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## **Introduction**

When recently strengthening his squad with a contingent of non-English-speaking footballers, Newcastle United manager Alan Pardew explained that the best way of dealing with the language problems facing the team was through fines and training ground punishments; “the new players have to learn English quickly”, he said, “if not they’ll get penalties” (Taylor 2013). In addressing a ‘language crisis’ (Börjesson & Bertilsson 2010) of a different type, the Swedish government, instead of imposing sanctions, has introduced a system of rewards for students who learn languages. Upper secondary students continuing with the additional foreign language (FL) they chose in secondary school, and who successfully complete their courses, now gain extra credits that can substantially boost their final grade point average (GPA). This paper examines the effect this unique initiative has on the motivation to learn French of six students over the course of one and half semesters of study.

## **Learning foreign languages in Sweden**

Being a small country with an export-driven economy, policy-makers in Sweden see language skills as important and languages have long been a central part of the school curriculum. For example, during the 1950s successfully completed courses in English, German and French were entry requirements to upper secondary school. Today roughly 80% of students begin learning a FL in secondary school, the remainder taking extra courses in Swedish, Swedish as a second language, or English (Tholin & Lindqvist 2009). Of those who begin learning a FL, a fifth switch to extra Swedish and/or English before the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Of those who continue until the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, just over 90% gain a passing grade (National Agency for Education 2011). In upper secondary school there has been a clear tendency for students to make tactical decisions when choosing courses. With the aim of achieving the best possible GPA, the trend has been to opt for courses regarded as easier than FL learning, and, where learning a FL has been a compulsory program component, starting afresh with a new FL

rather than continuing with the one learnt in secondary school, widely regarded as an easier option.

While these trends can be understood as a consequence of increased opportunities for personal choice in the Swedish education system in the last two decades, they need also to be seen against the backdrop of a general antipathy to learning more than one FL. For example, in the 2005 Eurobarometer, *Europeans and their Languages* (European Commission 2005), in response to the question ‘do you think knowing other languages than your mother tongue is, or could be very useful for you personally?’, Sweden topped the list of countries with 99% of the sample expressing agreement. When asked which language was most important, 97% of Swedish respondents, again the highest rating of all 25 countries, said it was English. The social dominance and perceived utility of English is clearly reflected in response to the statements, ‘everyone in the European Union should be able to speak one language in addition to their mother tongue’, and ‘everyone in the European Union should be able to speak two languages in addition to their mother tongue’. While for ‘mother tongue plus one’, 90% of Swedes expressed agreement, in response to the ‘mother tongue plus two’ statement, only 27% – the lowest of all 25 countries and way below the EU average of 50% – did so. Attitudes to foreign languages are also reflected in Swedish students’ language proficiency. For example, in the European Commission’s (2012) Survey on Language Competencies, while Swedish students topped the table for listening in English, they came next to bottom in the table for the most popular additional FL (Spanish). Although the perceived utility of English may not perhaps be the major reason why secondary students turn their backs on FLs, (for example Henry (2010) found that students who dropped languages did so primarily because they found language learning boring), at the upper secondary level, along with tactical choices, this is clearly a factor influencing decisions not to continue (Henry 2011).

The situation of FL learning has been prominently debated in different media forms in Sweden (Börjesson & Bertilsson 2010; Ekelund 2010). Thorson et al. (2003: 38), for example, demanded that the importance of languages should be made unambiguously clear and that resource-intensive language learning ‘should be made profitable’, while Enkvist (2005: 122) argued for ‘a new system of assessment in secondary and upper secondary school that places a premium on effort’, calling for language study to ‘generate some advantage over easier courses’. In 2006 changes to the admissions system to higher education that included a new system of additional credits for advanced level courses in languages were introduced.

Emphasizing the importance of FLs, the purpose of the reform, the government stated, was ‘to reinstate interest and motivation’, and ‘to provide a clear signal that upper secondary students who chose advanced courses should be rewarded’ (Swedish Government Bill: 2006/07:107:24).

### **The GPA-enhancement system and its impact**

Prior to the reform, providing program entrance requirements were met, the allocation of places on university programs was made on the basis of the student’s GPA (calculated by multiplying the number of credits available for a course by the grade achieved, the maximum being 20.0). With the introduction of the new system, which came into effect in the Autumn Term of 2010, the GPA can be enhanced with additional credits gained by obtaining a passing grade for advanced level courses in English (max 1.0 additional credits), mathematics (max 1.0 additional credits) and FLs (max 1.5 additional credits), with the maximum enhancement possible being 2.5. For FLs, credits are available for two courses. The first of these, *Stage Three* (corresponding to CEFR A2.2) is normally studied in the first year of upper secondary school and 0.5 additional credits are available. For the second course, *Stage Four* (CEFR B1.1), normally studied in the second year, 1.0 additional credits are available. However, for students who start a *new* FL at upper secondary school, *Stage One* and *Stage Two* courses do not provide any additional credits, and it is only if they proceed to the *Stage Three* course (normally studied in the third and final year), that additional credits can first be gained. To gauge the effect of the extra (1.5) credits available for FLs, to increase the GPA by a similar amount, it would be necessary for the student to gain a higher grade in nearly half of the total number of courses taken over the three years of upper secondary education.

Although the reform first came into effect for the admissions round for the 2010/2011 academic year, its impact on upper secondary students’ choices of subjects became immediately apparent following its enactment in 2007. As can be seen in Table One, data collected by the Swedish National Agency for Education show that numbers of students taking *Stage Three* and *Stage Four* courses increased dramatically, while for *Stage One* and *Stage Two* courses, declines in numbers were witnessed for the most popular FL, Spanish.

[Insert Table 1. about here]

### **L2 motivation and the impact of external/extrinsic factors**

Because knowledge of a foreign language can have concrete benefits (e.g. educational and employment advantages), motivation can be generated by factors other than a desire to achieve communicative proficiency. In the models and theoretical frameworks developed over the years such ‘external’ factors have been variously conceptualized as *instrumentality* (Gardner 1985), *extrinsic reasons for language learning* (Noels 2001), *external pressures/incentives* (Ushioda 2001) and, in Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System model, the *Ought-to L2 Self* (Dörnyei 2005; 2009a). While Gardner’s concept of instrumentality includes an internalised ‘promotive’ element, in the sense that L2 proficiency can be part and parcel of the professional person one aspires to become (Dörnyei 2009a), the other three constructs are narrower in focus, encapsulating the wish to succeed in language learning as a means to an end not necessarily related to future L2 use.

The most extensive work on the ways in which external factors can generate L2 motivation has been carried out by Noels and her colleagues (e.g. Noels 2001a 2001b; Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand 2000). Bringing self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan 1985) to language learning, they have looked at the ways in which factors other than the *intrinsic* pleasure of learning a language, and/or positive L2-speaker identifications, can create motivation.

### ***Different levels of self-determination in extrinsic motivation***

Learning behaviours that are externally or *extrinsically* motivated take place at different levels of internalization and can be arranged along a continuum in terms of the extent to which they are integrated into the learner’s self-concept, that is to say, the extent to which they are ‘self-determined’ (Deci & Ryan 1985; Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand 2000; Vallerand 1997; Vallerand & Bissonnette 1992). On this continuum *integrated regulation* is the most internalized and self-determined form. Here, activities are willingly carried out because they fit in with the learner’s other goals and beliefs, are consistent with the individual’s self-concept, and performing them involves a realization and an expression of the self (Noels 2009). As Vallerand & Bissonnette (1992: 601) explain, a student might see studying for an exam, and thus foregoing other interesting activities, as necessary ‘because doing well in school is important for me as a person’. Moving along the continuum, *identified regulation* is also a self-determined form of extrinsic motivation where behaviours consistent with personally important goals are internally regulated. For example, a student might chose to do extra work in a subject if they believe that this will yield rewards in the sense of improving

ability (Vallerand & Bissonnette 1992). Although the activity is not pursued for its own pleasure, it is self-determined in the sense that no one is bribing or coercing the student to do it. Some forms of extrinsic motivation are, however, only partially self-determined. In *introjected regulation* behaviours prompted by external contingencies can mean that, to a certain degree, individuals internalize the reasons for their actions. Here actions are performed not in the sense that they have self-relevance or personal importance – as in integrated and identified forms – but rather out of a need to maintain self-esteem by living up to externally-derived evaluative standards (Noels 2009). However, because these internalised beliefs and controls are not fully self-determined, the experience, for example, of needing to prepare for a test would stem mostly from a sense of guilt if sufficient time is not set aside for study (Vallerand & Bissonnette 1992). As Noels (2009: 297) explains, in introjected regulation, motivation derives from the student's feeling that she/he 'should' or 'ought to' learn the language as part of a desire to live up to socially-generated expectations.

When behavior is exclusively controlled by reward/punishment forces it is regarded as *externally regulated*. Here the causes of action are independent of the person's own wishes, and experienced as a form of control. When behavior is externally regulated activities that could – or should – be enjoyable are carried out in ways that are nonself-determined, the factors instigating and sustaining motivation being some form of reward or constraint (Vallerand & Bissonnette: 1992). Effort is put into language learning, not because the learner wants to develop her TL skills, but because she is motivated either by a reward that is on offer, or to avoid the consequences associated with failure. Finally, in addition to intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation, Deci and Ryan (1985) identify passive approaches they call *amotivated behavior*. This is the least self-determined form of behavior as the individual experiences a lack of purpose, passively, 'going through the motions to carry out an activity that makes no sense to them until they can escape it' (Noels, 2009: 298).

### ***SDT and language learning***

Focusing on the impact of intrinsic and more self-regulated forms of extrinsic motivation, Noels (2001a) explains that they tend to lead to more positive attitudes to language learning, increased motivational intensity and better language skills than less self-regulated forms. Indeed, as Noels and her colleagues (2000) have shown, the more internalized the reason for L2 learning, the more comfortable and persevering students tend to be. While extrinsic motives for language learning have been found to correlate closely with instrumental motives,

orientations focusing on language learning for the purposes of travel and social contacts correspond with more self-determined and intrinsic forms of motivation. Interestingly, Noels et al. (2000) found that identified regulation was more strongly correlated with criterion variables than intrinsic motives, leading them to conclude that, on their own, intrinsic reasons for language learning may not generate optimal levels of motivation, and that the personal value and importance of learning the language may be more important in generating sustained effort.

Because it emphasises the central role of the self in language learning, focusing on the ways in which the learner internalizes the reasons for learning, SDT shares common ground with Dörnyei's (2005, 2009a) L2 Motivational Self System approach (Noels 2009). In particular the *Ought-to L2 Self* sub-system of Dörnyei's (2005, 2009a) model, with its focus on the prevention of negative outcomes and the learner's desire to meet the expectations of others, has similarities with the less self-determined extrinsic reasons for language learning. In addition to the *Ought-to L2 Self*, Dörnyei (2009a) identifies two other sources of language learning motivation; the desire to become a proficient speaker/user of the language (*Ideal L2 Self*), and the situated and executive motives that derive from the learning environment (the *L2 Learning Experience*).

As Dörnyei (2009b) explains, the strength and intensity of motivated behavior will be greatest when all parts of the system work together in harmony. Thus the most motivated L2 learners will be those who desire to become a proficient speaker/user of the language in the future (*Ideal L2 Self*), who experience enjoyment, satisfaction and a sense of meaningfulness from learning (the *L2 Learning Experience*), and for whom achieving normatively acceptable standards is important (the *Ought-to Self*). However, for many learners the three subsystems are likely to have a differing impact on motivated behaviour. As Noels (2009) makes clear, even though students may well endorse a variety of reasons for language learning, they tend nevertheless to normally indicate reasons similar in terms of the degree of self-regulation involved. This would mean that, rather than having motivational profiles where all three system elements contribute equally in generating motivation, for most students one of the subsystems is likely to have a disproportionate role. Further, the relative contribution to the learner's motivation of the separate subsystems is also likely to vary, between languages, as a function of different learning settings, and in different cultural contexts.

Empirical work on the differential impact of the three subsystems of Dörnyei's model seems to confirm these proposals, in particular revealing how the prevention-oriented focus of the ought-to L2 self may not always play a strong role in generating motivation. For example, in studies carried out by Csizér and Kormos (2009) and Taguchi, Magid and Papi (2009), the impact of the ideal L2 self on criterion measures of motivated learning behaviour and intended effort was found to be substantially greater than that of the ought-to L2 self. Given that, in Csizér and Kormos' (2009) study, the L2 learning experience also had a much stronger impact than the ought-to L2 self, the researchers conclude that the ought-to L2 self may only play a marginal role in shaping motivated learning behavior, a similar conclusion being drawn by Lamb (2012) who, in an Indonesian context, failed to identify an ought-to L2 self factor in his data.

## **Purpose**

In the context of the Swedish government's initiative to 'reinstat interest and motivation for foreign language learning' by rewarding upper secondary students who continue to develop skills in the FL learnt in secondary school with additional GPA-enhancing credits, the purpose of this study is examine the impact of the initiative on student's reasons for choosing to continue with French, and on their motivation during the school year. Self-determination theory and Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System model provide the analytical lenses through which the students' motives and learning motivation are examined.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The participants were six students (four females and two males) from a class of 22 taking *Stage Three* French. The selection of participants was guided by two important considerations. The first was to identify two different categories of students, (i) those reporting that the additional credits had a substantial impact on their motivation, and (ii) those reporting that the credits lacked such an impact. The second was, within each of these groups, to identify students with differing motivational profiles. Using this strategy it was hoped to create a sample with maximum variation by including learners with different forms of experience, thus making it possible to explore the variation within the respondents, as well as identifying commonalities. This, in turn, would mean that it could be reasonably assumed that any patterns emerging across the sampled diversity would be relatively stable (Dörnyei 2007: 128). Selection took place in three stages.

### *Stage One*

In the first stage (mid-October, 2011), an interview was conducted with the class teacher, the purpose being to categorize students' learning behaviours and motivational profiles (cf. Dörnyei 2011). The focus of the interview was on differences in students' approaches and attitudes to learning French. From the discussion three characteristics upon which the teacher felt that most of the students differed in noticeable ways emerged. The identified characteristics were aptitude & ability, learning behaviour and language anxiety. Based on these three parameters, the teacher went through the class register creating a learning profile for each learner. Three profile types emerged:

1. Higher aptitude & ability / focused learning behavior / lower anxiety
2. Higher aptitude & ability / focused learning behavior / higher anxiety
3. Lower aptitude & ability / less focused learning behavior / higher anxiety

### *Stage Two*

In the second stage (end of October), students completed a single open-ended questionnaire item, asking them to list the things that made them motivated/less motivated to learn French. For each list the students were additionally asked to rank order the things they listed.

### *Stage Three*

Cross-referencing the learning profiles created by the teacher with the students' motivational profiles, two students for each of the three learning profile types were selected. The first student was selected because she/he had given a liking of French and a desire to use the language outside of the instructional context a high ranking and had not listed the GPA-enhancing credits as a motivational source. The second student was selected because she/he had ranked the opportunity to gain the additional credits as the single strongest source of motivation.<sup>1</sup> These 6 students, identified by pseudonyms (see Table 2) were then invited to participate in a series of interviews.

[Insert Table 2. about here]

### ***Data collection***

Between November 2011 and June 2012 semi-structured individual interviews were carried out at roughly one month intervals.<sup>ii</sup> The interviews, which lasted for between ten and twenty-five minutes, took place towards the end of lessons, thus allowing prior observation of the students' classroom behaviours. All of the interviews were conducted in Swedish. Digital recordings were made and verbatim transcripts produced.

### ***Method of analysis***

When analysing the data, an interpretive approach inspired by Ricoeur's (1970) 'double hermeneutic' and drawing on techniques associated with IPA (Smith & Osborn 2003) was employed. The double hermeneutic involves the combination of an empathic and a critical standpoint. Thus, while trying to arrive at a point where the researcher's understanding is attuned as closely as possible to that of the participant, analysis also involves taking a step back, adopting a critical position, and actively deploying explanatory concepts. The adoption of an empathic perspective involved finding out how the student experienced the different demands of learning French. The critical element involved the use of self-determination (Deci & Ryan 1985; Noels 2001a, 2001b; Noels et al. 2000) and motivational self-system (Dörnyei 2005, 2009a) theories to interpret these experiences.

The data analysis was conducted in three stages using an approach similar to that outlined by Smith and Eatough (2007). The first stage involved separately reading through the sets of transcripts for each student several times, making notes of interesting features. In a second stage, the transcripts were re-read, this time using the abstractions of self-determination and motivational self-system theories as a compass, transforming the initial notes and ideas into theoretically resonant themes. Finally, in a third stage, connections were sought and the themes were grouped together in categories concordant with the purpose of the study.

### **Results**

The presentation of the results is divided into two parts. In the first I examine the motivation of the three students for whom the additional credits seemed to have little or no impact on either the choice to continue with French, or in generating motivation for learning. In the second section I examine how, for the other three students, the additional credits impact on both choice and motivation.

### ***Little or no impact on either choice or motivation***

#### *All three motivational subsystems working in harmony*

For both Jonna and Emil the choice to continue with French is motivated by the desire and expectation of using the language in the future. Jonna talks about how a visit to Paris a couple of years after starting with French ignited a desire to spend more time in France, while Emil, although he has never been to France, has his sights set on a career as an airline pilot, imagining how this will take him to different French-speaking parts of the world. Both have parents who learned French in school and talk about how, on occasion, they have exchanges in French at home with them. They say that they enjoy the work they do in class and Jonna (consistently) and Emil (often), show engagement in classroom activities.

Both students also explain how, in a context in which everyone speaks English, French can give them something extra that other people don't have. As Jonna, for example, explains,

It is a language that you don't have to know. And that's a little bit why I think it is so fun. I have actually made my own choice that I want to learn French and so I feel that it makes it even more fun. Because you have to learn English. (Interview 1)

Making the point that that they would have taken Stage 3 and 4 French anyway, even without the additional GPA enhancement, the additional credits are perceived by both students as simply a bonus. Neither seems to feel that their motivation to learn French has been affected by the extra credits. Jonna (Interview 5) says that she has not 'thought about the extra credits at all actually', Emil responding along similar lines:

Emil: I like learning French and so if I can get 1 or 0.5 extra credits, then of course I'm happy about that. It's like a plus.

I: You would have taken French anyway?

Emil: Yes, I would've done. No problem. So it's just like a little bonus.

(Interview 6)

In addition to both the intrinsic motivation generated from the enjoyment of learning and pursuing an actively-chosen and identity-developing course of action, and integrated self-regulation, where learning French is seen as a part of personal development, motivation is additionally generated via introjected forms of self-regulation in the sense of needing to maintain self-esteem by matching up to normative expectations. Like the other students in the

study, both Jonna – who wants to study economics after graduation – and Emil have very clear ambitions for the future and are aware of the expectations held by others that they will do well in their studies, and in life after school.

*Motivated by the challenge of learning*

Choosing to continue with French, Tim makes it clear that his reasons have little to do with the additional credits. In fact, in our first interview, he seems only to have a vague idea of how the system works. Rather, he frames his choice to continue in the form of a challenge:

I want to move forward. I want to learn. And to master it. Reasonably. As much as I can. /.../ Right now I feel at least that, as I have to learn a language, I might as well go in for it and really try and learn it.

Although he talks about wanting to be able to speak French and wanting to make progress in his learning, he nevertheless finds it hard to envisage situations where, in the future, he might actually speak/use French, mostly because of his perceptions about the international utility of English. If he were to travel to France, he says, French would mostly likely fulfill a fallback function; ‘I would try and use English first off, and, if it didn’t work, French’ (Interview 4). Although he says he likes the teacher’s approach, the relaxed atmosphere of French lessons, and that there are many students he enjoys working with, he finds the learning process frustrating. Compared to other subjects, charting progress, he says, is difficult. Although he hopes to study engineering at one of Sweden’s most prestigious universities – for which he will need a very high GPA – Tim never conveys any sense of being under externally-generated pressure. Rather, like the reason for choosing to continue with French, his motivation would appear to stem mostly from the challenge of learning and the satisfaction of achievement. In fact, motivation to learn French differs little from motivation to learn other subjects, as he explains when talking about his feelings on getting the result of a test:

Tim: Ah...[long pause] It’s the actual thing with the test itself. That .... it’s a test ... or really the whole thing. First the work before the test. Then doing the test. And the test goes well. That’s it. That’s the thing.

I: OK. So does it matter which subject it is?

Tim: Actually, no, it doesn't matter what it is. It's actually the same for all subjects.  
[long pause] How it is in all subjects really. Just more or less so.

(Interview 4)

In describing what drives him to succeed in French, Tim gives expression to a highly internalized desire. In SDT terms, the driving-force of his motivated behavior comes from processes of integrated regulation, and possibly even from an intrinsic pleasure derived from the satisfaction of achievement. In integrated forms of regulation activities accord with the array of other self-relevant goals the person possesses and performance of the activity becomes 'a realization and expression of the self' (Noels, 2009: 298). In the context of this intense and highly self-relevant learning behaviour – confirming self-worth by taking on a challenge – the incentive of the additional credits seems to have little impact. Like Jonna and Emil, while he sees the credits as valuable, they have little effect on day-to-day motivation: 'I can't say that they motivate me so very much. It's not like I go round and think "ah, my extra credits, I need to get them"' (Interview 1) he says.

### ***An impact on choice and motivation***

For Cilla, Freya and Siri, the GPA-enhancing credits appear to have a substantial effect both on opting to continue with French, and on motivation. None would have chosen to learn an FL at all had it not been a program requirement. Nor, but for the additional credits, would any of them have continued with French, Cilla wanting to learn German, Freya saying that she would have probably switched to Spanish, and Siri preferring to have started Italian.

#### *Cilla*

French, Cilla says, has little personal appeal, nor is it anything she can see as being of much use to her in the future. Like Tim, if she were to travel to France she feels that she would most likely use English. The value of French is in its contribution, via the extra credits, to her GPA:

Now French is not so important for me. It is mostly about the extra credits. Because I am not going to work in a profession where I am going to need it. I don't need it for study. And no one in my family can speak it.

I don't think I am going to have any use for it. Maybe go to France on holiday, but then I would use English I think. They speak so incredibly quickly the French.

(Interview 1)

Cilla expresses concern about her abilities both compared to others in the class, and to contemporaries learning German, which, along with English, forms a constant point of reference when she talks about progress learning French. In particular, she feels that she cannot put her knowledge of grammar, syntax and vocabulary ‘into a language’ (Interview 1).

Except for a brief period at the beginning of the second semester when the prospect of a period of study abroad in France appears on the horizon (see Henry 2013), Cilla is motivated by achievement. However, unlike the feeling of inner satisfaction that for example Tim describes when successfully meeting the challenges of learning, for Cilla performing well on a test is much more about demonstrating her capabilities to others, not wanting ‘to sink myself’ (Interview 1), as she puts it. This applies not only to course results, but also in the longer-term sense of working towards the superordinate goal of a high prestige career:

A lot of it is about me wanting very much to be best. To have a profession that shows that you are pretty good (Interview 1)

Over and above the boost it can give to her GPA, and, in broader terms, providing evidence of her diligence and abilities, learning French seems to have little meaning. When, in our final interview, Cilla reflects on her learning behaviour over the course, she expresses how, most of the time, what she did lacked personal engagement and a sense of purpose:

Well, it was like, ‘oh, now it’s French again’, like you’d go to lessons and write the stuff down. There wasn’t anything that you like reflected on, checked up, if I had understood this. It was mostly just...that you went there and so ... were there ... it felt like that there was so much missing ... so it didn’t feel like there was any real point.  
(Interview 6)

### *Freya and Siri*

The sense that the extra credits provide the main incentive for sticking with French is echoed by both the other girls. Explaining how, on occasion, French lessons can be enjoyable, Freya also says:

Well if it was just the extra credits, then I would have had to force myself to go to the lessons ... erm ... just to get the extra credits...but that's almost how it is ... quite a lot of lessons actually. (Interview 2)

Siri expresses similar ideas, drawing a parallel between having to go to French lessons and needing to get up at 05.00 am on a Saturday and Sunday morning for her weekend job in a local hotel; in both cases, she says, 'you've got no choice' (Interview 5).

While all three girls recognise that greater effort and resources need to be channeled into French, the energy to action such plans nearly always seems to be lacking. Reflecting on the level of effort that, compared to other subjects, she puts into French, and how she prioritizes between them, Freya rationalizes these decisions in the following way:

Er .... I maybe should put in more effort and put in a little more time, but at the same time I feel that I also need to put more time into the other subjects to get the highest [grades] so to say. Yes. Because here I get, I get my extra credits even if I only get a pass. So it feels pretty safe in that way. (Interview 2)

By thinking about the extra credits, Freya, even in the face of setbacks, is able to maintain a positive approach to learning French. Even if she were to end up with the lowest grade it would not, she says 'be the end of the world', because she would at least have got her extra credits.

Siri, however, seems only to experience frustration and disenchantment. French, she says, is incredibly hard. While, just like Cilla and Freya, she regularly gets As and Bs in other subjects, in French she is not even sure she is going to pass. Again like the other two, she feels that she has been disadvantaged from the start, not being as good as many of the others in the class, and that this gap has hardly decreased over time. Had she been able to switch to Italian, she says, she might have been able to make better progress, a point echoed by Cilla who feels that, back in secondary school, had she chosen German instead of French 'I might have been able to cope with the language pretty well' (Interview 6).

Although at various times in the earlier part of the course Freya and Siri – and for a period at the beginning of the second semester Cilla – voice ideas about using French in the future, and

report gaining some enjoyment from their learning experiences, by the middle of the second semester there are few signs that any of the three derive much pleasure, value or meaningfulness from learning. For all three girls the external regulation of learning behaviours seems to progressively increase over the course. By the summer, French has become merely a means to an end; getting the points necessary to have a chance of competing for a place on an attractive university program. For example, in our first interview, Siri talks about possibly visiting Paris and spending time in France. By the end of the second semester, however, this is an idea she actively distances herself from:

It has become so hard and I feel no motivation and it is not fun and ...it ... I am doing it, as I've said, just for the extra credits. And ....er... I wouldn't want to travel to France either. Not even for fun. (Siri, Interview 5)

Not only does the need to constantly have to push themselves to keep going to be sure of passing the course preclude opportunities to derive satisfaction from the learning experience, but, as we see here, it also seems to have a directly negative impact on self-concepts as a future speaker/user of French.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

With the purpose of 'reinstating interest and motivation', the aim of the Swedish government's foreign language initiative is to reward upper secondary students who continue with their FL by enhancing their GPA. For some of the students interviewed here (Jonna, Emil and Tim) the additional credits seem to have little or no impact on their motives for continuing with French or motivation to learn. For Jonna and Emil, not only is learning French mostly enjoyable, but motivation is also generated by the visions they have of speaking/using the language in the future. It stems also from the desire to do well in school and, via a university degree, in life beyond. Not only are their reasons for learning the language self-relevant and highly internalized which, as Noels et al. (2000) suggest, is likely to generate most intense forms of motivation, but all three elements of their motivational self-systems seem to function in a manner that is mutually complementary, thus highly conducive to sustaining effortful behaviour (Dörnyei 2009b). In such circumstances it is perhaps hardly surprising that, for Jonna and Emil, the 'reward' of the extra credits has no noticeable effect. For Tim the decision to continue with French is rooted in the challenge it offers, and effort expended is generated mostly by taking on the task of learning something difficult and the

subsequent satisfaction gained from achievement. Because, from the outset, he knows he is going to pass the course, there is little if any scope for the GPA-enhancing credits to generate additional motivation.

For Cilla, Freya and Siri, however, learning French is a struggle. Nevertheless, all three successfully complete the course, albeit with grades substantially lower than those gained in other subjects. In this sense the GPA-enhancement initiative has had exactly the effect intended; rather than switching to a beginner-level language, these students have stuck with French for another year, continuing to develop their communicative skills. However, because the GPA-boost functions as a coercive factor, the reasons for learning lack internalization and effortful behaviours are not self-determined. A superimposed contingency, the additional credits mean that the girls are pursuing a course of action they would not otherwise have embarked upon, one that is independent of what they really want to do. Consequently, learning – and the skills it leads to – lacks self-relevance and has little personal meaning. As all three students indicate, learning mostly consists of attending classes, doing the minimum required, and not thinking too much more about it.

This generally passive and detached approach is, to a degree, facilitated by the fact that the GPA-enhancement is not conditional on the final grade achieved; as long as a pass is obtained the credits will be generated. Safe in the knowledge that, as Freya puts it, ‘I get my extra credits even if I only get a pass’, the incentive functions in a way that generates effortful behaviours that extend as far as – but not beyond – minimal levels of attainment. Learning that is directed to the achievement of short-term goals – getting a passing grade – is, however, unlikely to result in the development of enduring communicative skills that are, or should be, the goal of language learning. Here it is important to be aware that the quality of learning and its durability differ as a function of the types of motivation that drive learning processes. As Reeve and his colleagues (2008) point out, SDT studies have shown that not only is learning improved, but also that students feel better when they pursue intrinsic rather than extrinsic goals. For extrinsic motivation, more self-regulated forms lead to better learning outcomes. Thus, rather than directing or controlling students into particular forms of action, Reeve et al. (2008) argue that they should instead be given opportunities and resources to internalize a personal value for acting; when internalized behaviours are experienced as autonomous, more positive learning outcomes are likely. If, though, students are coerced into doing something they may not wish to do, or which they cannot see the value of, it follows that, not only are

they unlikely to do more than the minimum required of them, but that the learning which does take place, because it is not self-determined, will be less meaningful and less enduring.

Moreover, as Ryan and Deci (2006: 1570) point out, externally controlled behaviours are often also associated with 'lower well-being, engagement and satisfaction'. All three students speak of dissatisfaction learning French, a frustration in not being able to make any visible progress, and a sense that the task they are engaged in – and which demands so much of them – is ultimately pointless as they are never likely to have a use for the French they have learnt. Indeed, the negative stance that, over the period, Siri develops to the subject, the language, and the country is conceivably a consequence of the negative emotions associated with externally regulated learning behaviours.

In places such as Sweden, where there are few opportunities to have TL contacts or to interact with TL-speakers, FL learning is a highly future-oriented activity. For this reason, students' learning experiences and the attitudes they hold at the end of a period of study are likely to have an important impact on self-concepts as future TL-speakers/users and willingness to make use of their language skills later in life. If, like Siri, students are forced into a situation where, because of the need to maximize their chances of gaining a university place, they continue with a language they are either no longer interested in, or feel they have learnt for long enough, there is a risk that negative attitudes may develop. Thus the price paid for increased proficiency might be negative reflections on the learning experience, negative attitudes to the language and its cultures, and a weakened self-concept as an emerging TL-speaker. For Siri, and others like her, the question needing to be asked is whether it might not have been more beneficial to have finished with French at the end of secondary school, switching subsequently (if at all) to a language she was more interested in? By making a fifth and, for many students, a sixth year of FL learning de facto compulsory, the effects of the Swedish government's initiative to stimulate interest in languages may, paradoxically, be the opposite of those intended.

Finally, it is important to point out that, being a small scale study, the experiences of students here may not reflect those of other students in the class, students in other classes, and students learning other FLs. Therefore, given the importance of the issues and the numbers of students in Sweden now learning a FL for a fifth and sixth year, it is important that in future research the effects of the GPA-enhancement system are more fully explored.

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<sup>i</sup> In cases where there were more than two students to choose from, I sought advice from the teacher as to which of the students he felt would be most comfortable being interviewed.

<sup>ii</sup> Emil, Jonna and Siri were interviewed on six separate occasions, while Cilla, Freja, and Tim were interviewed five times. Two of the final interviews, with Cilla and Emil, took place in September 2012 as both students had been absent from class in June.