

3 Understanding the Inner Motivational Resources of Language Learners' Out-of-Class Technology Use for Language Learning

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Introduction

The latest reports on digital media indicate that we are much more connected than ever before as information and communication technology tools rapidly advance and internet use is more prevalent. The current digital population of 4.54 billion has already surpassed 60% of the global population, with nearly 4 billion people using smartphones in daily life; furthermore, the digital population's average social media usage has reached more than two hours per day (Clements, 2020; Kemp, 2020). These exponentially growing trends predict that we will spend much more time daily accessing digital media and experience fundamental changes in educational paradigms, as in all aspects of life in this new digital era (Dincer, 2020). Given the abundance of digital tools, we as language teachers and educators should become more inclined to use digital tools for language learning (LL) purposes. Understanding successful language learners' practices with technology beyond the classroom is important in planning more relevant teaching for our students in the digital era.

Despite the potential positive affordances for LL beyond the classroom, less is known about students' interest-based activities beyond the classroom in today's digital era, and limited research has ventured into this less charted terrain of language learning and teaching. To this end, this chapter explores English as a foreign language (EFL)

learners' technology-oriented LL experiences beyond the classroom and investigates how their personal learning contexts help them to fulfil their basic psychological needs (i.e. autonomy, competence and relatedness). The chapter starts with a review of the characteristics of out-of-class language learning (OCLL). It examines the literature in connection with Benson's (2011a) pedagogic framework (i.e. self-instructed, self-directed naturalistic and naturalistic) and digital LL beyond the classroom. This brief review is followed by a description of the main tenets of self-determination theory (SDT) and research on OCLL with technology. Drawing on three types of OCLL identified by Benson (2011a), and the ways in which they connect with SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), the chapter continues by presenting an outline of the theoretical basis for the current study. The chapter then presents qualitative evidence on how online OCLL contexts can fulfil language learners' three basic psychological needs and what drives them to study language with digital tools beyond the classroom. Finally, the chapter discusses the study findings, making reference to the relevant literature. It suggests that understanding the nature of quality out-of-class technology use for LL is the initial step to inform educators about the educational potential of technology and sets guidelines for teachers who are willing to create an autonomy-supportive environment within and beyond the classroom.

Out-of-Class Technology Use for Language Learning

Out-of-class learning refers to a wide range of activities undertaken beyond the confines of formal learning institutions. Alternative terms such as 'out-of-school learning', 'learning beyond the classroom' and 'informal learning' are also used. The research on OCLL has made a considerable contribution to the field of language learning (Benson, 2011a; Richards, 2015). Success in LL depends on how students engage with the language both within and outside the classroom; moreover, OCLL plays a facilitative role in both autonomy and motivation in LL (Benson, 2011a; Chik, 2018; Richards, 2015; Stockwell, 2013).

OCLL is of high importance for optimal LL, and it plays a complementary role to in-class teaching. Due to its complex and difficult to observe nature, OCLL has been underrepresented in applied linguistics research thus far (Reinders & Benson, 2017). To define this somewhat ambiguous field of inquiry, Benson (2011a) proposed a broad framework covering all the aspects of LL beyond the classroom as one of the initial attempts to bring clarity to what is quite a dynamic concept. In his framework, he addressed OCLL with its four distinct dimensions: location, formality, pedagogy and locus of control. According to Benson (2011a): *location* concerns the area or setting where learning practice occurs (e.g. in-class, after-school or extracurricular);

formality refers to the extent to which learning practice is connected to formal qualifications (e.g. formal or informal); *pedagogy* denotes the extent of the learning practice, including teaching and instruction (self-instructed, self-directed naturalistic or naturalistic); and *locus of control* is the extent to which learners direct their learning experience (e.g. self-directed or teacher-directed). Although this broad framework is somewhat rudimentary and open to interpretation, it nevertheless helps us understand OCLL environments (Benson, 2011a, 2011b; Chik, 2014; Reinders & Benson, 2017).

Within this conceptualisation, the pedagogical continuum stretching from self-instruction to naturalistic has become the basis for various studies aiming to investigate the nature of LL experiences beyond the classroom (e.g. Chik, 2014, 2018; Kocatepe, 2017; Lai *et al.*, 2016; Lee, 2019). Within this continuum, specifically designed LL tools can take a teacher's place in self-instruction, while direct interaction with target language speakers and engaging with authentic materials without an explicit intention to learn the language can play a role at the hypothetical end of naturalistic learning (Benson, 2011a).

Many language learners also create naturalistic learning situations for themselves and reflect upon them as language-learning experiences – a process that can be called ‘self-directed naturalistic learning’ (Benson, 2011b: 76). In self-directed naturalistic learning, a learner's focus of attention might be on communication, enjoyment or learning something but not on the language itself (Benson, 2011a, 2011b). As Benson (2011b) states, these learning types often run concurrently with the learners' in-class learning, with successful language learners taking advantage of naturalistic learning situations and using a wide range of learning strategies beyond the classroom as well. The internet and information technology offer an infinite number of choices in terms of content and medium of learning in the digital world and are helpful for creating authentic LL contexts (Chik & Ho, 2017; Dincer, 2020; Lai *et al.*, 2018; Reinders & Benson, 2017; Richards, 2015). As expected, student-led language learning initiatives outside the classroom with technology have increasingly become the focus of research (Chik, 2018; Dincer, 2020; Lai *et al.*, 2018; Nguyen & Stracke, 2020; Reinders & White, 2016). Despite this ever-growing interest, less is known about how learners' engagement with digital practices beyond the classroom contributes to learners' inner motivational resources to study language over time. To gain a better understanding of this process and the factors that drive these learners to use technology to continue their LL beyond the classroom, we draw on SDT, which, as a general theory of human motivation, can play a complementary role in expanding and reinforcing Benson's framework of OCLL (Kocatepe, 2017). What is more, enhancing our understanding of the learners' digital world might also unlock classroom pedagogy for teachers (Chik, 2018).

Self-Determination Theory and Out-of-Class technology engagement for language learning

SDT and its supporting mini-theories are mainly concerned with the idea of how all individuals have an innate proclivity to develop authentic lives providing that their universal psychological needs are satisfied in the social milieu (Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020). The theory has been extensively tested in both the general education domain, with its sub-theories of basic psychological needs and cognitive evaluation, and in the realm of LL. Within SDT, these needs – autonomy (i.e. a sense of volitional agency in actions), competence (i.e. a sense of feeling efficacious in actions and meeting the challenges) and relatedness (i.e. a sense of feeling connected to and cared for by significant others) – provide a basis for understanding how social context supports or thwarts individuals' needs. The extent of fulfilment of these needs is strongly related to one's motivational orientations. SDT broadly differentiates the motivational orientations into three forms along a continuum from the least to the most self-determined orientations: amotivation, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (see Figure 3.1).

According to the basic distinction in this continuum, amotivation refers to the state of lacking any intention to engage in an activity. Extrinsic motivation is the heterogeneous category of motivation differing in terms of perceived locus of causality. It has less autonomous (i.e. external and introjected) and more autonomous (i.e. identified and integrated) forms of motivation. These pertain to the motive of behaviours for various reasons, such as tangible rewards (i.e. external), personal obligation (i.e. introjected), personal importance (i.e. identified) and self-endorsement of goals (i.e. integrated). Intrinsic motivation refers to the reason for engaging in an activity for inherent interest and joy (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT also acknowledges that 'most intentional behaviors are multiply motivated. People can, for example, be simultaneously intrinsically motivated and identified for some actions' (Ryan & Deci, 2020: 3). When the social context is autonomy supportive (i.e. supportive of autonomy, competence and relatedness), it facilitates an environment in which humans become more autonomous to act and engage in activities; on the contrary, unsatisfied needs reduce intrinsic motivation and disengage people from the activities they may be involved in (for a complete discussion, see Reeve, Chapter 1 of this volume, and Noels *et al.*, 2019).

To date, motivation research has focused primarily on how in-class language learning settings, or teacher-directed virtual settings, promote language learners' motivational orientations by satisfying the learners' basic needs as understood within the SDT framework; nevertheless, we have little knowledge about what goes on outside the language classroom from the students' side (e.g. Akbari *et al.*, 2015; Fandiño *et al.*, 2019).

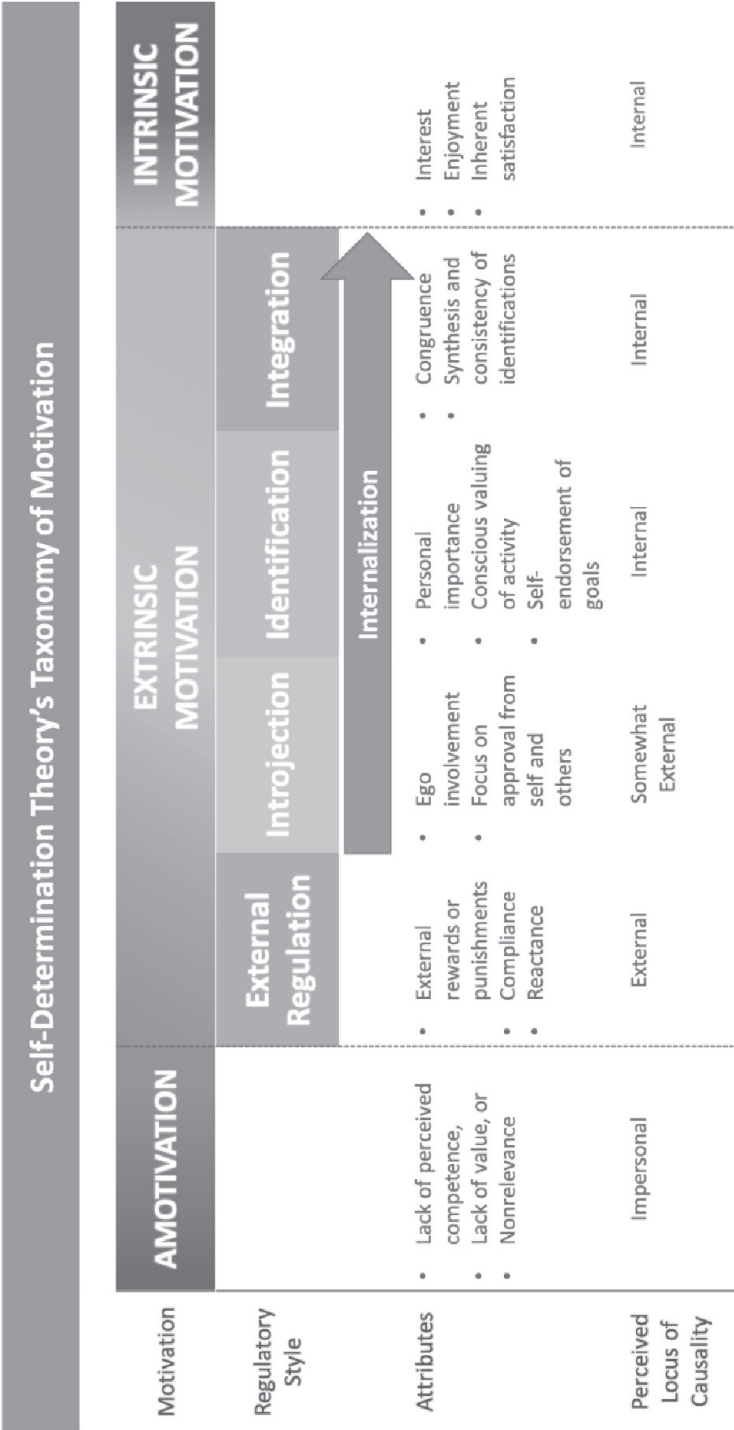


Figure 3.1 The self-determination continuum of motivation
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Encouragingly, however, a few SDT studies have recently explored how out-of-class contexts, including home, self-access language centres and online environments, support students' autonomous behaviours (Dincer, 2020; Fathali & Okada, 2017; Kocatepe, 2017; Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2020). This fact notwithstanding, the facilitative role of OCLL in promoting autonomous motivation in the LL domain has obtained less scholarly attention thus far (Dincer, 2020).

Within the limited literature, Kocatepe (2017) investigated the pedagogic intensity of Arab female EFL learners' out-of-class practices, criticising the narrow focus on autonomous out-of-class language practices. Her data indicated that *self-instructed learners* are prone to engage mainly with practices for the improvement of linguistic benefits and enhancement of language proficiency. However, she noted that the actions of self-instructed learners might evolve into more internalised motivation, and those students could potentially later demonstrate a higher degree of self-determination. Although *self-directed naturalistic learners* engage with OCLL practices with different degrees of external regulation, they mostly have a more internalised motivation for their practices beyond the classroom (Kocatepe, 2017). *Naturalistic language learners* engage with activities in English not for explicit learning purposes but due to a genuine interest in the activity or real-life outcomes. In other words, they do not have a clear pedagogic agenda in mind. Kocatepe (2017) concluded that natural LL, such as listening to a song, or watching a film because of genuine enjoyment or interest practices, helps naturalistic language learners to satisfy their intrinsic interests and attain pedagogic goals.

In other research, Fathali and Okada (2017) investigated Japanese EFL learners' intention to study language in technology-enhanced OCLL contexts with a structural modelling approach. The researchers confirmed that basic psychological needs are predictors of learners' intentions to study beyond the classroom with technology and their OCLL achievement. Their findings specifically revealed that while perceived competence was the strongest predictor of the intent to study and achievement beyond the classroom, the need for relatedness did not predict students' achievement beyond the classroom. With their empirical testing of SDT in OCLL, Fathali and Okada concluded that, for learners studying language with technology, competence is the most highly valued need, followed by autonomy and, finally, by relatedness.

In a more recent study, Dincer (2020) adopted a cluster analysis approach to investigate the characteristics of Turkish EFL learners who study the target language beyond the classroom with technology. Corroborating the theoretical assumptions of SDT, Dincer revealed that students who feel more autonomy while learning beyond the classroom are also the ones who are more prone to engage with digital learning tools. As expected, those learners engaging with digital tools attained higher proficiency levels and spent a considerable amount of time on

digital tool usage on a daily basis. Moreover, the study showed that they also benefited from using a wider range of digital tools compared to those learners who are less autonomously engaged for LL purposes.

Theoretical Framework

Although these few studies may have limitations in terms of gender-specific perspectives, or data collection methodology, they contribute significantly to the discussion of the intertwined relationship between language learner autonomy and autonomous motivation in SDT (see Lou *et al.*, 2018; Reeve, Chapter 2 of this volume). The literature offers insights into the understanding of the complex nature of OCLL through the integration of the SDT framework. To this end, we combined Benson's (2011a) pedagogic continuum and the SDT continuum of motivation to explore language learners' OCLL practices supported with digital tools and the use of the internet. In our model, we adopted Benson's three pedagogical dimensions to provide data about students' learning practices and utilised SDT to allow us to delve deeply into the extent to which online OCLL practices with technology nurture students' inner motivational resources for volitionally engaging in LL beyond the classroom.

The Study

As a part of an ongoing longitudinal project, this study adopted a qualitative approach for exploring autonomous language learners' OCLL experience with technology in a Turkish EFL context. It aimed to investigate how OCLL with technology fulfils language learners' basic psychological needs and how it motivates them to study language beyond the classroom.

First, we chose study participants who autonomously engaged with technology for LL purposes and communicated their intention to participate in the subsequent data collection steps. We specifically selected this group because they typically take more initiative in learning beyond the classroom and exhibit more connection to online practices in English. Participant selection and data collection steps are presented in Figure 3.2 and are described in detail in Sections 1 and 2.

Section 1: Participant Recruitment

Survey application

The participants were recruited using a cross-sectional survey design. 110 EFL learners majoring in teaching English in a Turkish university completed a survey form including two 5-point Likert scales ranging

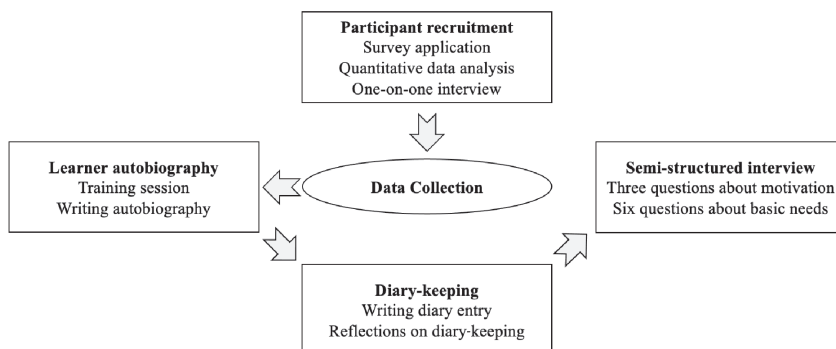


Figure 3.2 Participant recruitment and data collection

from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The first scale is a slightly adapted version of an 8-item learner autonomy scale (e.g. I set up my own language learning goals.) developed by Nakata (2011). The second is an 11-item out-of-class technology experience scale (e.g. I use digital tools outside the classroom, mainly to use the language to go after personal interest) developed by Lai *et al.* (2018).

Quantitative data analysis

To recruit language learners who take more responsibility and use technology for their own learning beyond the classroom, we analysed the quantitative survey data by setting criteria for the learners (i.e. criteria: autonomy $\geq M = 4.00$; out-of-class technology $\geq M = 4.00$ and indicating a willingness to contribute to the research). We invited the language learners who felt more autonomous in learning, who reported high usage of digital tools for LL beyond the classroom and who expressed an interest in participating in the subsequent parts of the research by providing their contact details in the survey form, to examine their drive to learn a language beyond the classroom. Out of 41 volunteer students who were willing to participate in the study, 17 met the criteria.

Interview

We conducted one-on-one interview sessions with the invited volunteer students once to decide whether the participants showed sufficient autonomous learning characteristics and out-of-class technology engagement for learning English. We asked questions to confirm their previously reported responses to the survey items and informed the participants about the following steps of the study and

the length of the project. At this stage, two students changed their minds about contributing to the research as they thought it might take too much time. Two additional students did not convincingly meet the criteria, as they were not engaged with using digital tools beyond the classroom as much as they had previously reported in the quantitative survey application.

At that point, we eliminated the 4 students and decided on 13 study participants. We subsequently created a WhatsApp group to interact with the participants and to organise group and personal meetings. We met with the students several times during the 4-month process, to discuss the study steps, motivate them for the following steps, and collect the data. The students participated in multiple data collection procedures (i.e. autobiography writing, diary-keeping and interview) to delve deeply into how their online OCLL context nurtures their psychological needs and engenders autonomous motivation. Throughout the study, we kept field notes and recorded and documented some of the meetings. The demographic characteristics of the study sample and the data type details are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Demographic characteristics of the qualitative sample and data types

Participant	Demographics				Data types		
	Age	Gender	Year of the study	Perceived proficiency	Biography [1]	Diary [2]	Interview [3]
Elif	18	F	Prep. year	B1–B2	✓	✓	✓
Ebru	18	F	1st year	B1–B2	✓	✓	✓
Ali	18	M	1st year	B1–B2	✓	✓	✓
Esra	19	F	1st year	B1–B2	✓	✓	–
Fatma	19	F	1st year	B1–B2	✓	✓	✓
Ahmet	19	M	1st year	B1–B2	✓	✓	✓
Fatih	19	M	1st year	B2–C1	✓	✓	–
Merve	20	F	1st year	B1–B2	✓	✓	✓
Tuba	21	F	1st year	B1–B2	✓	✓	✓
Mehmet	21	M	1st year	B1–B2	✓	✓	✓
Zeynep	23	F	1st year	B1–B2	✓	✓	✓
Mustafa	23	M	1st year	B1–B2	✓	✓	–
Yusuf	26	M	1st year	B2–C1	✓	✓	–

Notes: Pseudonyms have been used to retain the anonymity of the participants. The names were determined based on the most common names with English letters in Turkey.

F = Female, M = Male. Prep. year indicates intensive English language education up to 20 hours weekly throughout an academic year; 1st year indicates 8-hour English language courses and up to 13 hours field courses in Turkish weekly throughout an academic year. Perceived English proficiency level is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001): A2 = Elementary, B1 = Intermediate, B2 = Upper Intermediate, C1 = Advanced.

Section 2: Data Collection

Learner autobiography

As the first step of the data collection, we conducted a 15-minute training session on how to write LL autobiographies with all the participants. We consequently provided sample biographies and a guide with eleven prompts for constructing their autobiographies (e.g. Is there anybody/notable event that influenced your decision to learn English? If yes, how or what?). In this training session, we also answered their questions about autobiographical writing. Later, we asked the participants to write their learning autobiographies and return them within one week. The participants freely submitted their LL histories and narrated some critical milestones such as high school years and the university entrance process. After the initial screening of the learner autobiographies, some individual open-ended interview sessions were conducted to inquire further into some critical points from the data.

Diary-keeping

We invited all the participants to track their daily LL by keeping an online diary to be completed at least once a week for three months. In the diary-keeping practice, the participants were asked to evaluate their OCLL experience with digital tools and to provide details on whether the experience related to purposive activities (i.e. consciously using English for improving specific language skills, such as watching a YouTube video for language learning) or non-purposive activities (i.e. using English because the activity only requires such use for interacting with English speaking friends on social media for recreation) and which websites they visited. As some of the participants showed little interest in the diary-keeping practice, we introduced a monetary incentive in the sixth week and informed them that the three students who had the most diary entries would be given monetary gift cards (up to 150 Turkish Liras). The participants wrote between 4 and 30 diary entries over the three-month period and reflected upon their diary-keeping practices at the end of the procedure. The students who had produced the most diary entries were rewarded in the group meeting.

Semi-structured interview questions

For the final step of the data collection, we met with the participants again and asked learners to answer nine open-ended written interview questions regarding their motivation to study English beyond the classroom and their basic psychological needs. Three of the questions were about their motivation to study language (e.g. Why do you study English beyond the classroom?) and six questions were about basic

psychological needs (e.g. When you think about your language learning experience beyond the classroom, what can you say about feeling efficacious in learning English?). At this point, nine participants provided the data.

Their learning history and diaries helped us to determine their learning types based on Benson's (2011a) pedagogical framework, which assisted us in examining their OCLL experience with technology. The written interview questions helped us conceptualise the reciprocal relationship between OCLL and motivation.

Data Analysis

We analysed the data through a deductive-dominant qualitative content analysis approach (Elo *et al.*, 2014). This approach is welcomed 'when some views, previous research findings, theories, or conceptual frameworks regarding the phenomenon of interest exist' in the literature (Armat *et al.*, 2018: 220). In this approach, the researchers analyse the data based on the pre-existing categories of the adopted theory or conceptual framework, and it is also probable to add some new categories inductively if some coded segments of the data do not fit the original categorisation (Armat *et al.*, 2018; Elo *et al.*, 2014).

Typical content analysis has three main phases – preparation, organisation and reporting – and researchers should ensure trustworthiness in each phase by asking various questions (Elo *et al.*, 2014). To enhance trustworthiness in the preparation phase, we first grounded the study in earlier OCLL research and modern motivation theory in the literature. We also carefully selected the study sample and collected the data from multiple sources, namely learning autobiographies, diary-keeping practices, and open-ended interview questions. This data triangulation allowed us to corroborate and converge the evidence. To ensure trustworthiness in the organisation phase, we initially determined the code definitions and then worked together and adopted a double-coding process by first independently assigning pre-determined codes to the data and finalising the process with mutual consensus to assess the quality of the main categories (Schreier, 2012). Finally, for trustworthiness in the reporting of the findings, we used an illustration and supported the categorical findings with sample student excerpts.

In the content analysis, we first used Benson's (2011a) pedagogical framework (i.e. self-instructed, self-directed naturalistic and naturalistic) for grouping the participants, to better conceptualise the differences between the learners' experiences beyond the classroom. Then, we divided the participants into the three types according to their learning experiences beyond the classroom. Identifying learners' OCLL types was difficult as they engaged extensively in LL in various ways beyond the classroom. They were also moving back and forth between the two

ends of the continuum, from self-instructed to naturalistic learning, as indicated in their learning histories, diaries and interviews. However, both researchers' consensus and the multiple data sources helped to assign the learners into three groups (i.e. self-instructed, self-directed naturalistic and naturalistic). Then, the participants' underlying motivation for OCLL engagement with digital tools was investigated with SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). We coded all the data with reference to three innate basic psychological needs and motivational orientations. Then, we provided the characteristics of each learning type group in connection with SDT and supported the findings with participant excerpts. To distinguish the participants, we anonymised students with pseudonyms and used numbers to show the data type (1 = Autobiography, 2 = Diary, 3 = Interview).

Findings

The findings indicated that students utilise a wide variety of technological tools for studying language outside the classroom. They play online games (i.e. requiring synchronous communication and decision-making) extensively, and surf on social media (e.g. Reddit, YouTube, Instagram). They also use various smartphone applications for LL (e.g. VOA, Duolingo) and visit online dictionaries (e.g. Oxford Learners' Dictionary, Tureng). Moreover, they interact with foreigners via chat applications (e.g. Cambly, WhatsApp). The analysis revealed that the same tools might be used for various purposes to unlock language competence. Learners' psychological needs play a significant role as motivational determinants of their intention to study the language and to use particular tools beyond the classroom. The learners differed in OCLL practices with technology and in motivational orientations.

In this study, we grouped language learners into three learning types based on the pre-existing categories of Benson's (2011a) pedagogical framework. There were four self-instructed learners, six self-directed naturalistic learners and three naturalistic learners. The details regarding each group of learners' characteristics are provided in the following section.

Self-instructed learning

Self-instructed learning is the most instruction-oriented type of learning beyond the classroom. Four participants exhibited self-instructed learning characteristics and used specially designed language materials and LL applications or websites. For example, Merve regularly used an application and perceived that tool to be a tutor. As she stated, *'Elevate monitors my learning progress and provides me with feedback.'*

Hence, I feel like Elevate is my teacher' [3]. Concerning their digital practices beyond the classroom, these learners watched movies, listened to music, talked to native English friends, or read English books, but their ultimate goal was to sharpen their language skills, not to attain enjoyment or pursue recreation. As Ebru explained, 'I searched for English series on the internet to improve my English proficiency and started watching series such series "Friends" and "How I met your mother"... I was imitating the actors, and that [practice] significantly helped me to improve my speaking and pronunciation. Watching those series also helped me to improve my listening skills' [1].

When we asked the participants about the factors that drove them to study beyond the classroom with technological tools, they explained that they intended to learn and discover more about what they had learnt in the class. To compensate for the drawbacks of in-class education and enhance their competence, the participants sought opportunities for self-improvement. Although these students had varied motivational orientations during their learning journey, less self-determined orientations constituted a significant determinant for their motivation to study. They preferred to improve their language skills to bring financial benefits to their teaching profession in the future and to pursue an academic career in their major, taking praise from their teachers or their parents. Although their origin of focus for activities beyond the classroom was based on more external reasons, the autobiographies of these learners revealed that they learnt from their failures; when they achieved a goal, they became more motivated to study and began to internalise the behaviours. For instance, in Zeynep's case, she entered university at her second attempt and spent two years in English preparatory classes. She initially studied English in order not to shame her family; later, her main motivation was to pass the preparatory class. When she became more aware of her mistakes and the weaknesses in her language learning, she became more interested in English and became more successful in English classes. She stated, *'The more I succeeded, the more my motivation increased. In my second year of the prep class, I was literally a true lover of English' [1].* She further commented in her interview reply, *'Everything, every topic that I learned beyond the classroom is an extra profit [language development]'.*

The results also indicated that self-instruction oriented students sought opportunities for competence and autonomy needs, as these requirements were not quite satisfied in the classrooms. Ebru, who had a strong volition to satisfy her competence, explained, *'Thanks to the small successes I have achieved while learning, my enthusiasm for working has increased. Gaining an understanding of most of the concepts I have encountered in YouTube videos about language learning is another factor that motivates me' [3].* Emphasising the fulfilment of autonomy needs, Zeynep noted, *'In class, we always use the materials*

the teacher has chosen for us, and we are together with the same people all the time. What we [students] learn is always dependent on a particular material, a certain application, or the teacher' [3]. Zeynep later expressed her desire to have more choices in her learning and she underscored the plentiful opportunities provided by technological tools. Complaining about controlling teacher behaviours in the class, Merve said, *'I have to use the applications my teacher wants me to use; unfortunately, I do not have any other choice' [3].* She added that outside the classroom, *'I can choose the learning applications on my own and either keep or quit using them. It is my decision' [3].* The study participants did not state anything specific regarding the need for relatedness in OCLL settings, as they were content with their in-class learning practices that allowed them to practice the language with their classmates.

Self-directed naturalistic learning

Self-directed naturalistic learning refers to a more authentic type of learning beyond the classroom, exhibiting both self-instruction and naturalistic learning behaviours. Six participants demonstrated self-directed naturalistic learning characteristics. The learners in this group showed a more multifaceted composition than the ones in the other groups. This aspect confirmed the complexity of understanding OCLL. The learning activity was not straightforward: instead, it displayed fluctuation, evolving into a more naturalist type of learning. Although an action starts with an instruction-oriented purpose, it might easily move towards a naturalistic form for enjoyment and vice versa. Some of the learners were more focused on instruction-based activities, whereas the others engaged in more naturalistic learning. By and large, these latter students aimed at creating a naturalistic learning environment with the intention of bridging learning and enjoyment in a single activity beyond the classroom. For instance, being aware of the pedagogical potentials of games, Esra said, *'I used to play "The Witcher Wild Hunt 3" [a story-driven open-world game] in Turkish. I am crazy about this game, and I decided to start it over in English to improve my language skills while playing' [2].* Similarly, Ali used games for his language development, stating, *'I [later] switched to online games. I realised that the games cannot be played without communication [in English], and I started communicating in games and found [the practice] useful. Otherwise, I would not have friends with whom to talk in English in class or elsewhere' [1].*

These students engaged with digital tools for various reasons, and they had a more internalised regulation towards learning English. OCLL with technology was a tool for attaining their goals. The fact that English is a lingua franca today encouraged them to study the language

harder in order to become a well-equipped English-speaking teacher or for indulging their passions. On this issue, Ali said, *'I study English as I love it, and I have a passion for studying. Online tools ease my language learning process and [enable me to] access the resources that I want'* [3]. In acknowledging the digital world as a context that provides more room for manoeuvre, Ahmet shared, *'I want to be a teacher who speaks like a native speaker'* [3].

These students sought more opportunities to satisfy their competence and autonomy needs, which were insufficiently fulfilled in the class. The need for competence was more predominant among those students who were close to a self-instructed learning point, whereas the need for autonomy was more apparent for students who were close to a naturalistic learning end. Emphasising the joy of studying English with the online tools and taking decisions in her learning, Elif said, *'I decide the applications that will be most useful to myself, and I believe that I use them efficiently. When I realise that a tool is worthless, I quit using it.... I am not restricted to a single resource [teacher], as I can learn new things from various resources'* [3]. Furthermore, relatedness was much more apparent when the learners fully engaged in the activity and reached a particular stage in their language development. They might feel connected to the people and things on the internet, to websites, or to applications that they frequently use. Ahmet, who spent most of his time watching YouTube videos and using apps for speaking to native speakers, commented, *'The YouTube context is my best friend, as it is always with me; I feel extremely happy there'* [3]. Making an analogy of someone who loses himself while reading a novel and reads as if the characters therein are living, Fatma stated, *'Being a member of the audience of a news page or an article website is amazing, which makes me feel good'* [3]. These learners considered in-class learning limited in choice or inadequately appealing to their interests, as self-instructed learners do. However, they were aware of the difficulties teachers would face in finding appropriate material or an activity that fits all students' needs and giving individual feedback to all the students during class hours.

Naturalistic learning

Naturalistic learning, as the most self-oriented type of learning, involves engaging in activities simply for enjoyment and not out of a clear intention to study the language. Learning naturally occurs as the learners are actively using the language in their authentic contexts. Three participants fit into this category. When we asked these students to keep learning diaries, they only wrote a few entries and abandoned the diary-keeping task, as they do not use digital tools for LL much. In one of his diary entries Yusuf wrote 'None' as a reply to the questions about the purpose activities (i.e. What activities did I use to improve specific

language skills? What is new I learned today?). They played games for pleasure, read the news to keep up with the recent events or they used social media in English. As Yusuf acknowledged, *'It is hard for me to track my learning progress because I use the language to socialise. I do not do anything to improve my English in a specific aspect'* [2]. Their autobiographies indicated that technology triggered their interest in learning that particular language because the language they are exposed to on the internet is mostly English. Thus, their learning story emerged from a requirement and genuine enjoyment. For example, Fatih recalled, *'My exposure to English arose during the time that I started gaming. I have always been curious about games; the fact that 99% of games that I play are in English sparked my interest in learning and understanding the language'* [1].

These participants engaged in OCLL activities for inherent interest and enjoyment. We can characterise them as intrinsically motivated and situated at the most favourable point along the motivation continuum. For example, Mustafa described his feelings towards English learning as follows: *'With the pleasure of speaking another language, I thoroughly got into this business'* [1]. Fatih also explained how English had become a major part of his life: *'If I lost my memory, I bet that I would forget Turkish [mother tongue] first. I came to the way I am [in this manner]: first, [my English language learning journey] started with a small spark of curiosity; it later [figuratively] grew into a fire that continues to burn'* [1]. Yusuf replied to the question about the non-purposive activities as, *'I have watched a travel blog on YouTube named "Rick Steves' Europe". I like to watch travel videos and the bloggers. Rick Steves, has a very nice accent and voice to listen'* [2].

Relatedness was evidently a more dominant need in these learners than the other two needs were, as they already felt autonomous in their actions and competent in their virtual contexts. Yusuf primarily spent time on social media with native speaker friends, whereas Fatih and Mustafa had a gamer community with which to interact, and their online communities helped them to fulfil their need for relatedness. Mustafa wrote in his autobiography: *'I made some English friends [while playing] games and had to use English to communicate with them.... I started to play PUBG [Player Unknown's Battlegrounds, an online multiplayer survival game] in 2018, and it was totally a team game. I had to be in synchronous contact with my friends in English during the game'*. Personal interviews and autobiographies indicated that these students do not tend to complain about their in-class education. The main problem for them was their classmates' low proficiency in their practice of English. These naturalistic learners felt bored sometimes in the class, as they did not have sufficient opportunity to practice the language with someone else at the same level of language proficiency.

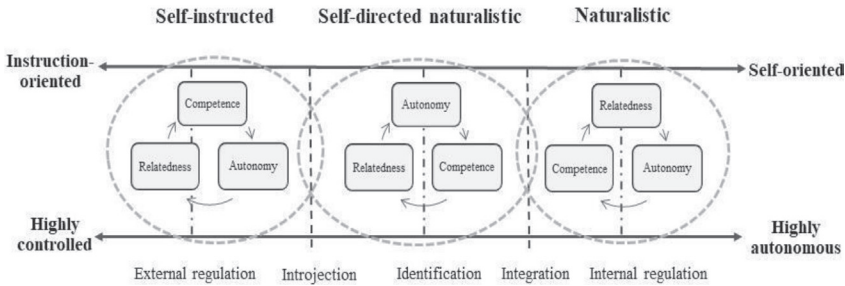


Figure 3.3 Modelling the online OCLL within the SDT framework

Based on these study findings, we developed a preliminary conceptual model integrating Benson's (2011a) pedagogical framework and SDT's motivation continuum. The model is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

According to this model, students' online OCLL practices in general extended over a continuum from the instruction-oriented to self-oriented in parallel to the SDT continuum of motivation from highly controlled to highly autonomous regulation. Although these OCLL types have distinctive characteristics in terms of the origin of behaviours – whether it is external or intrinsic motivation – the layers between the types can often overlap with one another. A learner in one group might display the fundamental characteristics of the next type's characteristics. For example, a naturalistic learner might engage in online practices for self-instruction or act in a self-directed naturalistic way to simultaneously attain short-term goals. In conjunction with SDT (see Ryan & Deci, 2020), a naturalistic learner can be both intrinsically motivated and identified, or a self-instructed learner might simultaneously show external and introjected regulation for some learning actions in the model. However, the basic psychological needs collaboratively work to constantly internalise the learners' motivation for each kind of orientation.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter, we investigated the nature of autonomous language learners' OCLL practices in their personal online learning environments, as well as their inner motivational resources on the basis of the SDT model with a qualitative research focus. Based on multiple sources of data from 13 Turkish EFL learners, we derived conclusions on autonomously engaged learners' real-life online practices beyond the classroom. Our findings reaffirmed that these learners take more initiative in their learning (compared with learners who are not autonomously engaged learners) through the use of a wide variety of online tools and spend their recreation time by interacting with their

online target language community. This finding is consistent with various studies that emphasise how skilful today's digital learners are at creating personal online LL settings (e.g. Chik, 2014, 2018; Dincer, 2020; Haidairi *et al.*, 2019; Kocatepe, 2017; Lai *et al.*, 2018).

Through a deductive content analysis approach in this study, we also inferred a preliminary conceptual model of OCLL with technology, based on Benson's pedagogical continuum and the SDT continuum of motivation. Although the students' OCLL initiatives with technology were categorised into three separate dimensions, from a strong intention of learning (i.e. self-instructed) to a hypothetical state (i.e. naturalistic), along a pedagogic continuum, their behavioural motivations ranged from external orientations to more internal ones, along the SDT continuum. Our investigation of the practices of each group revealed that the OCLL contexts supported the students' autonomous motivation and helped them to become more self-determined in their learning. We also deduced that satisfaction of a specific psychological need might seem more important in each group in practising language beyond the classroom within this interactive and intertwined OCLL model.

The learners who practised language beyond the classroom for self-instruction intended to excel at LL and perceived the OCLL online resources as personal tutors providing instant feedback and individual suggestions. In addition, their OCLL practices played a complementary and facilitative role with regard to their in-class learning. This point emphasises the complementary role of online LL practices in compensating for the limitation of in-class practices (Dincer, 2020; Lai *et al.*, 2016; Richards, 2015). These learners associated LL with tangible rewards and perceived the OCLL context with technology as a tool for achieving their goals. Although the learners' motivational orientations varied from activity to activity, their main motive to study beyond the classroom using digital tools was mostly externally regulated despite their awareness of the long-term benefits of online engagement (Fandiño *et al.*, 2019). This result also partially corroborated the findings of Kocatepe (2017), who focused on activity-based motivation among learning types. Kocatepe argued that some learning activities such as watching TV and movies are intrinsically enjoyable, whereas others such as studying curriculum-oriented materials beyond the classroom are associated with external regulation. The findings of our study also indicated that self-instructed learners tend to have lower proficiency levels and seek online LL opportunities largely to fulfil their competence and autonomy needs beyond the classroom.

Most of the study participants fit into a self-directed naturalistic learning group. Their learning types were still under construction, evolving from one with an instruction focus toward a naturalistic orientation. They had somewhat internal reasons for learning a language and a more internalised, autonomous motivation. Consistent with

previous research (Kocatepe, 2017), these students pursued their interests in online settings to attain a personally relevant goal or obtain learning gains, as they recognised that their engagement would naturally result in language development. Through this evolutionary process, online OCLL contexts enabled the students to fulfil their competence and autonomy needs, thus facilitating more intrinsic regulation and generating positive outcomes. Therefore, their online LL experience within a need-supportive context helped them to promote autonomous behaviours and devote increased efforts to learn a language (Alm, 2006). In contrast to the instruction-oriented students, these students were more aware of the drawbacks of in-class education, and they did not blame their teachers for these issues. They felt joyous in the LL process and might perceive a sense of belonging to a virtual tool or website, even if this interaction was one-directional.

The naturalistic learners used language as a tool for interacting and communicating with their online community. Although these learners did not intend to study language for their online OCLL practices, they were aware that these unintentional authentic language practices help them to implicitly learn daily expressions and words, which they were not able to do in an in-class setting. This was found to be true in earlier research also (Kocatepe, 2017). Naturalistic learners have an intrinsic motive to study language, and they are genuine lovers of language itself. Although they do not engage in these practices for language development, they are aware of the pedagogical potential of their online practices and their interaction with their online community (Chik, 2014). Consistent with relevant research (Akbari *et al.*, 2015), naturalistic learning environments supported inner motivational resources to practice language and instilled a connectedness to the language community. This finding emphasises the potential of online social networks to fulfil the relatedness need of learners and to sustain their intrinsic motivation (Akbari *et al.*, 2015; Fathali & Okoda, 2017). As these learners had already reached a certain level of proficiency, their peer groups in the class did not adequately meet their expectations in terms of language practice. Thus, the lack of relatedness fulfilment in the class might direct these learners to join virtual settings and create an online language community to satisfy this need beyond the classroom.

Parallel to various SDT studies, the results of this research indicate that the more students take responsibility for their OCLL experiences with technology, the more they perceive themselves as competent, autonomous and connected with others in online OCLL contexts, and are therefore more autonomously motivated to study and learn the language. Based on the study findings and relevant SDT research outlining need-supportive practices (for reviews, see Alm, 2006; Davis & Bowles, 2018; Dincer *et al.*, 2019; Noels *et al.*, 2019), we offer

the following practical recommendations for language teachers on supporting students' basic psychological needs:

- Open a place in the curricula for students' interests and provide them with more choices and opportunities to indulge their curiosity in language, both inside and outside the classroom.
- Involve students with personally relevant tasks that extend beyond the classroom, matching their language proficiency and learning needs, and provide constructive feedback on those OCLL practices.
- Encourage students to create or join a virtual language learning community and guide them to practice authentic language in cooperation with OCLL in a technology context.

In brief, as today's learners have been born in the internet-and-technology era, we as language teachers and educators need to be more familiar with digital tools and remain up to date to guide learners on the best uses of technology for LL purposes. By adopting more autonomy-supportive teacher behaviours (for reviews, see Dincer *et al.*, 2019; Işık & Balçıklanlı, 2020; Reeve, 2016), we might adapt our classrooms and modify our instruction to extend students' LL beyond the classroom successfully. In addition to well-known autonomy-supportive in-class teaching practices, we should open more space to technology-enhanced language practices, such as flipped learning, and try to undertake optimal digital practices to sustain the learners' autonomous functioning for optimum learning.

Although the study helped us to examine thoroughly how an online OCLL experience supports students' basic needs beyond the classroom and provided language teachers with recommendations for bridging in-class and OCLL, the study has limitations, like any research study. First, the study is limited in terms of its data collection strategy, especially the interview process. Focus-group interviews and face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the participants might add much for elucidating learners' inner motivational resources. Second, although the study had a small number of participants and limited data, we have suggested a preliminary conceptual model of OCLL with technology. One should be cautious in generalising the rudimentary OCLL model suggested in this study. This OCLL model needs to be consolidated with further research to better understand the relationships between OCLL contexts and inner motivational resources.

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