

# Interactions Among Language Learning Demotivation, Self-regulated Learning Strategies and Academic Procrastination

Keiko MORI

## 1. Introduction

The job of school teachers is never easy, and it can be more challenging when they aim high. As an example, language teachers work hard to encourage students to be independent learners, and to do well on tests at the same time. When the students apparently lose motivation to learn and/or when they spend much less time than expected for their academic work, teachers could be easily discouraged. They are of course responsible for the teaching part, but they also need to analyze learner variables of individuals that should influence attitude toward learning, including fatigue, anxiety and perceived expectation of significant others. Moreover, the teachers are expected to support those learners to be self-regulated for pursuing their own goals.

In Japan research findings on those topics were shared among TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) and language educators, but they were not necessarily evidence-based. There is still lack of research for educators who emphasize theoretical basis of research findings. The purpose and scope of this short article is, therefore, to provide a contextualized overview of current literature (2010–2018) written in English on (de)motivation, self-regulated learning strategies (SRLS) and academic procrastination as well as interactions of those variables in the research field of educational psychology, and when necessary, that of second language acquisition (SLA). The goals of this survey are to apply its findings to the context of school-based language education, and connect them to the teachers' topics of interest. In other words, I will seek a possible answer to a common question among teachers, "What is going on in the students' mind when they are lost in class?"

## 2. Learner Demotivation

Demotivation, or reduced motivation, is a relatively new term and it is not yet popular in Japanese educational setting, so I'd like to briefly mention different types of learner motivations, then discuss a range of motivational states in literature. Motivation is often categorized into 2 types, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to Reeve (2009), intrinsic motivation leads people to sustained interest

and enjoyment of activities. This kind of motivation “emerges spontaneously out of people’s psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness” (p. 112). Learners can experience psychological needs satisfaction when they engage themselves in learning with intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation has little to do with innate “wants” but to do with environmental variables. Extrinsic motivation is characterized as follows: “...because we desire to gain attractive consequences and because we desire to avoid unattractive consequences, the presence of incentives and consequences creates within us a sense of wanting to engage in those behaviors that will produce the sought-after consequences” (p. 113).

Interestingly, we cannot tell the difference from the outward appearance if learners are intrinsically motivated or extrinsically motivated. Ushioda (2001) depicts this point: “motivation may be defined not in terms of observable and measurable activity, but rather in terms of what patterns of thinking and belief underlie such activity and shape students’ engagement in the learning process” (p. 96). We tend to judge learner motivation, which can change in quality (intrinsic/extrinsic) and quantity (motivated/demotivated), by what and how much learners do; it is possible for learners to do tasks for a long time without any engagements nor goals, thus without learner motivation.

Based on the understanding above I searched journals on the Internet for peer-reviewed articles using PsycINFO with the keyword “demotivation,” and found 37 articles published between 2010 and 2018. Among them 29 articles were either from occupational, organizational, clinical, or general psychological perspectives. 8 articles dealt with learner demotivation in the school setting, and one of them was selected for summarizing.

Hassaskhah, Zafarghandi & Fazeli (2015) was the only research that examined demotivation of college-level language learners with statistical analysis. The authors gave a questionnaire called DeMTB (demotivation test battery) to 308 undergraduates majoring English, and proved that institution related factors were most demotivating among others: lack of facilities, staff/teacher quality and social/economical disadvantages were the main factors of demotivation (the other two were significant others related and self-related).

Learning that there were not many written about learner demotivation in the school context, I searched with keywords “demotivation” “language learning” and “school” using Google Books to find books in English, published between 2010 and 2018. As a result, there were 10 books, and the two most relevant, Kikuchi (2015) and Sampson (2016), were selected for more understanding of demotivation among language learners.

Kikuchi (2015) overviewed scholarly work on motivation, then focused on demotivation in his book, *Demotivation in Second Language Acquisition*. As mentioned in the book, his context is Japanese schools. Thus, the “second language” implies English as a foreign language (EFL). He first distin-

guished demotivation from amotivation, meaning lack of motivation, with which people would act with no intentions to gain any outcomes or consequences. On the other hand, demotivation, or reduced motivation, “concerns the negative process that pulls learners down...demotivation is situational, and demotivated learners can still be motivated again” (p. 5). He also defined demotivators as “the specific and external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action” (p. 4). Kikuchi (2015) states that motivational constructs work differently according to individual differences. Even if learners have the same teacher, classmates, and social expectation of English proficiency (i.e. perceived expectations of others regarding one’s proficiency), some are motivated and others are eventually demotivated. Learners are different in sensing which factors are demotivating.

So, what does (de)motivation look like in the school context of a language learning classroom? Sampson (2016), in his book, *Complexity in Classroom Foreign Language Learning Motivation*, surveyed the foreign language education system in Japan, then provided an overview of classroom motivation in the English as a foreign language (EFL) setting. He introduces both internal and external factors shaping the dynamics of demotivation among EFL learners by summarizing related literature. For external factors of demotivation, he refers to “pedagogical materials, a focus on tests and entrance examinations, and a lesson style involving non-communicative methods such as grammar-translation with a memorization focus” (p. 24). Major internal factors mentioned are lack of interest, lack of clear objectives, and perceived irrelevance of English study.

In order to describe the dynamics of (de)motivation, Sampson (2016) states that students’ “ideal L2 self,” or positively imagined future self as a target/second language user, has significant effects on language learning motivation. His idea is based on the possible-selves theory by Markus & Nurius (1986). Possible selves are “images of ourselves and actions in possible future situations, some of which we might wish for, while others we may want to avoid” (p. 27). Regarding one’s ideal L2 self, learners “revise their ideas of the plausibility of an ideal L2 self: for some this revision was influenced by individual perceptions in interactions during classroom activities; others through idealizing a peer role-model speaker; yet others based their revision on understandings of their familial circumstances” (p. 160).

Thus, language learners’ academic (de)motivation can change due to personal and environmental incentives (ex. one gets motivated after attending a job search event and hearing about companies’ expectations regarding the level of language command). In other words, the ideal L2 self is modified over time through external and internal changes, which also alters motivation for language learning.

### 3. Self-regulated Learning Strategies (SRLS) and (De)motivation

Another variable in motivational studies is self-regulated learning (SRL). It has been researched for over the last three decades in several fields. One of the most well-known SRL models is a social cognitive model of self-regulation, consisting of the three phases: forethought or planning, performance monitoring, and reflections on performance. The three-phase process is cyclical and developmental, and individuals can improve their learning system by activating appropriate learning strategies. Research shows learners competent in regulating their cognition, motivation, affect and behavior tend to achieve better at school (Wigfield, Klauda & Cambria, 2011). Moreover, second language acquisition (SLA) has its own resource from research on language learning strategies (LLS). Oxford & Carmen (2018) defines LLS as “mental actions that are...complex, dynamic, teachable, and at least partially conscious...LLS can involve various self-regulation functions...to (a) accomplish current language tasks, (b) improve language learning and performance, and/or (c) enhance long-term proficiency. And a set of learning strategies of second language (L2) learners can be seen as a complex system” (p. 7). Empirical studies of SRLS in the context of language learning (i.e. LLS) can possibly suggest a clearer picture of SRLS in language classrooms.

In this section I focus on interactions between (de)motivation and SRLS of learners. Using PsycINFO, I searched using keywords “self-regulate” “strategy” and “learning,” and found 33 articles from peer-reviewed journals published between 2010 to 2018. The following 3 studies were selected to summarize relations between motivation and SRLS.

Morshedian, Hemmati & Sotoudehnama (2017) surveyed 120 Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners at a language institute to prove that self-regulation training of EFL reading was effective regardless of the learners’ proficiency levels. Strategies learned by the students included LLS, such as “to use metacognitive strategies to monitor and repair understanding during reading through pondering whether the text made sense to them, whether they had any problems with the section they had just read, what the reading selection at hand was about, what the author mainly discussed, and what the author mentioned most often” (p. 296). The authors gave them questionnaires, then led think-aloud protocols (participants verbalizing on-time thoughts and feelings while executing some tasks) as the students try to understand written texts using SRLS. Pre-test/post-test comparison of the experimental group (with SRLS training) and the controlled group (without training) using two-way ANCOVA showed that self-regulation instruction to the experimental group led to significantly higher self-regulatory procedures in their reading comprehension.

Miele & Scholer (2018) introduced a theoretical model of motivation regulation strategies and discussed how learners monitor and regulate task motivation. The authors used a framework of

metacognition and SRL literature where there are two reciprocal procedures inside the model: monitoring of the quantity and quality of motivation, and controlling of strategies for the optimal state of motivation. This metamotivational system is reciprocal as it provides “a feedback loop, such that the control function takes the output of monitoring as its input and monitoring takes the output of control as its input” (p. 3).

Shell & Soh (2013) surveyed 233 US college students taking computer science (CS) courses in order to find learner differences in motivation and strategic self-regulation, using a profiling approach. Through cluster analysis, the authors found 5 profiles, each of which consists of one’s state of motivation (intrinsic, integrated or apathetic) plus one’s level of self-regulation (strategic, mastery-oriented or unskilled). The results showed that the students not majoring in CS reported more learned helplessness (maladaptive passivity) and surface learning with apathetic tendencies. Furthermore, those who were apathetic, amotivated and disengaged had little instrumentality of the course without much future academic or career goals in mind, when compared to those who were motivated and self-regulated in terms of strategy use.

The results above indicated that motivation for a task or a specific area of study can be modified through self-regulated learning activities. Likewise, learners’ use of SRLS and their motivation to do tasks seem to be correlated, and SRLS training can encourage learners to use SRLS more effectively.

#### **4. Academic Procrastination, Self-regulated Learning Strategies (SRLS) and (De) motivation**

This section introduces the third variable, academic procrastination, and discusses its interactions with SRLS and (de)motivation. I will start with definitions and theoretical basis of academic procrastination, then summarize research results on their interactions. Delaying starting or finishing one’s errands, business reports, academic assignments or life planning (such as saving money from salary for one’s retirement) is called procrastination. Either the doer of those actions or others judge them irrational and/or harmful when the delay seems to result in negative consequences. But as in Mori (2017), “delay” is based on one’s internal norms so that the same delaying act can be recognized as procrastination by some and as a strategic action by others. Klingsieck (2013) reviewed a variety of studies on procrastination and differentiated procrastination from strategic delay (i.e. planned, rational form of delay). Her definition of procrastination, based on Steel (2007), is “the voluntary delay of an intended and necessary and/or [personally] important activity, despite expecting potential negative consequences that outweigh the positive consequence of the delay” (p. 26). According to Klingsieck (2013) the variety of theoretical approaches to procrastination are grouped into four perspectives: the differential psychology perspective, the clinical psychology perspective, the situational perspective, and the motivational and volitional

psychology perspective. The motivational and volitional perspective has been relatively popular lately due to its connections to concrete theories such as Self-Determination Theory, Action Control Theory and Temporal Motivation Theory.

Surveying research on relations between procrastination and self-regulation via PsycINFO and PsycARTICLES, I found 24 articles written in English, published between 1990 and 2018, with the keywords “academic procrastination” and “self-regulation” from peer-reviewed journals. The reason I extended the year range was to collect enough articles to look up to. The majority were correlational studies, and they sought relations between targeted psychological variables and trait procrastination. On the other hand, the following three articles were based on the motivational/volitional perspective, and investigated learner differences in the quality and quantity of procrastination, matched with distinct SRLS patterns.

Grunschel, Patrzek & Fries (2013) gave an online survey to 554 university students to examine relations between reasons of academic procrastination and the following variables: academic procrastination, Big Five personality traits, academic performance, motivation to change, psychological strain and satisfaction. According to the preliminary study to 270 students concerning reasons for academic delay, there were four types of delayers: the inconspicuous, the pressure-seeking, the worried/anxious and the discontent with studies. The first type was associated with low self-management, lack of motivation and self-regulation. The second oriented their idea of success on beliefs and experiences that their learning was most effective under pressure. The third was perfectionistic with low self-confidence. The fourth sensed lack of support from others as well as embracing aversive feelings toward the task. Through latent profile analysis the authors found four classes. The first class had low scores on all the 4 types above and was high in conscientiousness and lowest in procrastination. The second class had high scores on self-pressure orientations (type 2) and was low in procrastination. The third had high scores on anxiety (type 3), was high in neuroticism and highest in psychological pressure. The fourth had high scores on task aversive tendencies (type 4) and was high in psychological pressure. The authors concluded that the third and fourth classes had poor self-regulation skills and serious delays, and interventions to cure serious procrastination must be tailored according to the class-specific causes of procrastination. For future studies the authors suggested as follows:

Researchers could ask students to remember a certain number of past episodes of academic delay and to specify the reasons for their academic delay regarding these episodes. If the reasons vary among the individual episodes, it may be more reasonable to distinguish different types of academic delay rather than different types of academic delayers. Hence, conducting such a study could be a promising endeavor to develop a typology of academic delay. (p. 231)

Grunschel, Schwinger, Steinmayr & Fries (2016) examined the effect of motivational regulation strategies use on academic procrastination, and found that those who used most of the strategies had less academic procrastination. They conducted two studies with German university students (N1=419, N2=229) to investigate the relationship between motivational regulation strategies, academic procrastination, and students' academic performance. In Study 2 they added affective and cognitive well-being criteria as outcome variables. Categories of motivational regulation strategies were as follows: enhancement of situational interest, enhancement of personal significance, mastery self-talk, performance-approach self-talk, performance-avoidance self-talk, goal setting, external regulation (self-consequating), and environmental control. Results showed that the sum score of the strategies and most of the individual strategies had significant positive indirect effects on students' academic performance. More precisely, for the sum of strategies and for two strategies (mastery & performance approach self-talk and goal-setting), there were medium-sized positive indirect effects on the performance and well-being. Academic procrastination was an intermediary variable in the relation of motivational regulation strategies (except for performance-avoidance self-talk) and GPA. The authors concluded that teaching strategies to regulate motivation is important to reduce students' academic procrastination and to support their academic success and well-being.

Sims (2014) presented a likeability model for self-regulation coaching in managing academic procrastination. She thoroughly reviewed current research on academic procrastination and found four patterns, or "low task likeability factors," as follows: perceived low level of task enjoyment (enjoyment), anticipation of aversive outcomes (consequence), estimated inability to do the task (ability), and competing attractiveness of alternative tasks (competition). She matched each factor with self-regulation shortcomings to be dealt with, such as low enjoyment with motivation (intrinsic/extrinsic), imagined consequence with performance evaluation anxiety, perceived inability with low self-efficacy of performance, and task competition with weak attentional control of distracters. In the end, the author reassured that procrastinators can recognize and target their individualized problems, and that coaches or academic supporters can teach them to use effective self-regulation strategies.

Research showed that maladaptive procrastinators or procrastination types, compared to strategic delayers or delays, resulted in psychological and performance problems. As mentioned in Grunschel et al. (2013), however, problem arises when delays and delayers were considered to be in the same category: differences in delayers are interpersonal and those in delays are intrapersonal. Hence, researching interactions among motivation, SRLS and procrastination should require careful selection of research variables, particularly when procrastination needs to be addressed in detail.

## 5. Findings and Future Directions of Related Research

In this survey I searched online on interactions of a few learner variables, namely, (de)motivation, self-regulated learning strategies (SRLS) and academic procrastination, in order to grasp how they are researched in the field of educational psychology. First, for demotivational studies there were more resources in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) than educational psychology, but the literature itself was scarce in general. That is, the term “demotivation” was not popular among educational psychology researchers, but motivational changes have been broadly researched. Second, in both SLA and educational psychology there were relatively a large number of studies on relations between motivation and SRLS, and some research results implied correlations between motivation and the quantity or quality of SRLS use. Lastly, there were fewer researches that dealt with interactions among (de)motivation, SRLS and academic procrastination; procrastination seems to be overlooked or regarded lightly among educators/researchers when they discuss motivational problems of learners.

Now, I'd like to summarize findings that are applicable to language education in Japan. Regarding demotivation, Kikuchi (2015) and Sampson (2016) offered contextualized perspectives on language learners' individual differences. From those findings, teachers can learn lessons about learner demotivation and remotivation observed in the classroom: learners are varied in terms of skills in adjusting psychological elements or utilities for the optimal results. Affected by internal and/or external changes in the learning process, the level of regulation may change. One can regulate motivation for learning well one day but not necessarily every day. This can be a partial answer to the question introduced at the beginning, “What is going on in the students' mind when they are lost in class?”

On the other hand, it is unfortunate that I could not find any article on motivation and SRLS in which the target group was “type 1” in Grunsel et al. (2013): the inconspicuous, or low in both self-management, motivation and self-regulation. They should be able to gain more support from someone who can help out based on sound theories and evidence. Lack of research can possibly result in lack of effective support. As Wigfield et al. (2011) suggests, activating learning strategies to regulate one's cognition, motivation, affect and behavior should promote better performance at school, and the use of strategies seems correlated with learner motivation (Miele & Scholer, 2018). With more knowledge and practical suggestions, educators can help students activate one strategy after another and learn independently in the end.

Additionally, there are learner differences regarding quantity/quality of SRLS use as well as that of procrastination. Interactions of individual factors should be understood more since learners' perceived shortcomings (ex. procrastinating specific tasks) might be related to other internal factors (ex. poorly regulated motivational strategies). It is possible that learners experience learned helplessness and



poor performance levels (ex. low scores in grammar tests of English language courses) as a result of maladaptive procrastination, without knowing the cause of those perceived problems. With appropriate help, such procrastinators might learn to spot and replace those maladaptive areas with adaptive ways of self-regulated activities.

Lastly, future research on SRLS and procrastination should support teachers and learners alike. Interactions among learner cognition, affect and (non-)action in the learning process must be researched more with evidence, and the findings/suggestions should be applied at school and elsewhere. As in Grunsel et al. (2013), a simple survey to students (i.e. remember past episodes of academic delay and their reasons) can enhance learner awareness toward self-regulated learning of specific tasks or genre of activities. As an example, language learners are often motivated to speak the target language better and to make an effort to improve conversation skills in vain. In reality, lack of anxiety regulation skills might influence their willingness to try interacting with others in the language. In that case they focus on their negative feelings that lead to avoidance of communicative activities. Then, habitual procrastination of practice speaking ruins their pursuing of mastery-oriented goals.

Overall, it must be helpful for teachers to have free access to discussions and findings of qualitative and/or quantitative researches targeting specific contexts (ex. proficiency levels or genre of tasks) and learners (ex. K-12 or college-level). Teachers should be able to support struggling learners better to overcome difficulties, including psychological distress, unskilled strategy use, and maladaptive procrastination, with theoretically sound advice and/or training.

## Reference

- Grunsel, C., Patrzek, J. & Fries, S. (2013). Exploring Different Types of Academic Delayers: A Latent Profile Analysis. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 23, 225–233.
- Grunsel, C., Schwinger, M., Steinmayr, R. & Fries, S. (2016). Effects of Using Motivational Regulation Strategies on Students' Academic Procrastination, Academic Performance, and Well-being. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 49, 162–170.
- Hassaskhah, Jaleh, Zafarghandi, Amir M. & Fazeli, Maryam (2015). Reasons for Demotivation Across Years of Study: Voices from Iranian English Major Students. *Educational Psychology*, 35(5), 557–577.
- Kikuchi, K. (2015). *Demotivation in Second Language Acquisition*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Klingsieck, K. B. (2013). Procrastination: When Good Things Don't Come to Those Who Wait. *European Psychologist*, 18(1), 24–34.
- Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible Selves. *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954–969.
- Miele, David B. & Scholer, Abigail A. (2018). The Role of Metamotivational Monitoring in Motivation Regulation. *Educational Psychologist*, 53(1), 1–21.
- Mori, Keiko (2017). Current Research Perspectives on Maladaptive Academic Procrastination. *The Bulletin of the Graduate School of Education of Waseda University. Separate Volume*, 24(2), 89–98.
- Morshedian, Mahboobeh, Hemmati, Fatemeh, & Sotoudehnama, Elaheh (2017). Training EFL Learners in Self-Regulation of Reading: Implementing an SRL Model. *Reading & Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning*

- Difficulties, 33(3), 290–303.
- Oxford, Rebecca L., & Carmen, Amerstorfer M. (Eds.). (2018). *Language Learning Strategies and Individual Learner Characteristics*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Reeve, Johnmarshall (2009). *Understanding Motivation and Emotion* (5th ed.). Danvers, US: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Sampson, Richard J., (2016). *Complexity in Classroom Foreign Language Learning Motivation: A Practitioner Perspective from Japan*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Shell, Duane F. & Soh, Leen-Kiat (2013). Profiles of Motivated Self-Regulation in College Computer Science Courses: Differences in Major Versus Required Non-Major Courses. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 22(6), 899–913.
- Sims, Ceri M. (2014). Self-regulation Coaching to Alleviate Student Procrastination: Addressing the Likeability of Studying Behaviours. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 9(2), 147–164.
- Steel, P. (2007). The Nature of Procrastination: A Meta-analytic and Theoretical Review of Quintessential Self-regulatory Failure. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133, 65–94.
- Ushioda, E. (2001). Language Learning at University: Exploring the role of motivational thinking. In Z. Dornyei & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Motivation and Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 93–125). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Wigfield, Allan, Klauda, Susan L., & Cambria, Jenna (2011). Influences on the Development of Academic Self-Regulatory Processes. In Zimmerman, Barry J. & Schunk, Dale H. (Eds.). *Handbook of Self-Regulation of Learning and Performance*. London, England: Routledge.