (Eds.). (2007).** *Language learner strategies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- This collection of papers offers a contemporary overview of key issues in the field of language strategy research. Although the book focuses on an agenda for strategy research, it also indirectly generates rich insights for practice.

8

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Introduction

Throughout this book, we have emphasized the importance of the connections and interactions between the various psychological constructs, and shown ways in which they are linked together. Nevertheless, for organizational reasons, each chapter has inevitably focused on a specific topic area. In this final chapter, we shift our attention to a more explicit discussion of the interactions that we have alluded to in the earlier chapters.

Teachers know intuitively about the interconnections between different facets of their learners' psychologies and the ways in which these all link to the different social groups their learners move in. Teachers also understand that all these aspects influence learning. Think of the ways in which you and your colleagues discuss learners and issues in your classes. You might make statements such as this:

Omar got a bad grade on his last test and seems to think that he'll never be able to learn a language, no matter what he does. As a result, he really seems to have no motivation at all right now. In class, he seems bored and uninterested. He won't make any effort or do his homework, and he has no goals or ambitions at the moment. I'm also starting to worry that his low motivation is spreading to his friends, and sometimes even the entire class seems to be struggling under the influence of his negativity.

While this is a fictitious statement, many teachers will recognize the kinds of connections we make between different psychological aspects of our learners as we do here between attributions, motivation, emotions, effort, goals, contagion, and group dynamics.

In this final chapter, we will attempt to bring together the different aspects of learning that we have addressed in the various chapters of this book and to view the psychology of language learning as a whole, rather than in terms of its constituent parts. We show how integrating these aspects can provide a lens through which to view and understand different areas of learning and teaching.