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STICKING WITH SPANISH: REASONS FOR STUDY AND MOTIVATION MAINTENANCE IN ADULT BEGINNER DISTANCE LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Abstract

This paper examines the reasons for study of adult beginner distance learners of Spanish and the relationships between those reasons and motivation maintenance. A survey of 563 Open University UK students found motivational orientations distinct from those of young people in earlier studies. Adult learners who maintained their motivation also demonstrated a greater number of reasons for study. Their motivation embraced intrinsic and extrinsic, integrative and instrumental orientations, short-term and long-term ambitions, and an L2 self both ideal and realistically attainable. During their course module they focused more consistently than others on the language skills they had targeted, and expressed increased enjoyment of the learning experience. This study suggests that achieving 'softer' short-term goals encourages persistence towards longer-term goals which reflect the ideal L2 self.

Keywords: motivation, reasons for study, motivational orientations, beginner language learners, adult learners

Introduction

While motivation is a complex, dynamic and crucial factor in all foreign language learning, relatively few studies have addressed specifically the motivation of adult part-time learners (Attwood 2010) and, although distance language learning is now more researched than in the past (for a recent review see Coleman and Furnborough 2010), no large-scale quantitative surveys of adult beginner distance language learners have previously been conducted. Lanvers (2013) has shown that, in the UK at least, the motivations of distance language learners are very close to those of conventional campus-based students as regards the ideal L2 self and the intellectual satisfaction and increased fluency arising from language learning, but that, despite higher prior contact with the target language and culture, distance language learners are less confident in their own capacities.

This paper focuses on learners' motivational orientations derived from their reasons for study, and their relationship to indicators of motivation, including persistence and skills targeted, and motivation maintenance. Motivational orientations, defined as 'classes of reasons for learning the L2' (Noels 2001: 43), have been extensively documented, for example by Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1994), MacIntyre et al. (2001), and Noels (2003). A study of high school students in unilingual and multilingual contexts by Clément and Kruidenier (1983) postulated four orientations - knowledge (i.e. about the target language group), travel, friendship and job related/instrumental. Noels et al. regard these orientations as 'common to all groups of learners' (2000: 59). Our data suggest, however, that motivational orientations of adult distance learners differ in certain key respects from those of young learners in university and high school studies.

Theoretical background

Three distinct motivation constructs inform this paper: firstly the socio-educational construct developed by Gardner and his colleagues, secondly self-determination theory, and most recently the concept of the L2 self-image developed by Dörnyei.

Integrative and to a lesser extent instrumental orientations constitute a widely debated feature of Gardner's socio-educational construct (1985). As MacIntyre et al. comment (2001: 373): "Although these two concepts have been very useful in identifying L2 learners' orientations, they are extremely broad, are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and may not fully account for ... an individual's motivation." By contrast self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1985; 1991 *inter alia*) focuses on a spectrum of behaviour from intrinsic to differing degrees of extrinsic motivation. Whilst intrinsic motivation is obviously powerful – "people engage in activities that interest them, and they do so freely, with a full sense of volition, and without the necessity of rewards or constraints" (Deci et al. 1991: 328) – this theory also identifies a more self-determined form of extrinsic motivation, classed as *integrated regulation*, in which "the regulatory process is fully integrated with the individual's coherent sense of self ... assimilated with the individual's other values, needs and identities" (Deci et al. 1991: 330). Following Noels' exploration of relationships between intrinsic/extrinsic motivation within self-determination theory and integrative orientation (Noels et al. 2000; Noels 2001), she suggested the potential for integrating these constructs (2003).

More recently the focus of motivation studies has shifted to a concept of the *L2 self-image*, particularly applicable to English as a global language contexts where opportunities for integrating into L2 communities may be limited or non-existent (Dörnyei 2009: 10). However, it is widely acknowledged that this new focus represents a reformulation rather than rejection of Gardner (see the contributions of Dörnyei himself, MacIntyre et al. and Noels, in Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009). Dörnyei (2009: 30) points out the relationship between on the one hand the *ideal L2 self* and integrative motivation, and on the other between the *ought-to L2 self* and extrinsic motivation.

The notion of different possible selves also takes account of the range of disparate reasons within any individual learner which support their motivation (MacIntyre et al. 2009: 46). However, as Gardner (2005: 4) has pointed out, students' reasons for studying a language, or their motivational orientations, do not *in themselves* constitute motivation. He has defined motivated learners as ones who "express effort in attaining the goal, ... show persistence, and ... attend to the tasks necessary to achieve (their) goals. They have a strong desire to attain their goal, and they enjoy the activities necessary to achieve their goal." This paper takes account of Gardner's stricture.

To sum up, the findings presented in this paper suggest that all three constructs referred to above remain relevant to the study of motivation maintenance in adult students of Spanish at a distance.

Context of the study

The subjects of this study were students on a beginner level distance learning course module in Spanish (*Portales*) offered by the Open University (OU UK). It was 11 months in duration, and led to credits either for a specific qualification in the language or towards a degree. *Portales* is designed to offer language skills and a feel for Hispanic cultures to students who have no previous knowledge of Spanish. Whilst the primary focus is on speaking and understanding simple Spanish in

everyday situations, competence in all four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) is assessed through regular assignments and a final exam.

The profile of the first cohort of over 1,000 students on the Spanish course *Portales* was detailed in Coleman and Furnborough (2010), and can be summarised as follows. While the gender of the group studied matched that of students at conventional universities, distance students were older (average mid-forties) and better educated, with two out of five already holding a degree. Most had a little previous experience of learning Spanish and all had visited a Spanish-speaking country. Prior learning, especially independent (though not necessarily distance) study, was a predictor of success, as was a bi- or multilingual background, but high interactive contact with Spanish speakers was not. Alternative modes of tuition were offered, either face-to-face or entirely online, but our results (Coleman and Furnborough op. cit.) showed that students opting for either mode can achieve the same language learning outcomes, so this distinction is not included in the present study, which examines their reasons for study and implications for motivation maintenance.

Aims of the study

In order to identify why some students show greater motivation maintenance than others and possible predictors of their persistence, the research questions addressed are as follows:

1. What are the reasons for study of this group of learners?
2. How do these reasons conform to different motivational orientations?
3. How do their reasons for study differ from those of other learners?
4. How do their reasons for study relate to the language skills that they target?
5. How do they perceive progression towards their main goal?
6. To what extent do they perceive the learning process to be enjoyable?

Method

Quantitative analysis / Questionnaires

This study presents analysis of quantitative data obtained through questionnaires at two different points in the learners' experience: just before they embarked on the course (Appendix 1) and at its end (Appendix 2), once study and assessment had been completed but before results were known. The questionnaires reflected our understanding of motivation literature and addressed respondents' reasons for study, target skills, perceived progress and enjoyment. They also drew on items related to reasons for studying a language that had already been used successfully with language students on higher level courses at the OU (Hurd 2002; Schrafnagl and Fage 1998).

Our pilot version of the pre-course questionnaire was trialled with 12 adults who reflected the population of potential beginner language students to check that all items were clear and unambiguous and the questionnaire was of a suitable length. Responses, and in some cases oral feedback, from some of the participants led to minor adjustments to the final version. The post-course questionnaire mirrored very closely the pre-course version, and so did not require advanced piloting.

Ethical clearance was obtained. Student data, course registration and assessment scores were also used, in accordance with the University's strict ethical guidelines.

Responses to the postal questionnaires were scanned into an SPSS database for statistical analysis. The pre-course questionnaire was completed by 1345 students (response rate 68.6%), the post-course by 724 students. Excluding special cases left 563 students who had completed both questionnaires and for whom full course records were available. This latter group forms the basis of our study.

Analysis by outcome groups

In all independent learning contexts, and especially in distance learning where students are physically isolated from one another, attrition is higher than for conventional residential universities. At the OU, as in many other distance teaching and adult education institutions, recruitment was not to a complete degree course, but to a single course. Students' motivation and determination to succeed could therefore be measured in practice not only against completion of the one-year module, including coursework and end-of-year spoken and written examinations ('complete') and pass in the overall assessment ('pass'), but also, crucially, registration for the next-level course ('continue') as a measure of persistence.

On this basis, respondents were allocated to one of four 'outcome groups' (see Table 1). The Non-Complete-and-Fail (NF) group comprises 35 individuals. Of the 528 who completed, 23 failed – the Complete-and-Fail (CF) group. Of the 505 who passed, 293 registered immediately for the Intermediate Spanish course, and make up the Complete-and-Continue (CC) group. The other 212 are designated Complete-and-Pass (CP).

Table 1: Outcome groups

		Completion	Success	Continuation	N
CC	Complete-and-Continue	√	√	√	293
CP	Complete-and-Pass	√	√	X	212
CF	Complete-and-Fail	√	X	-	23
NF	Non-Complete-and-Fail	X	X	-	35

In the analysis which follows, descriptive statistics are followed by correlational and factor analyses.

Results and discussion

Reasons for study

Most important reason for studying Spanish

Table 2: Labels for reasons for study

Questionnaire item	Short label
to gain credits towards a qualification in Spanish (Certificate or Diploma)	S-credits
for pleasure or interest	Enjoying
to assist me in my present or future work	Working
to be able to communicate with Spanish-speaking friends or family	Friends
to be able to communicate when visiting a Spanish-speaking country	Communicating
to be able to live in a Spanish-speaking country	Residing

to understand TV, radio, films or songs in Spanish	Viewing
to read newspapers, magazines or books in Spanish	Reading
to help my children or grandchildren learn Spanish	Tutoring
as an intellectual challenge	Thinking
as part of a wider programme (for instance, to obtain a degree)	P-credits
other (please specify)	Other

The reason that drives the largest number of students at the beginning of the course module (Figure 1) is the desire to speak Spanish when they are visiting a Spanish-speaking country (*Communicating*). Other major reasons are pleasure or interest (*Enjoying*), and obtaining a Spanish qualification (*S-credits*). Three main drives may thus be perceived: communicative, intrinsic and extrinsic.

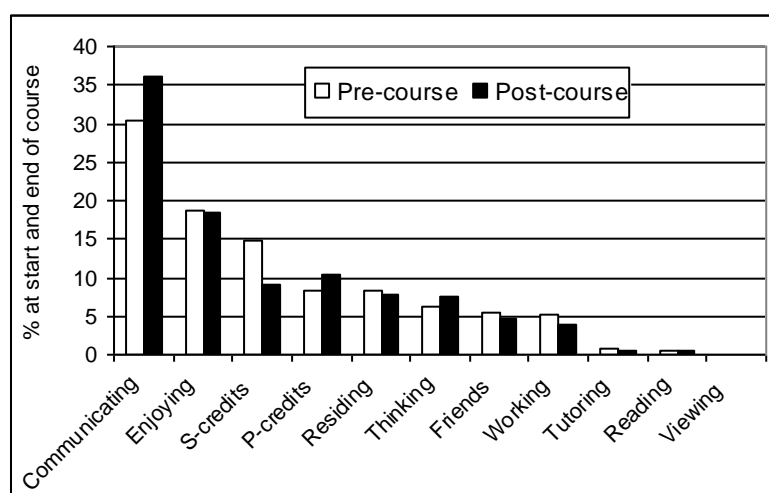


Figure 1. Most important reason for studying Spanish at the start and end of the course (percentages).

By the end of the course *Communicating* is the most important reason for a still larger proportion of students. *P-credits* has become the main reason for about a tenth of the group, and overtaken *S-credits*. But otherwise the rank order is unchanged.

Range of reasons for studying Spanish

A fuller picture emerges from considering all the reasons, rather than just the most important, with which learners embarked on studying Spanish, and the changes recorded over the course of those studies (Figure 2).

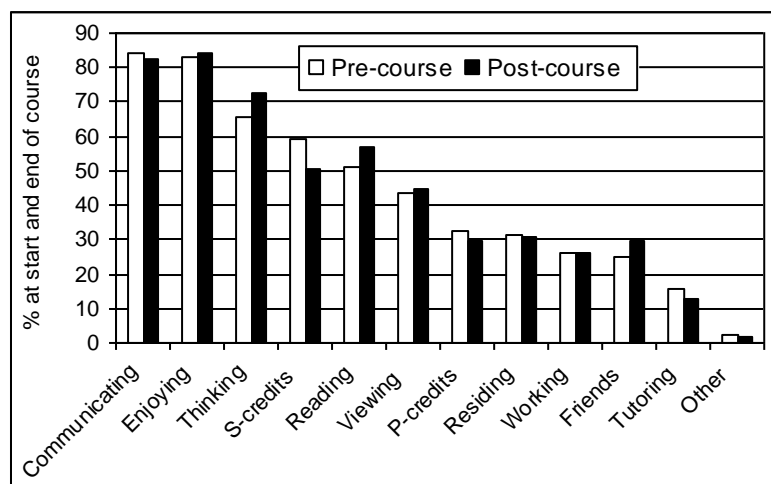


Figure 2. Reasons for studying Spanish (multiple responses possible).

Comparing these figures with the most important reasons (Figure 1), the roles of *Thinking* and *Enjoying* are now more evident, showing these intrinsic motivations, in particular the former, rising in importance by the end of the course. By contrast, some of the apparently more extrinsic ones, in particular *S-credits*, appear to have reduced in importance. What Figure 2 also reveals is the role of understanding audiovisual and especially printed media (*Viewing* and *Reading*) which, without being main reasons, were regarded by many students as an important element in studying Spanish, and increasingly so by the end of the year. The likelihood of these reasons co-occurring will be examined in the factor analysis section for the whole group and for each outcome group.

Number of reasons

An average of 5.2 reasons per respondent (both pre- and post-course) was recorded through the questionnaires, as shown in Figure 3.

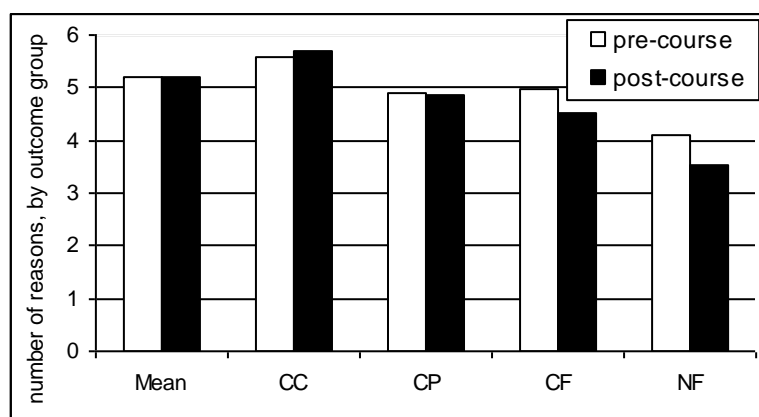


Figure 3. Number of reasons for studying Spanish at the start and end of the course (average per student).

A breakdown of these figures by outcome group reveals that not only does the CC group have the highest number of reasons, but this actually increases slightly during the course; by contrast, it decreases markedly for the two unsuccessful groups and remains virtually unchanged for the other successful group (CP). This suggests that the CC group's persistence may be related to their greater variety of reasons, and

we might hypothesise the higher number of reasons cited as a possible predictor of motivation maintenance.

Motivational orientations

Factor analysis of reasons for studying Spanish

Factor analysis of all these reasons for study, by identifying any underlying relationships between them, can define the motivational orientations of the different outcome groups, identify any changes in those orientations at the end of the course, and consequently assist in establishing whether any are more likely to be linked to motivation maintenance, as measured by successful course completion and continuation to the next level of Spanish.

Factor analysis (principal component analysis, varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation) was applied to the reasons for study of all the students who completed both questionnaires (N=563) and of the four outcome groups. The total variance within these groups is summarised in Table 3. It should be noted that the motivation of the CC group post course is ascribed to five rather than four factors, which will be explained later.

Table 3: Summary table of total variance explained

		All	CC	CP	CF	NF
Pre-course	Number of factors with Eigenvalue >1	4	4	4	4	3
	Cumulative percent	56.661	56.517	56.185	71.904	62.317
Post-course	Number of factors with Eigenvalue >1	4	5	4	4	4
	Cumulative percent	55.014	64.047	55.154	77.159	67.791

Factors identified and implications for motivational orientations

At the start of the course the factor analysis for all students identified four factors which comprise the following combinations of reasons for study (see Table 4):

Factor 1 loads heavily on two variables, *Viewing* and *Reading*, and comprises a desire to understand audiovisual and print media: newspapers, magazines, books; and TV, radio, films, songs. This may signify an interest in current affairs in Spanish-speaking countries, as well as in cultural issues, reflecting both an intrinsic and broadly integrative orientation. Over 40% of learners included both forms of media as part of their range of reasons for study, even though only a very small percentage of students nominated it as their most important reason (Figure 1). Media interest might be defined as a **cultural** orientation.

Factor 2 loads on three variables, combining *Enjoying*, *Thinking* and *Communicating*. This combination represents an intrinsic type of motivation that might be labelled **personal satisfaction/in-country communication**.

Factor 3 links *S-credits* and *P-credits*, which can be termed **credit accumulation**, in association with *Working*. It represents students' desire to obtain recognition and value as a reward for their studies, an extrinsic or instrumental type of motivation.

Factor 4 combines *Helping children or grandchildren to learn Spanish (Tutoring)* and *Communicating with friends or family (Friends)*. While this is the most important

reason for only a small proportion of students (see Figure 1), it enters the equation for more than a quarter of respondents (Figure 2). Such a **family** orientation has certain integrative implications.

At the end of the course (see Table 5), the factor analysis for all respondents (N=563) shows broadly the same four orientations identified at the start of the course, although *Residing*, *Working* and *Communicating* co-occur, with a weaker loading, with the **family** orientation. *Residing* had not formed part of any of the four factors at the beginning of the course.

Moving on from clusters of reasons appearing in the group as a whole to the clusters of reasons shown in each outcome group, the feature that stands out most when analysing the difference between the two successful groups is that for the CC group *Residing* is part of a factor both at the start and at the end of the course. However, for the CP group *Residing* does not figure at the start, and at the end it only has a weak loading within the cultural orientation (See Table 5).

The CC group reveals a fifth factor which combines *Working* with *Residing*. *Working* appears for most respondents to involve the development of predominantly oral/aural skills for non-predictable interactions; whilst this would not necessarily be the case, interviews conducted with a sample of 56 students drawn from the same cohort revealed that respondents were thinking primarily in terms either of working abroad or of dealing face-to-face or by phone with clients. Achievement of the combination of *Working* and *Residing* therefore implies a wider and more active use of the target language than any of the other combinations. This may be called a **life-plan** orientation, an ideal L2 self which appears to combine an integrative as well as an instrumental orientation (as in Kim 2009: 276).

Table 4: Reasons for study: summary of factor analysis pre-course

	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4	
All	Reading	.893	Enjoying	.795	P-credits	.717	Friends	.705
	Viewing	.903	Communicating	.676	Working	.647	Tutoring	.663
			Thinking	.608	S-credits	.574		
CC	Reading	.881	Working	.707	Enjoying	.803	Tutoring	.737
	Viewing	.910	Residing	.650	Communicating	.679	Friends	.722
			P-credits	.594	Thinking	.578		
			S-credits	.531				
CP	Reading	.878	Enjoying	.742	P-credits	.719	Tutoring	.802
	Viewing	.855	Thinking	.677	Working	.679	Friends	.584
			Communicating	.619	S-credits	.570		
CF	Enjoying	.831	Reading	.878	Friends	.779	P-credits	.856
	Communicating	.744	Viewing	.914	Residing	.735	Tutoring	.692
	Working	.594						
	Thinking	.566						
NF	P-credits	.874	Reading	.744	Enjoying	.652		
	S-credits	.748	Viewing	.823	Thinking	.582		
	Working	.661	Friends	.801				
	Communicating	.510	Residing	.515				

Table 5: Reasons for study: summary of factor analysis post-course

	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4		Factor 5	
All	Reading	.882	Enjoying	.773	P-credits	.748	Friends	.732		
	Viewing	.887	Thinking	.675	S-credits	.643	Tutoring	.570		
			Communicating	.594	Working	.535	Residing	.414		
							Working	.365		
							Communicating	.360		
CC	Reading	.903	Residing	.777	Enjoying	.793	Tutoring	.730	P-credits	.768
	Viewing	.905	Working	.763	Thinking	.586	Friends	.699	S-credits	.651
					Communicating	.553				
CP	Reading	.792	Enjoying	.711	P-credits	.752	Tutoring	.932		
	Viewing	.775	Thinking	.706	S-credits	.571				
	Friends	.589	Communicating	.525	Working	.547				
	Residing	.576								
CF	Reading	.866	Thinking	.938	S-credits	.871	Tutoring	.877		
	Viewing	.915	Enjoying	.624	Working	.628				
	Friends	.693	P-credits	.599	P-credits	.342				
	Working	.633	Communicating	.544						
NF	Reading	.876	S-credits	.906	Friends	.756	Working	.893		
	Viewing	.837	P-credits	.802	Enjoying	.739	Tutoring	.688		
	Residing	.590			Communicating	.622				
	Thinking	.548								

Changes in motivational orientation

Factor analysis for the smaller, unsuccessful groups is inconclusive, so the focus in this section (see Table 6) is on differences between the larger CC and CP groups, in particular the factors which distinguish the CC group, in order to explore what motivates successful students to persist in their studies.

Table 6: Summary of factor analysis data (CC and CP groups)

Factor	CC Pre-course	CC Post-course	CP Pre-course	CP Post-course
1	Cultural	Cultural	Cultural	Cultural + Friends + Residing
2	Life-plan + credit accumulation	Life-plan	Personal satisfaction + in-country communication	Personal satisfaction + in-country communication
3	Personal satisfaction + in-country communication	Personal satisfaction + in-country communication	Credit accumulation + Working	Credit accumulation + Working
4	Family	Family	Family	Tutoring
5		Credit accumulation		

Both groups share a cultural orientation when they are embarking on their Spanish studies, but for the CP group at the end of the course the **cultural** orientation is also linked, although less strongly, to *Friends* and *Residing*, reasons which are also of an integrative nature. For them, *Working* is subsumed within the **credit accumulation** orientation at both points in time, and the **family** orientation is reduced, towards the end, to the single response of *Tutoring*.

There have also been some important changes in the CC group. They are now unique in showing five clear-cut orientational strands, including the **life-plan** orientation which can be interpreted as a clear commitment to communication, and its combination with **family** as an integrative feature. Their orientations by the end of the course therefore comprise: **cultural** orientation, **personal satisfaction/in-country communication**, **life-plan**, **credit accumulation**, and **family**. *Thinking* is now firmly placed within the **personal satisfaction** orientation.

The most distinctive feature of the CC group post course, by contrast with the successful group that did not continue, is the clear presence of the **life-plan** and **family** orientations not found together in any other outcome group. The conjunction of these orientations could be interpreted as a markedly integrative feature. In addition, they demonstrate both extrinsic (**credit accumulation**) and intrinsic (**personal satisfaction/in-country communication**) values.

It is evident that the combination of **life-plan** and **family** orientations unique to this outcome group implies a wider and more active use of the target language than any of the other orientations, thus placing speaking (and listening) skills at a premium, precisely those skills which have traditionally proved most problematic to develop through distance learning.

In the context of the L2 motivational self system the combination of orientations outlined above appears to represent a complex ideal self, which includes not simply a desire to become competent in the target language, but more specifically to carry out transactions at both a personal and professional level, with the potential for achieving academic success and satisfaction (represented by the **personal satisfaction/in-country communication**, and **cultural** orientations). This represents a considerable challenge, the significance of which will be analysed later in this paper, after examining their response to the skills involved and their sense of progression towards their goals.

Comparison with other types of learner

Whilst earlier studies have already identified the orientations of younger learners in full-time secondary or higher education such an analysis had not previously been undertaken with adult learners. Our hypothesis, that the combination of motivational orientations of adult learners differs somewhat from those of younger learners, can be demonstrated by comparing our results with those of earlier studies (Table 7).

Table 7: Motivational orientations

Adult students in the Open University beginners' study	Young adult university students ¹	High school students in a bilingual context ²
Cultural	Interest in the country	Knowledge (i.e. about the target language group)
Personal satisfaction / in-country communication	Liking for the language	Travel
Family	Desire to travel	Friendship
Credit accumulation	Career / lingua franca	Job related / Instrumental
Life-plan		

¹ (Coleman 1996)

² (Clément & Kruidenier 1983)

NB A further study, carried out with high school students in a unilingual context in the same country (Canada), found the categories listed in Column 3 to be still valid, but with the additional factor of school achievement (MacIntyre et al. 2001).

It is worth noting that the **life-plan** orientation (i.e. *Residing, Working*) is distinctive to the current study; the **family** orientation in the present study (which subsumes *Friends*) is also broader than the friendship orientation for high school students. This may reflect the influence of the wider social context of adults who have not only already established substantial contact with the country(s) where the target language is spoken, but are also likely to operate in a context which includes family and professional responsibilities; in short, a range of possible selves appropriate to adults.

Language skills targeted as indicator of motivation maintenance

Whilst persistence constitutes one element in defining motivation, no less important is conscious effort devoted to the tasks necessary for achieving the learner's goals (see Gardner 1985, op cit). To this end learners were also asked at the outset which language skills they perceived to be most important to target and at the end about measures indicative of their efforts to achieve this.

For the majority of respondents what mattered most was speaking and aural comprehension, in that order, as evidenced in Figure 4, and this desire to communicate orally offered a good fit with their reasons for study. It is noteworthy that a broadly similar pattern in this respect is observable across all outcome groups.

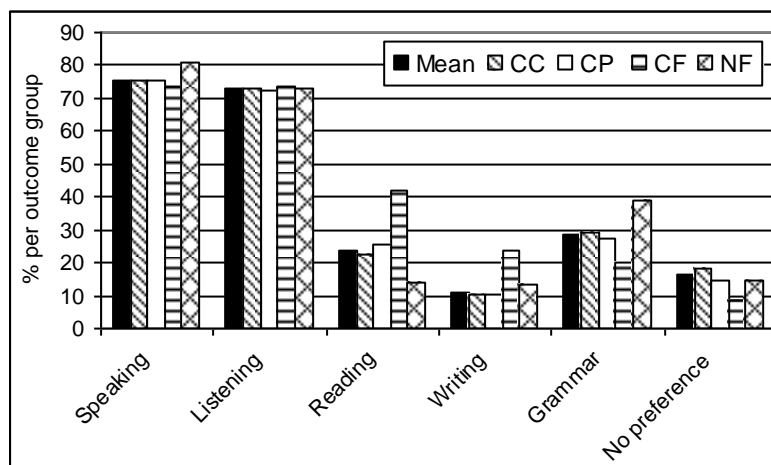


Figure 4. Targeted skills pre-course, percentages citing the skill as 'most important' or 'second most important'.

A key characteristic of motivated learners is expenditure of effort in order to attain their goal. Since speaking is not only the skill ascribed greatest importance by the learners but also acknowledged as the hardest skill to develop through distance learning, given the relative paucity of opportunities for interactive exchanges in the target language, respondents in our survey were asked about use they had made of other resources over and above their language course itself in order to achieve this (Figure 5).

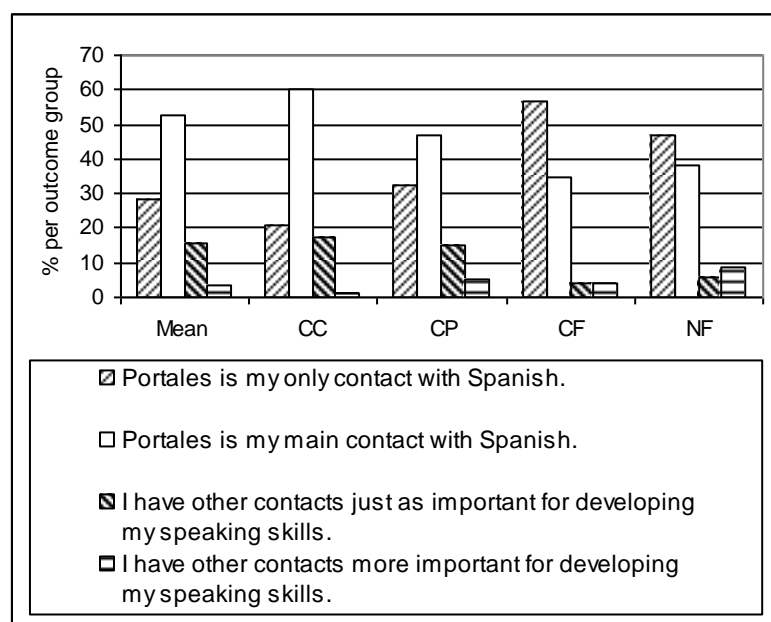


Figure 5. Use of resources for developing speaking skills.

Resource use for successful groups (CC and CP) is different from that for unsuccessful groups (CF and NF). Those who fail the course are more likely to have relied exclusively on the course materials. The difference is statistically significant ($p < .01$).

The findings indicate that the CC group was more actively engaged in seeking out other opportunities to develop their spoken Spanish than any other group. This may be related to the potency of their communicative goals derived from their **life-plan** and **family** orientations at the end of the course; as a result the CC group has a stronger communicative drive in order to attain the higher levels required to perform in these demanding areas.

Progress towards goal achievement

Achievement of goals can be an important motivating factor (resultative motivation); it is a measure of success and source of satisfaction, and can have a positive effect on students' attitude towards their course. The greater the sense of progression, the higher the satisfaction level is likely to be. Students were therefore asked how far they felt they had progressed towards achieving their most important goal. As can be seen in Figure 6, there is overall a high perceived achievement rate, though successful groups show even higher satisfaction.

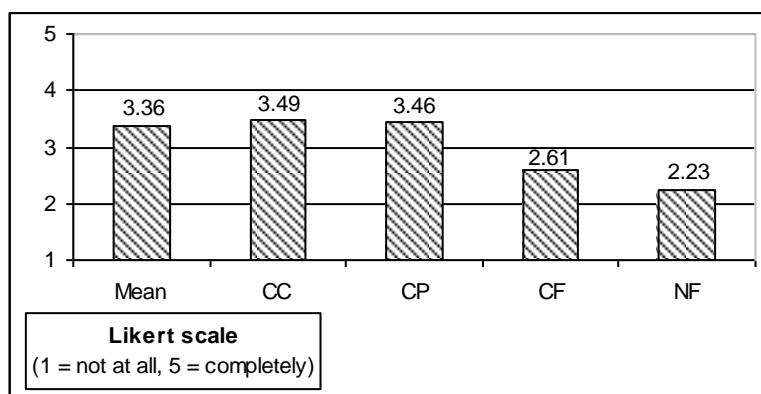


Figure 6. Mean perceived progress towards most important goal.

Of those who completed both questionnaires, 41.9% (233 respondents) felt that they had attained their most important goal completely or almost completely (5 or 4 on the Likert scale); by contrast 18.5% (101 respondents) had attained them not at all or hardly at all (1 or 2 on the Likert scale). Figure 7 shows, for each specified most important goal, the valid percentage of students perceiving it to have been attained.

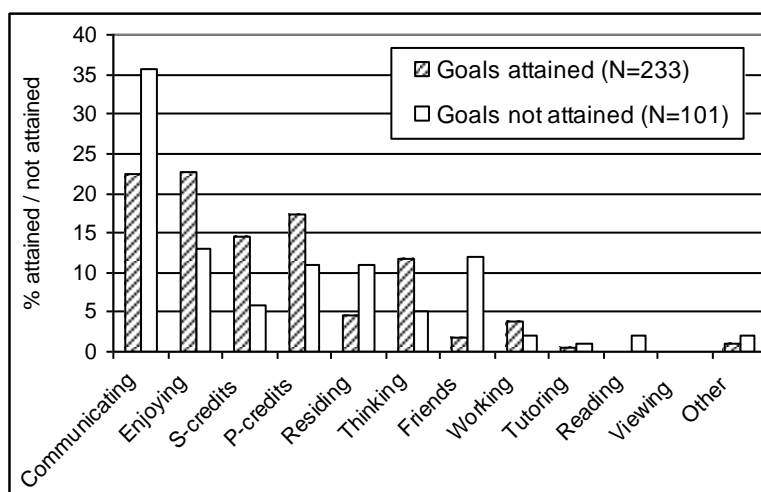


Figure 7. Progression towards goal relative to main reason for studying Spanish (valid percentages).

Both the more intrinsic reasons (studying for *Enjoying*, and *Thinking*) and the extrinsic ones (obtaining *S-credits* and especially *P-credits*) are to a greater extent associated with a feeling of success; those who feel they have not progressed very far are more likely to have been studying in order to live in a Spanish-speaking country, or communicate in Spanish when visiting or with friends or family. This confirms that goals involving a more practical and interactive use of the language were, within the beginner course, less likely to be completely achieved than intrinsic and instrumental/extrinsic ones.

Goals and progression to the next course

Since, as teachers, we would like to see students continue in their language studies, our interest additionally lies in any differences between successful students who persisted in their studies (CC group) and those who chose not to (CP group), and what we can learn about motivation maintenance. Satisfaction with progress was only marginally higher among the CC group (Figure 6); however, there are important differences between the two groups in terms of their main reason for studying Spanish (Figure 8).

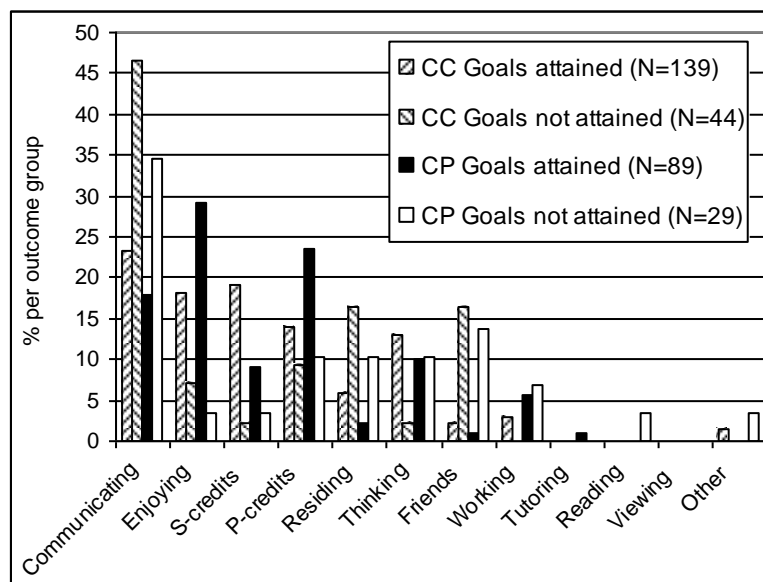


Figure 8. Progression towards goal relative to main reason for studying Spanish: CC and CP outcome groups (valid percentages).

For over half of the CP group the goals attained focus heavily on *Enjoying* and *P-credits*. It seems reasonable to conjecture that some at least of this group, having obtained the credits that they were seeking, were no longer motivated to continue studying Spanish, and that *Enjoying* did not in itself constitute sufficient incentive to do so.

For the CC group reasons for study where goals were attained outweighed those where they were not, with *Thinking* markedly standing out as a positive. Nearly 80% of the CC group who felt that they had not progressed very far had, as their main reason for studying, a specific communicative goal, in many cases associated with less routine interactions; this is consistent with their distinctive **life-plan** and **family** orientations, neither of which is realistically achievable within the timeframe of a beginners' course. Hence they were the group most motivated to expend effort in developing their speaking skills (Figure 5) and persist in order to attain those goals. This persistence may have been reinforced by what they had actually experienced positively, including the intrinsic motivation derived from a sense of *Thinking* as well as *Enjoying*.

Enjoyment

Students derived a high level of enjoyment from the course, especially and unsurprisingly those who were successful and in particular those who continued to the next level. Figure 9 indicates the different mean levels of enjoyment, where 1 = not at all and 5 = very much.

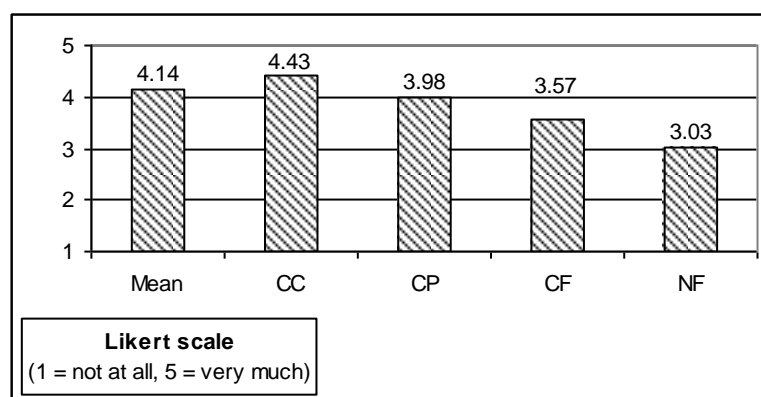


Figure 9. Enjoyment of the course

Enjoyment is central to intrinsic motivation in self-determination theory, and a key element both in Gardner's definition of motivation (e.g. 2001: 6) and in coping with the inevitable ups and downs associated with the extended duration required for language learning (Dörnyei 2001: 16). The very clear correlation between mean perceived progress and mean enjoyment has already been noted in an earlier study (Coleman and Furnborough op. cit.).

Conclusions

This paper has examined reasons for study and motivational orientations among beginner adult learners of Spanish at a distance in relation to initial motivation and its maintenance, as reflected in their persistence and attention to a key language skill (in this case speaking) essential to achieving their goals.

In our study respondents acknowledged an average of over five reasons. Those who were successful and chose to continue not only started with the highest number of reasons, but that figure actually increased as the course progressed. For unsuccessful groups, on the other hand, there was a reduction in the number of reasons by the end of the course, and no change within the successful students who opted not to continue. This suggests that a high and/or increasing number of reasons may constitute a possible predictor of persistence.

It has also confirmed our original hypothesis that the range of reasons for study of adult beginner language learners may be different, and in certain aspects wider, than that of young people who have predominantly been the subject of large-scale motivation studies. This reflects both the social contexts in which adult learners are operating (actively engaged with professional, family and other responsibilities), and their direct experience of, as well as positive disposition towards, the target country/countries whose language they are learning (Coleman and Furnborough 2010).

Gardner (2001: 16) queries whether motivational orientations are 'directly associated with success in learning a second language'; however, our research does suggest that for adult distance learners there may indeed be some links. The two orientations unique to the CC group at the end of the course (**life-plan** and **family**) require a commitment to developing active and wider-ranging communicative skills necessitating a longer period of study and potentially testing the learner's motivation; this applies in particular to the **life-plan** orientation, identified only within the CC group, and which recalls Dörnyei's (2009: 25) 'superordinate vision' and Murphy's (2011: 120) 'persevering learner identity'. This is consistent with targeting key language skills required for achieving their communicative goals, and committing effort to attaining them.

Whilst the group which demonstrated persistence might not yet have achieved their goals in terms of orientations where speaking/listening was at a premium, the study suggests that other orientations of a more intrinsic nature can support learner motivation by offering 'softer'

goals whose attainment can provide a feeling of satisfaction and success in a shorter time span. The positive sensations derived from these intrinsic motivational orientations appeared to give them the strength to persist in the harder skills associated with their more integrative orientations. In this respect intellectual challenge appears to play an important part (cf. Holmberg 1995), particularly within a distance learning course, as was the case for the CC group. By contrast, students in the CF group, whose reasons for study were largely intrinsic (the only one for which *Enjoying* ranked higher than *Communicating* as the most important reason both at the start and end of the course) were unable to maintain their motivation, and indeed failed. This might suggest that intrinsic orientations may by themselves be insufficient in the longer term, since they do not generate the effort and intensity which define the motivated learner; a view supported by Noels (2009: 309). On the other hand those learners whose motivational orientations combined integrative and intrinsic goals demonstrated a greater commitment to the development of interactional communicative skills, matched by effort to achieve them.

We have noted the particular challenges of developing speaking skills through distance language learning, for example limited opportunities and lack of immediate feedback; learners at beginner level may also have fewer resources at their disposal. At the outset, speaking and listening were the skills predominantly targeted by all outcome groups; by the end of the course however the CC group was the one most actively engaged in seeking out opportunities to develop their spoken Spanish. The potency of their communicative drive may be related to the **life-plan** and **family** orientations they had developed by the end of the course.

Murphy's qualitative study confirmed the importance, for adult distance learners, of 'experiencing feelings of competence and a sense of relatedness for the maintenance of motivation' (2011: 119). Our findings additionally suggest that no single motivational construct can fully take account of the rich mix of reasons and orientations that motivated these learners to take up a new language successfully and continue beyond their initial programme. They reveal that a combination of orientations, with a weighting on the integrative (**life-plan**, **family** and **cultural**), supported by intrinsic (**personal satisfaction**) as well as instrumental (**credit accumulation**) motivational orientations, may favour motivation maintenance, as was the case for the CC group. In terms of L2 self-image, the findings also appear to indicate that, for the reasons given above, from a L2 motivational self perspective, developing a complex and sophisticated yet not unrealistic ideal self is conducive to persistence in study.

Understanding the components of adult language learner motivation in different contexts has both pedagogical and policy implications. It is hoped that the construct of motivational orientations and possible predictors of persistence referred to in this paper will be confirmed or otherwise by further analysis of a follow-up data sample replicating this study and extending it to other languages and students at more advanced levels.

At a pedagogical level follow-up action might consist in exploring ways of assisting our learners to appreciate and internalise some of the findings of this paper, for example the importance of recognising, not only that learning a language is an extended process (which they generally do), but also the importance of valuing regular short-term goal achievements. In particular, for students who feel hesitant about speaking (one of the major challenges for distance learners) setting themselves very limited, but regular, tasks which they can complete successfully could be very helpful in this respect. It could be combined with activities to increase positive reflection. Whilst we need to acknowledge that even (or perhaps especially) highly motivated adult distance learners have to balance their studies with often demanding professional and personal commitments, action research initiatives to foster their motivation maintenance strategies could be highly beneficial.

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Appendix 1: Relevant items from pre-course questionnaire

1	What are your reasons for studying <i>Portales</i> now? Put a cross against all the reasons that apply in the first column and against the most important reason in the second column.	All that apply	Most important
	• to gain credits towards a qualification in Spanish (Certificate or Diploma)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• for pleasure or interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• to assist me in my present or future work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• to be able to communicate with Spanish-speaking friends or family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• to be able to communicate when visiting a Spanish-speaking country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• to be able to live in a Spanish-speaking country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• to understand TV, radio, films or songs in Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• to read newspapers, magazines or books in Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• to help my children or grandchildren learn Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• as an intellectual challenge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• as part of a wider programme (for instance, to obtain a degree)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2 In studying *Portales*, which aspects of Spanish do you want to concentrate on in particular? Please put one cross in each column to indicate the aspect that is most important, the second most important, etc., or tick the final box.

	Most important	Second most important	Third most important	Fourth most important	Least important
• Writing in Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Reading in Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Listening to Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Speaking in Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Knowledge of Spanish grammar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I have no preference	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Appendix 2: Relevant items from post-course questionnaire

1 What were your goals while you were studying *Portales*?
(Please cross **all** that applied to you in the first column, and put **one** cross against the most important in the second column)

	All that applied	Most important
• To gain credits towards a qualification in Spanish (Certificate or Diploma)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• For pleasure or interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• To assist me in my present or future work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• To be able to communicate with Spanish-speaking friends or family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• To be able to communicate when visiting a Spanish-speaking country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• To be able to live in a Spanish-speaking country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• To understand TV, radio, films or songs in Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• To read newspapers, magazines or books in Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• To help my children or grandchildren learn Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• As an intellectual challenge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• As part of a wider programme (for instance, to obtain a degree)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Other (please specify below)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2 How far do you feel you have progressed towards achieving your most important goal?
(Please cross one box only)

Completely					Not at all
5	4	3	2	1	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

3 How much have you enjoyed studying *Portales*?
(Please cross one box only)

Very much

Not at all

5

4

3

2

1

☐☐☐☐☐

- 4 This question aims to find out how important *Portales* has been in developing your speaking skills, or whether and to what extent other contact with the language has been important, e.g. through work, friends, holidays, watching television.

(Choose the one option that applies to you most)

Portales is my only contact with Spanish.

☐

Portales is my main contact with Spanish.

☐

I have other contacts with Spanish that are just as important as the course for the development of my speaking skills.

☐

The course plays a subordinate role in the development of my speaking skills. Other contacts I have with Spanish are more important.

☐