

# 4 Participant Motivation on the BA Programme: a Self-Determination Perspective

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on a study of BA students' motivation for joining the course and for participating in it over the 3 years. The study was an informal investigation carried out with the final cohort of students, and was itself motivated by a concern that this final group of students may be less motivated than previous cohorts, having joined the course at the last available opportunity. It was also felt by staff that earlier cohort motivation seemed to decline as students moved towards the end of the course, and I was interested to find out whether this was really the case, and if so what aspects of the course, or other contextual factors, were associated with change in student motivation.

I will first explain the theoretical framework for the study, and set out its specific aims. The next section will describe the methodology used to research the topic. I will then present some of the key findings, and discuss them with reference to the academic literature and to Leeds staff's experience of the course. Finally I will draw some conclusions about the motivation of the students, the motivational impact of the BA Programme and tentatively discuss possible implications for the design of other part-time distance teacher education programmes.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

BA students were professional teachers, and it is therefore possible that their motivation to participate in the BA was influenced by their motivation as teachers. However, as Dörnyei (2001) points out, this is a relatively neglected area, and very little work has been done specifically focussing on the professional motivation of teachers during in-service programmes. By contrast, the motivation of students in higher education has, like other areas of motivation, spawned a vast literature (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). While a number of different theories have been invoked, the most promising for my purposes appeared to be Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Reeve, Deci & Ryan, 2004), which holds that behaviour can be intrinsically or

extrinsically motivated, or lacking any motivation ('amotivated'). This theory had clear relevance for the BA Programme since it was evident from talking to students that they joined the programme with differing degrees of freedom. Moreover, there were several standardized instruments used in SDT research, based on the original 'academic motivation scale' (Vallerand et al., 1992), one of which could be adapted to the BA context. Finally, there was an area of controversy in the academic literature regarding the importance of 'autonomous' forms of motivation in certain cultures (see below) which this study might inform. I will now describe the theory in more depth before presenting the specific questions which the study intended to address.

The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is well-known among educationalists. Intrinsically motivated learners are said to study because they are genuinely interested in the subject or enjoy the process of learning; extrinsically motivated learners do it in order to gain some other kind of benefit distinct from the process of learning. In the field of pedagogy it is widely understood that intrinsic motivation is the more desirable because learners with this kind of motivation tend to exert more effort and employ more adaptive learning behaviour, and research has repeatedly demonstrated links with academic success (e.g. Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005).

According to SDT, all human beings are endowed with an intrinsic motivation to learn, so that they can explore and control their environment. This intrinsic desire for learning will flourish as long as three conditions are met: people have a sense of autonomy (i.e. that they are doing the activity for themselves), of competence (i.e. that they are capable of doing it well), and of relatedness (i.e. that they feel socially secure and are not acting against others' interests). However, its principal proponents, Ryan & Deci (2000:60), argue that "although intrinsic motivation is clearly an important type of motivation, most of the activities people do are not, strictly speaking, intrinsically motivated". Ironically, this is especially true of formal education, where we often find ourselves studying things we may not have autonomously chosen to learn, but still do for extrinsic reasons. The key feature of SDT is that it proposes that these extrinsic reasons can be more or less internalized:

Thought of as a continuum, the concept of internalization describes how one's motivation for behaviour can range from amotivation or unwillingness, to passive compliance, to active personal commitment. With increasing internalization (and its associated sense of personal commitment) come greater persistence, more positive self-perceptions, and better quality of engagement. (Ryan & Deci (2000:60-61)

As shown in Figure 1 below, the more external types of motive can be characterized as 'controlled' – we act because we feel obligated or to please other people, and may accordingly feel stressed and conflicted. The more internal types of motive, on the other hand, can be termed 'autonomous' – we act because we ourselves want to achieve a personal goal and to do well, and gain a sense of harmony and freedom by doing so. Van Lier (1996) has argued that when goals and motives have become fully internalized, the motivation is effectively 'intrinsic', with the same kind of stimulation and satisfaction to be drawn from successful learning.

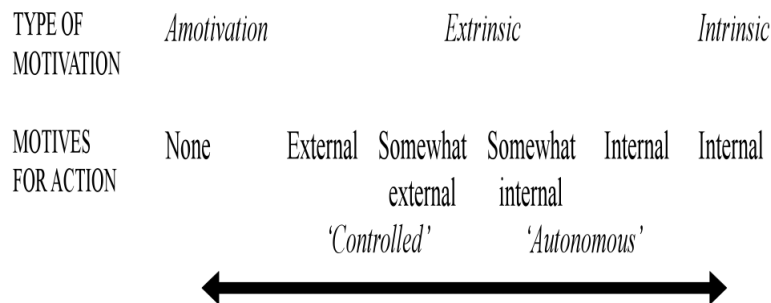


Figure 1: Simplified version of the Self-Determination Continuum (adapted from Reeve et al., 2004: 39)

Academic courses have the potential to either promote self-determination or to suppress it. Factors such as the way instructors communicate with students (Noels, 2001), how much support they provide students (Williams & Deci, 1996), and the way they are assessed (Ryan & Brown, 2005), for example, have all been shown to affect the degree to which learners feel self-determined and their self-reported motivation to participate. It has also been conclusively demonstrated, in these and other studies (e.g. Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005) that the nature of students' motivation can change as they move through a course.

One area of controversy is how universal SDT is. Some cross-cultural psychologists (e.g. Iyengar & Lepper, 1999) have argued that the experience of autonomy is not valued as highly in oriental as in western cultures, and that people in oriental cultures might be just as well motivated to do things that respected others want (such as parents, spouses or senior colleagues) as things that they want for themselves. In that case SDT would fail to predict effort or adaptive learning behaviour among oriental students. However, proponents of SDT (e.g. Vansteenkiste, Zhou, Lens & Soenens) argue that these critics are mistaken because they conceive of autonomy as being the opposite of dependence on other people, whereas in reality "one can willingly accept guidance or support from without" (Lens & Soenens, 2005:471) yet still feel in control of one's life and actions. Vansteenkiste et al.'s research with Chinese students of English in the USA bore out their prediction that "autonomous or volitional study motivation is universally important and should predict better learning and well-being" in all cultures (ibid: 468).

### 3 AIMS OF THE STUDY

Based on SDT, my hypotheses were that BA students who have 'autonomous' motives for doing the course will be more strongly motivated, and will put more effort into the course, than those who have 'controlled' motives for doing the course. This would be reflected directly in their self-reported motivation and enjoyment of the course, and indirectly in their success as reflected in course grades. I also hypothesised that during the course the level and nature of students' motivation may change as a result of their experience of the course, or of other sociocultural factors.

The precise research questions I hoped to address were:

1. What is the nature of students' motivation at the beginning and end of the BA programme?
2. Do students with more autonomous motives perform better on the course?
3. What are the reasons for any changes in their motivation?

## **4 RESEARCH METHOD**

Following Dörnyei (2001:42), I adopted a mixed method approach to researching these questions, in the hope that "a combination of qualitative and quantitative designs might bring out the best of both approaches while neutralizing the shortcomings and biases inherent in each paradigm". A standardized questionnaire measuring level of self-determination in higher education students was available through the SDT website (<http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT>) but I was aware the data this generated, while reliable and large-scale, could not do full justice to a construct as complex as motivation, nor to the possible academic or non-academic influences on motivation. I therefore decided to supplement this instrument by carrying out two semi-structured interviews with selected participants.

### **4.1 Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was an adapted version of the Learning Self-Regulation Questionnaire (LSRQ) (Black & Deci, 2000), which is itself a simplified version of the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992). It consisted of 14 statements about the respondents' participation on the course, to which they had to respond on a Likert Scale of 1-7, from 'not at all true' to 'very true'. Half represented examples of autonomous regulation of learning (e.g. "I participate actively in this course because I feel it's a good way to improve my academic skills and knowledge") and the other half examples of controlled regulation (e.g. "I follow most of my tutor's advice because I want other people to think I'm a good student."). Respondents' 'relative autonomy index' (RAI) is calculated by comparing the responses to the two types of statement. There were three additional closed items: students were asked to rate their own level of motivation to participate, confidence in ultimate success, and enjoyment of the course. The questionnaire was administered to all Cohort 6 students during the Pre-session course in the regions in December 2005, and then to all regional groups in May 2008 after they had completed two and a half years' study. One final open item differed slightly in the first and second administrations: at the beginning respondents were asked to summarize their hopes for the programme; at the later administration they were asked to summarize what they felt they had got out of the BA programme thus far.

### **4.2 Interviews**

The interviews followed a schedule drawn up in advance focussing on aspects of the course experience. During both interviews I tried to elicit information about the level of autonomy support the students were experiencing, from their Regional Tutor (RT), Leeds staff, their school headteacher or senior teacher, and their family.

The first interview also probed their reasons for joining the programme, their subjective feelings about the different components of the course and their perception of the level of challenge. The second interview focussed more on how far they felt they were achieving their goals, and how the course had changed them, personally or professionally (for pedagogic reasons, two of these interviews were conducted by one of the participants rather than myself). Ten students were selected for interview from two different regions, based on their questionnaire results and on comments from RTs; using these sources of information I was able to produce a sample which was broadly representative across the intrinsic-extrinsic motivational spectrum. Ten interviews took place in March 2006 and nine in June 2008 (one student was absent); all were recorded on mini-disc and later part transcribed.

## 5 RESULTS

Data were entered for analysis into the statistical software package SPSS 16.0. Where I compare results from the first and second administrations of the questionnaire I have restricted cases to those who completed both. Since some students were absent on each occasion this means the overall data set (c102) is rather smaller than the total number of students remaining in Cohort 6 in the final summer school (c140). I will first report the results of the questionnaire, and then use the interview data to supplement and help explain it.

### 5.1 Questionnaire data

At both beginning and end of the research period, BA students exhibited high levels of motivation to study on the programme. This is shown in the single item measure of motivation, where on a scale of 1-7 respondents' mean scores at beginning and end were 5.52 and 5.26 (n = 100 and n= 95 respectively). Turning now to the nature of their motivation, Table 1 shows that their course participation was mainly self-determined; their autonomous motives for studying were much stronger than their controlled motives at both beginning and end, as reflected in the positive RAIs of 1.56 and 1.61 respectively. However, it is also evident that the strength of both types of motives did decline over the programme, to a statistically significant degree.

*Table 1: Levels of self-determination of BA participants during Pre-sessional and final Summer School.*

Type of regulation	Dec 05 n = 101	June 08 n = 98	Change
Autonomous motives	6.35	6.04	-0.31*
Controlled motives	4.80	4.41	-0.39**
Relative Autonomy Index	1.56	1.61	+0.05

\*\* significant at p<0.01

\* significant at p<0.05

The two other additional single item measures were of student feeling of confidence and enjoyment. Overall mean scores were high, as with motivation, but in contrast to motivation, both these measures showed an increase from Pre-sessional to final Summer School, with confidence increasing from 5.21 to 5.45 (not significant) and enjoyment from 5.46 to 5.86 (significant at  $p < .01$ ). These results are shown in Figure 2 below. It should be added that there was considerable individual variation in these results; for example only 29 out of 102 students reported the same level of enjoyment of the course at the two administrations, while 12 reported a drop of at least two points on the scale, and 9 reported a rise of two points.

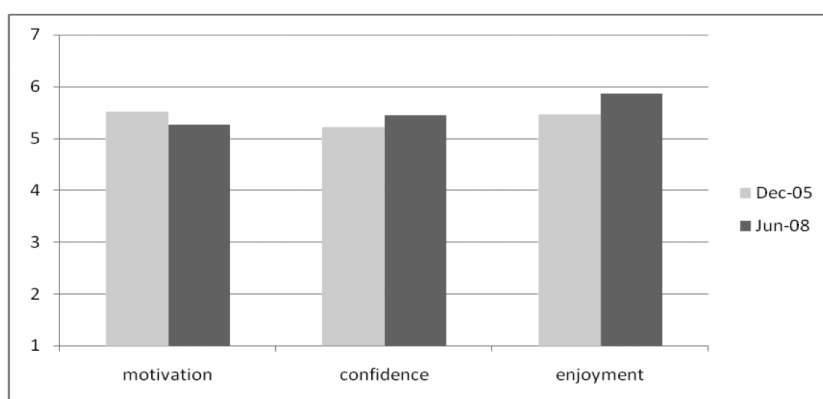


Figure 2: Levels of motivation, confidence and enjoyment of BA participants during Pre-sessional and final Summer School ( $n = 102$ )

Were students with more autonomous motives for participating in the course also better performers? One rarely finds high levels of correlation between motivation and achievement in educational courses because of the many intervening variables, and I have not been able to control for likely relevant variables here (e.g. level of English proficiency, educational background, time available for study). Moreover, the measure of performance used is the mean score of students on the 15 modules completed by the time of the June 2008 summer school, so it did not take into account the five remaining assessment points. Nevertheless, Table 2 shows that there is a significant positive correlation between RAI and student performance, and motivation and student performance. RAI also has a significant positive correlation with enjoyment of the course.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Coefficients for key variables with participants' average scores on first 15 BA modules ( $n = 98$ ).

Variables (June 08)	RAI	M	C	E	AvS
Relative autonomy index	1.000	.015	.106	.202*	.225*
Motivation		1.000	.325**	.325**	.217*
Confidence			1.000	.350*	.163
Enjoyment				1.000	.195
Av. score over 15 modules					1.000

\*\* correlation is significant at  $p < 0.01$

\* correlation is significant at  $p < 0.05$

In order to begin to explore the answer to my third research question, concerning possible factors associated with change in student motivation, I looked at the relationship of certain background variables with the nature of, and change in, student motivation. The first variable tested was regional grouping. This was potentially relevant because it could be hypothesized, following previous studies of instructional style (e.g Black & Deci, 2000; Noels, 2001), that RTs' support practices may have influenced how self-determined students felt on the BA programme. However an analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing changes in the RAI of the four regional groups (Muscat, Dakhiliya, Batinah and Sharqiya South) revealed no significant differences.

Two further background variables were studied: age and gender. Both were shown to be significantly related to student performance on the BA Programme (see Chapter 10) and a link to motivation might be predicted. Students were divided into two age groups, below and above 35. No significant differences between the two groups were found in any of the measures. By contrast, gender differences were significant on most variables measured, as shown in Table 3. As with Cohorts 1 & 2, females' overall performance as measured in module assessment scores were significantly higher, with an average 6 mark difference. As measured by the RAI, their participation in the BA was also significantly more self-determined, and it is not surprising to find they enjoyed the course more. The only measure in which male students outscored female was in confidence, though this difference was no longer significant in June 2008 as female confidence levels had risen much more than male.

Table 3: Gender differences in key variables during Pre-sessional and final Summer School.

Type of regulation	Male n = 52		Female n = 51		Gender Difference	
	Dec 05	June 08	Dec 05	June 08	Dec 05	June 08
Relative autonomy index	1.51	1.32	1.61	1.90	.10	.58**
Motivation	5.49	5.22	5.55	5.31	.06	.09
Confidence	5.46	5.50	4.96	5.40	-.50*	-.10
Enjoyment	5.48	5.58	5.45	6.16	.10	.58**
Av. Scores	n/a	48.77	n/a	54.87	n/a	6.10**

\*\*significant at  $p < 0.01$

\*significant at  $p < 0.05$

Each questionnaire had a final open item in which respondents could report their hopes for the course (December 2005) or how they felt they had benefited, if at all (June 2008). Their responses make an interesting contrast. At the beginning of the course the first potential benefit of the course identified by nearly half the participants (46%) was English language development; the second most frequently mentioned benefit was an increase in their academic knowledge or skills (25%), while an improvement in their teaching ability was cited first by only a small

minority (7%). By contrast, in June 2008 no less than 74% of respondents claimed that the course had helped them improve their teaching; language development was mentioned as a benefit by only 34%, while an increase in academic knowledge and skills was cited by 22%. It would appear from these comments that the students' perception of the course, and the benefits it could bring them, changed radically during the programme. While they entered the programme thinking mainly in terms of how it might improve their English language skills, as they participated they came to understand how the course could improve them as teachers, for example by providing them with new techniques, and by helping them understand, support and assess their learners as individuals (this was particularly valued by those teaching younger children). Of course this change in emphasis could indicate that their original goals and expectations – that the course would improve their English language – had been frustrated, but this did not seem to be the case. The overwhelming majority of the comments in June 2008 were positive, reflecting their generally high motivation and sense of self-determination, and several respondents expressed gratitude to the Ministry and the university for being given the opportunity to develop themselves in this way; but 14 of the 87 respondents did have criticisms to make, the most frequent being the too high level of challenge, and the difficulty in taking the course while also having full-time work and other social responsibilities.

## **5.2 Interview data**

The questionnaire results to a certain extent confounded expectations, in that they suggested Cohort 6 students were highly motivated, and that their participation was largely self-determined, both at beginning and near the end of the BA programme. While it is possible that earlier cohorts had even higher motivation, our hypothesis that the final cohort would have low motivation to participate was certainly incorrect. The interview data sheds some light on why this might be. All nine students interviewed in June 2008 talked of the way that the BA Programme became a major part of their lives. Not only did it take up a considerable portion of their leisure time but it impinged on the lives of others around them too, such as spouses, children and colleagues. The regular meetings at the regional training centres took up a day of their week, often involved considerable journeys, and most significantly created a new community in which they participated and in which close relationships were forged (see below). The frequent assessment points meant students were given regular personal challenges, with specific deadlines to meet, and the issuing of marks were interpreted – almost every interviewed student stressed their personal significance – as occasions for individual evaluation. Given the way the BA course entered their lives, it should not be surprising perhaps that many participants internalized the motives for participating – the initiative may have originally come from the Ministry and senior colleagues, but most students came quickly to see the course as their own endeavour and one that they were heavily investing in.

Students' comments in interview show this investment, to use Norton's term (Norton, 2000), to be in two aspects of their identity. Firstly, they came to see that the



course could improve, and in some cases transform, their teaching. One student, who had initially refused to join Cohort 1, reported:

I didn't know it was helpful and I would get more information and that I would improve in my teaching but now after I took this, now I have many improve, I improved in my teaching, now I have many strategies I can use in my class to work with my children, if I compare with before, yes, now, I feel in myself I have improved. [Student D]

Later in the interview she elaborated on how the course was helping her deal with her young learners: "I feel myself it's easier to teach them, easy to, not like before, yes, and I enjoy, interest, I enjoy working with them." Conversely, one might speculate that those who were uncomfortable with the identity of teacher could become alienated by the course. One student admitted that at first he found "the course is really really, it's very good for us, as teachers, as Omani teachers", but then explained that "there is no purpose for me to do this programme, just to take the degree...my motivation...and according to my results, now it's below, lower than before" [Student F]. With such individuals, low marks on course assignments might serve to reinforce the notion that they did not belong in the teaching profession.

Another way BA students found themselves investing in a new identity was through their developing English language skills. Several students commented on how they now felt more confident in their English ability, and in particular able to communicate with native-speakers of the language.

And also I think it's useful not for my teaching only, also for my life, it improve my language, now I can use it, talk with any native-speaker, also when I went abroad I can speak the language fluently, more than before. Also in my life I can understand the topic, the grammar, this will help me with my children when they become bigger. [Student J]

As this student's comment makes clear, English proficiency is not viewed as a narrow technical skill but as something potentially transformative, enabling participation in the real or imagined global English community (Kanno & Norton, 2003) for themselves and even for their children. In this respect the interview with myself was an opportunity to enact this English-proficient identity, as this exchange suggests:

I: Do you feel that you've changed as a person while doing the BA?

B: Yes, as a person, not only to get certificates or the grades, it change from inside

I: How?

B: What I said before, I get confidence now, yeah I get confidence, and, er, for example when I do the interview with you, back two years, I am afraid but now I get confidence [laughs]

There were also hints of a third way in which some were developing a new identity – as serious social science students. Four of my nine interviewees mentioned the possibility of continuing on to Master's degree courses, and as in the open questionnaire item responses several students expressed pride in how their academic knowledge and skill had developed. This topic is addressed in much more depth in other chapters in this volume (e.g. see Chapters 5 and 7).

The interview data provides evidence of threats to student motivation, which may have been the cause of the slight decline in overall levels of motivation observed in the questionnaire data. Most prominent among these were poor marks on assignments – “for example in the methodology I get F, my motivation become down then when I return it again and I passed I got more motivation” [Student G] – and demands on their time from work and family; for example Student F took the opportunity of the interview to apologize for his absence from the course the next day because his older brother had called him to attend to a family matter which he could not refuse.

At the same time the data also shows how design features of the BA helped to protect and sustain their motivation. Firstly, RTs are presented as highly supportive of students’ autonomy. While every interviewee claims to have benefited from their RT’s advice, it is clear that it was as much the way they offered advice and support, as much as the ideas themselves, that impressed participants. In fact, the two interviewees who made slightly critical comments both wanted more direct and explicit advice. For the others, the form of tutoring they experienced was novel and, as this extract shows, may even have influenced their own teaching:

All the time he try to motivate us to complete the programme. I think most of the tutors here, they try to help us, they help the learners to study, they try to motivate them, try to give them or to answer any question, also they are listening to us, to give our opinion, then they will try to give us what is right and first they will listen, and then they will try to elicit also another opinion from our colleagues, later on they will give their opinion, and this give us enough time to choose... We learn from them in our schools or in our classes we must take the own answers from our pupils, then we can give also another answer, we can say ‘yes, it’s correct but you can do this’, so this is make the learners, motivate learners to study. [Student K]

In SDT, it is just such ‘learner-centred’ instruction – which values learners’ perspectives, acknowledges their individual needs and feelings, and provides opportunities for choice in how or what they study – which is hypothesized to promote the internalization of motives and lead to more adaptive study behaviour (Noels, 2001). On the other hand, although it did not come across as a major concern of students, it is possible to argue that the lack of choice in the structure of the programme was potentially threatening to students’ sense of autonomy; as one said, “it’s better to... give us a choice and let us choose what we want to study. Some modules we don’t like but we have to do it” [Student J].

The regional groups themselves provided another significant motivational support. Most of my interviewees expressed solidarity with their colleagues, and some were explicit in how cooperation had sustained their interest in the course. For one student the imminent end of the course was regretted because it would mean no longer having weekly meetings with her group. This intensely cooperative form of participation in the course could itself be transformative, as Student H describes:

I like sharing things with my friends. Before [the BA] I thought that being success is a personal thing, but now I realize that being a successful person alone is not good, you need also to be a successful... improving yourself and improving others too. So with my group we do lots of things together, we share articles together, we share books together, we are senior teachers in same schools, same region, same wilayah.

This student had found she could learn as much by helping others as by studying for herself. By the same token, a malfunctioning regional group could reinforce negative motivation, though, and one student implied this had occurred in a male group in his region.

The challenge of integrating a part-time distance course into one's on-going social and work commitments is one that has been recognised in the literature, and it has been argued that successful students need to create an 'accommodation zone' between components of their lives and those of the course (Sataporn & Lamb, 2005). In the case of the BA, key moves by the Ministry facilitated the creation of this accommodation zone, such as the reduction of school teaching hours for students. The very length of the course may have worked in their favour too, for there was sufficient time for the course to become embedded in the rhythm of their daily lives. Moreover, Cohort 6 students benefited from school colleagues having done the course before them, and therefore being sympathetic towards the pressures they felt. Finally, though there is no space here to explore the cultural dimension of the students' participation in the course, it appears that extended families both created extra social demands on students and also provided solutions – all my female interviewees with children mentioned how they were able to call on sisters or mothers to look after their children when necessary (e.g. when working on assignments at the weekend).

## 6 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

I will now briefly summarize the findings of this study insofar as they answer the three research questions, before considering some possible implications of the study for motivational theory and the practice of in-service teacher education:

1. Against expectations, Cohort 6 students always had mainly autonomous motives for doing the BA course. The strength of this motivation declined slightly during the course, as is frequently observed in all kinds of educational programmes (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002), but their motivation remained mainly autonomous, while confidence and enjoyment increased significantly. No major regional or age differences were found, but female students' motivation was significantly higher and their participation more self-determined than males', though male students were more self-confident.
2. Students who had more autonomous motives tended to do better, as reflected in their grades over the first 15 modules, and they enjoyed the course more. They did not necessarily feel more confident.
3. It is possible to view students' relation to the course in terms of their self-identity. If teaching was an important part of their identity, then the course would have endorsed that and encouraged them to invest in it heavily, as many did. Likewise, if they had aspirations to belong to an international community, then they would have valued the chance to develop their language skills in regular communication with other Omanis and native-speakers. Even those who were heavily invested in the course were affectively challenged at certain points, though, and RT and peer group support were identified as key factors which helped to sustain their motivation.

Awareness of the study's limitations urges caution in drawing conclusions either for theory or practice. The sample was restricted to only about 70% of the total due to absences on the two occasions when the questionnaire was given; it is possible that the less motivated students were the ones who were absent. While the LSRQ has been found to be reliable in previous studies (Black & Deci, 2000), its brevity and the way it collapses the self-determination continuum into two broad categories (controlled vs autonomous) inevitably restricts its validity as a measure of students' motivation. Further, average assessment scores are a crude way of measuring students' effort and performance. However the results do suggest that in this Arab population self-determined motives are associated with higher motivation and adaptive learning behaviour, as has been found in western student populations, and thus may be taken as support for the cultural universality of 'autonomy' as a human psychological need (Chirkov et al., 2003).

The fact that this study was carried out with only the final cohort of students also limits what it can say about programme design; it is possible that different results would have been obtained from students in earlier cohorts, when the course had not yet become embedded in the local educational context and tutors were less experienced. Furthermore, it has been argued that students' motivation to participate in the course was shaped more by factors external to the programme itself, and in particular to the way students viewed themselves in relation to their job and to the global community of English users, than to features of the course itself. Nevertheless, the data presented here does indicate features of the programme which challenged or promoted their motivation. For example, assessment marks were largely viewed as demotivating – even a student who scored very highly reported being demoralized by receiving a 'B' grade. Fewer assessment points would have meant fewer occasions for public evaluation, and so might have avoided some instances of demotivation. Arguably it would also have helped some students achieve a more harmonious work-life balance (though it is also true that some students would have struggled to self-manage their work on fewer but larger assignments). RT and peer group support emerge as key mediators of student motivation; the organization of participants in these regional groups can be regarded as a key design feature, one that gave students a significant advantage over students taking distance programmes on an individual basis. The autonomy-supportive methods of RTs were also significant in sustaining student motivation, and probably more important than the pedagogic expertise or subject knowledge they brought to bear. The recruitment and retention of tutors with this autonomy-supportive communicative style can therefore be regarded as integral to the success of the programme.

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