

Triggers and Supports of International Visiting EFL Teachers' Directed Motivational Currents

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines the factors that trigger and sustain directed motivational current (DMC) experiences, defined as prolonged periods of intense motivational surges (Ibrahim & Al-Hoorie, 2019), among English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers ($N = 3$ women, ages 30–50) during their study-abroad programs in the United States of America. Multiple interviews (two per person) and a focus group interview (one with all three together) were used to collect qualitative data. The first interviews took place a month before the focus group interview session, and the second interviews were a month after the focus group interview session. A thematic analysis of the data suggested that frustration resulting from professional tensions and opportunities triggered the EFL teachers' DMC experiences. The enduring, unique periods of motivational flows were supported by the teachers' perceptions of the feasibility of the goals that they wanted to achieve, the positive influence of others (colleagues, family members, and mentors), and their ardent desire to be successful in their field. The findings of this study imply that visiting EFL teachers can experience DMCs despite the challenges associated with study-abroad programs, such as separation from their families and colonizing ideologies. The intense motivational feelings engendered by the DMC experiences made the participants resilient so that they could take advantage of the emergent opportunities (e.g., networking with experienced colleagues in their fields, publishing scientific articles, etc.) in the study-abroad programs.

Keywords: directed motivational currents, study-abroad programs, triggers, supports, resilience

INTRODUCTION

Directed motivational current (DMC) theory was pioneered and developed by Dörnyei and his associates (Dörnyei et al., 2014, 2015; Muir, 2020; Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). Although empirical research on this new theory of motivation is still in its infancy (Muir & Gümüş, 2020), the recent increase in empirical studies (e.g., Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2017; Ibrahim, 2017, 2020; Ibrahim & Al-Hoorie, 2019; Jahedizadeh & Al-Hoorie, 2021; Poupore, 2024; Safdari & Maftoon, 2017; Sak, 2019; Selçuk & Erten, 2017; Xodabande & Babaii, 2021; Zarrinabadi & Soleimani, 2024; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli, 2017) has lent support to its validity and established DMCs as a core construct in the field of second language (L2) learning motivation and teaching.

A gap in DMC-related scholarship is that the empirical research cited earlier has given little or no attention to English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers' DMC experiences. One context that has not yet been explored concerns language teachers' willingness to engage in study-abroad programs and become visiting scholars. The motives for engaging in such programs might include, for example, the ardent desire to acquire new knowledge in the field, aspiration to improve one's academic positioning, and prestige associated with study-abroad programs in certain contexts. These represent the most significant goals that visiting scholars want to achieve at all costs. Such strong goal visions are considered a core feature of DMCs (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). Thus, this study seeks to examine language teachers' intense, motivational periods in the context of study-abroad programs.

Study-abroad programs can also offer scholars, particularly visiting EFL teachers from the so-called developing countries (e.g., Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Togo, etc.), opportunities to use the resources that are necessary for knowledge co-construction, such as virtual libraries with subscription to the most prestigious journals and other forms of technology that enhance networking with experts from Inner Circle countries [e.g., Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America (USA), etc.]. As a result, they have access to what Darvin and Norton (2015, 2016, 2023) call symbolic capital (i.e., scientific publications in prestigious journals, certificates or diplomas obtained from renowned universities, presentations at international

conferences, and collaboration with experts from Inner Circle countries). Possessing symbolic capital is conducive to getting promotions and becoming a member of the academia upon returning home. These aspects are important for EFL teachers in Francophone sub-Saharan Africa, specifically those in Mali, who are confronted with various difficulties. Their universities do not subscribe to any international journals, have inadequate technological infrastructures with disrupted high-speed internet connection and electricity, limited funding for teachers' professional development, and outdated teaching materials. This can be explained by the lack of financial resources since public universities are entirely funded by the national government. It is for these reasons that EFL teachers from Mali can be motivated to take part in study-abroad programs.

The current study explores the factors that trigger and sustain Francophone sub-Saharan EFL visiting scholars' motivational experiences in the USA. It has three main aims: (1) To explore the visiting scholars' motivational experiences to understand in what ways they can become exceptionally absorbed in their academic activities against the backdrop of all the tensions (i.e., racism, colonizing ideologies, and professional identity tensions) that study-abroad programs in Inner Circle countries can involve, (2) to investigate in what ways their motivational experiences are similar to DMC experiences or not, and (3) to fill in an empirical gap by addressing the DMC experiences of EFL teachers in Francophone sub-Saharan Africa, an under-researched and under-represented context in DMC research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is necessary to specify the use of certain key terms before proceeding. In the present study, *visiting scholars* refers to researchers, teacher-researchers, EFL teachers, and teachers of languages other than English (LOTE) (e.g., Chinese, French, Japan, Spanish), who leave their home country university for an Inner Circle country university to enhance their teaching or research skills after obtaining a doctoral (PhD) degree in their field. Secondly, the term refers to professional teachers, who pursue their studies in Inner Circle countries to obtain a higher diploma. Concerning the use of the term, *study-abroad programs*, it refers to the professional development or mobility programs funded by national or international agencies and higher institutes of education.

Language Teachers' Motivation to Partake in Study-Abroad Programs

Research on language teachers' motivation to develop professionally has shed light on factors that drive them to participate in study-abroad programs. Liu et al. (2020) in a study with 169 visiting scholars from 97 universities throughout China used questionnaires and interviews to explore their motives for participating in a mobility program. The participants were EFL teachers and teachers of LOTE. The findings indicated that language teachers moved across borders to interact with a large pool of researchers, practitioners, and teacher-researchers to obtain academic information, co-construct their knowledge, escape from stress, benefit from external support or policy support, and gain symbolic capital allowing them to occupy leading positions in their home institutions. However, visiting scholars face multiple challenges, such as racism and professional identity tensions, including difficulties networking with supervisors or mentors and university authorities to co-construct their new knowledge to achieve their most significant goals abroad or at home (Koné et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2020). Professional identity tensions are defined as an internal struggle between the scholars' professional expectations or desires, personal beliefs, values, and aspirations (Pillen et al., 2013).

Professional identity tensions can act as a stimulus for scholars to partake in study-abroad programs to achieve their goal of becoming legitimate EFL teachers in their home country (Koné et al., 2024). A collaborative autoethnographic study conducted by Koné et al. (2024) with three EFL women from Mali revealed that the women's tensions were provoked by their male colleagues' biases (e.g., women are less performant than men because of their gender, women have no place in academia, domestic work and administrative activities are for women), and lack of institutional support to navigate these prejudices. The tensions boosted the women's motivational levels to such an extent that they could not resist partaking in study-abroad programs in the USA to gain legitimacy in their home country and to overcome the frustration at not being valued the way they wanted to be. Scholars may feel demotivated if they do not find opportunities to accomplish the activities that are required to achieve their valued goals. This is reflected in Karakaş's (2020) study with 11 Turkish scholars upon their return home. Some of the scholars who were interviewed by the author revealed that there were

mismatches between what they valued as teachers after studying in the United Kingdom or the USA and what their educational context (i.e., Türkiye) expected them to accomplish. They believed that their new knowledge and their expectations as teachers were not valued as they wanted, which caused disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration. These negative feelings decreased their commitment to the activities associated with their job, but they increased their motivation to apply for study-abroad programs to escape from stress. To understand these different motives and situational factors, in this study, I will draw on DMC as a theoretical lens. This is because this theory has the potential to examine how unpleasant internal struggles, such as professional identity tensions, may interact with the experiences and conditions of study-abroad programs to trigger visiting scholars' DMCs.

DMC Features

DMCs are enduring motivational surges that can support the achievement of long-term goals, such as learning a L2 (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Dörnyei et al., 2014, 2016). DMCs are characterized by four key features, which I will explain below in more depth, namely, goal-orientedness, salient facilitative structure, positive emotionality, and triggering parameters (Dörnyei et al., 2014, 2015, 2016; Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). In addition, I will also touch upon the construct of resilience, which has a strong potential to enrich our insights into DMCs.

Vision/Goal-Orientedness

Vision/goal-orientedness refers to the most significant and desired goal that a person wants to achieve (Dörnyei et al., 2014, 2016). It incorporates the ideal self that a person would like to become and what they have been envisioning, possibly for years (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). Vision is so vivid in DMCs that an individual can imagine themselves realizing their future goal (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014; Garcia-Pinar, 2022; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli, 2017). Throughout the DMCs, achieving the most significant goal becomes a passion, so its absence can provoke a sudden decrease in the motivational currents. For example, the DMC experiences of Tina, a participant in Maftoon and Safdari's (2017) study, abruptly vanished when she realized that the opportunity to immigrate to Italy that had been

available to her no longer existed. However, vision is not an indispensable feature of DMCs according to research by Henry et al. (2015) and Ibrahim (2016). For example, the participants in the former study experienced DMCs although “the long-term, superordinate goals to which motivational currents are directed seem[ed] not as clearly defined” (Henry et al., 2015, p. 337).

Salient Facilitative Structure

The facilitative structure of a DMC contains clear starting and end points, recurrent behavioral routines, and positive progress checks (Dörnyei et al., 2016; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021). The maintenance of the DMC-oriented behaviors is dependent on significant others’ feedback informing the individuals caught up in the currents that their effort investment is transporting them to their end-goal. Significant others are people (i.e., family members, friends, teachers, mentors, classmates, etc.), who notice important changes in the behaviors of individuals experiencing DMCs and provide them with constructive feedback (Henry et al., 2015; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021). Individuals’ perception that their skills match the challenge involved in the goal achievement tasks and a control over the behavioral routines leading to the achievement of DMC subgoals are other conditions that sustain DMC effort investment (Dörnyei et al., 2014, 2016).

Positive Emotionality

Positive emotionality refers to the positive feelings (e.g., confidence, enjoyment, happiness, pride, and satisfaction) that derive from being closer or achieving an important goal (Henry et al., 2015). These positive feelings included in the DMCs are beyond the natural pleasure because “individuals may even consider as enjoyable and satisfying activities that were once boring to them” (Al-Hoorie & Jahedizadeh, 2021, p. 519). When compared with the two DMC core features presented above, positive emotionality, according to Ibrahim (2016), is the most important DMC tenet that is susceptible to induce DMCs, and it generally accompanies DMCs through the entire process (Başöz & Gümüş, 2022).

Triggering Parameters

Triggering parameters are conditions that stimulate DMC experiences (Ibrahim, 2017). Establishing the necessary environmental and personal conditions may not be sufficient to trigger a DMC surge, but a triggering stimulus is a sine qua non for DMCs to occur (Dörnyei et al., 2016). Based on previous DMC studies with language learners, DMCs are triggered by positive or negative feelings, emergent opportunities, a significant vision, a cohesive group, a sense of achievement, a passion for achieving one’s vision, exam pressure, or an inspiring experience, such as studying abroad (Başöz & Gümüş, 2022; Ibrahim, 2017; Sak, 2019). Additionally, DMCs can be induced by social-situational factors (e.g., critical life incident, ego threat, and responsibility) and the contagion of other people’s goals, emotions, and ideas (Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021).

Resilience

The construct of resilience is defined as an individual’s capacity to bounce back from negative or unpleasant circumstances to experience positive feelings (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Hiver (2018) also describes language teachers’ resilience as their capacity to cope with adversity using the resources that are available to them to sustain their academic performance and well-being. In this regard, Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) reported that high-resilient people felt more happiness, pride, and satisfaction in their action than low-resilient people. This supports Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden-and-build theory stating that positive emotionality enlarges people’s thought-action repertoire, meaning that high-resilient people are disposed to persist in achieving their actions to be happier and more satisfied with their performance. All these factors are present in the DMC salient facilitative structure and positive emotionality. As such, the construct of resilience has the potential to deepen our understanding of language teachers’ DMCs, specifically female teachers from stressful contexts, such as sub-Saharan Francophone Africa, who are the focus of this study.

Empirical Studies on DMCs

The first empirical studies on DMCs examined the existence of the construct’s core features to lend support to its validity.

To this end, Henry et al. (2015) in a retrospective study with three Swedish learners used interviews and motigraphs to scrutinize the presence of DMCs' key features in these participants' motivated behaviors. They found that two core features of DMCs, namely, salient facilitative structure and positive emotionality, were present in the participants' motivated behaviors. Muir (2016) also used online questionnaires to confirm the existence of DMCs among participants from 71 nationalities. The findings indicated that 39% of these participants experienced DMCs meaning that DMCs are a universal phenomenon that can be experienced by people from various sociocontextual backgrounds. A retrospective case study by Zarrinabadi and Tavakoli (2017) used two semi-structured interviews to investigate the motivated behaviors of two Iranian EFL teacher trainees. The findings showed that DMCs' core features, namely, goal/vision orientedness, salient facilitative structure, and positive emotionality were present in their motivated behaviors. Maftoon and Safdari (2017), in a retrospective case study, collected data from one participant, Tina, to investigate the importance of a clearly defined vision in the maintenance of DMC-driven motivated behaviors. The results indicated that Tina's DMCs suddenly waned due to the absence of a significant long-term goal that could sustain her motivated behaviors. Sak (2019) also used retrospective techniques, such as interviews to explore the contextual factors that enhanced or impaired two Turkish EFL learners' DMCs. Classroom climate and exam pressure were revealed to be the situations that affected these learners' motivational trajectories. Exploring the roles of positive affect in the occurrence of DMCs was the aim of studies by Ibrahim (2016, 2020) to shed light on the fact that DMCs can be sustained by positive emotions. In the same line, Zarrinabadi and Soleimani (2024), in a retrospective case study, used interviews to examine the roles of positive and negative feedback on six students' motivated behaviors. Their results showed that feedback, whether positive or negative, helped the students persist in achieving their DMC routines. Additionally, Sak (2021) used the DMC disposition scale developed by Muir to explore the role of personality in the variation of disposition to DMCs among 172 Turkish EFL learners who had already experienced them. Conscientious and extrovert learners were revealed to have a dispositional advantage to experience DMCs. Other retrospective (e.g., Ibrahim, 2017; Ibrahim & Al-Hoorie, 2019; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021) and longitudinal studies (e.g., Başöz &

Gümüş, 2022; Xodabande & Babaii, 2021) examined the parameters that triggered DMC experiences among language learners. They found that negative or positive events, goal contagion, significant others' influence, and emergent opportunities were the factors that triggered DMCs. The findings of these studies suggest that DMCs are dynamic and depend on contexts, personalities, and significant others (Sak, 2019, 2021; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021).

Regarding the methods used in the empirical studies summarized above, many of them were retrospective case studies meaning that the data were collected after the participants' DMC experiences. These studies used two semi-structured interviews: one before selecting the focal participants and another after selecting them to examine their DMC experiences. While using retrospective case studies was important to shed light on the core elements of a novel theory, it can be difficult to capture all the dynamics of ongoing DMC experiences over time in participants' retrospective accounts. Research participants can also be subjective while giving the retrospective accounts of their experiences. What is important is that "most qualitative researchers, especially poststructuralists, do not see subjectivity as a major issue, as something that can or should be eliminated" (Duff, 2008, p. 56). The few studies that opted for longitudinal case studies emphasized the dynamics of ongoing DMCs over time, but there were still problems of subjectivity and lack of generalizability to other contexts similarly to retrospective case studies. In such a situation, it is up to the researchers to adopt a critical position to analyze, report, and "understand the recounted experiences from theoretical perspectives" (Henry et al., 2015, p. 334). Therefore, this study will draw on these previous studies and use retrospective techniques (interviews) to examine three female participants' DMCs.

Overall, empirical studies on DMCs focused on language learners' DMCs, except for Zarrinabadi and Tavakoli's (2017) study with two Iranian teacher trainees. This leaves a blind spot for DMC researchers because Francophone sub-Saharan EFL teachers' motivated behaviors remain unexplored despite their passion for partaking in study-abroad programs to achieve their most significant goals (Koné et al., 2024).

The Present Study

This retrospective case study examines the ways EFL teachers from Mali experience DMCs during their study-abroad programs in the USA. The study, therefore, answers the following research questions:

1. What are the features of Malian visiting teachers' DMC experiences?
2. What are the triggers for these visiting teachers' DMC experiences?
3. What are the factors that sustain their DMC experiences during the study-abroad programs?

METHODS

Sampling, Participants, and Context

The selection of the participants started in May 2022 in Bamako, Mali. With the help of two colleagues, I first identified 10 colleagues (four women, including the

participants of this study and six males), who had successfully completed their study-abroad programs between 2019 and 2022. The date was kept relatively recent to ensure that their retrospective accounts are reliable and not too strongly affected by memory fade. They were pre-selected because they were regarded as the most motivated returnees by their colleagues. I invited them and two of my graduate assistants for an informal lunch to discuss their motivational experiences. My two graduate assistants took notes of the discussions with the guests' consent. I analyzed these notes with my graduate assistants to select the participants whose motivation most closely resembled DMCs based on the presence of pre-determined core features in their motivational experiences: goal-orientedness, facilitative structure, positive emotionality, and a triggering stimulus (Dörnyei et al., 2014, 2015, 2016; Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). The absence of three major DMC features and their components in the narratives meant that the returnee had not experienced DMCs during their stay abroad. When we applied these criteria, we found that the motivated behavior of three women was similar to those of DMCs in many ways (they will be presented in the findings).

Table 1. *Participants' Biographical Profiles*

Pseudonym	Age	Official language	Rank	Teaching experience	Study abroad program	Length of stay in the USA
Molobali	30–40 ¹	French	Assistant professor	17	Africa Connects	One year
Diata	40–50	French	Associate professor	19	Fulbright	Nine months
Ayo	40–50	French	Assistant	18	Fulbright	Two years

Note. ¹Ages are in a ten-year range to help keep the participants anonymous. ²University teachers are classified as full professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and assistants in Mali. Assistants are teachers, who have not yet obtained a doctoral (PhD) degree in their field. They hold a Bachelor's or a Master's degree.

I collected data from these three focal participants. This was an opportunistic, convenience sample (Duff, 2008) because the participants were available (i.e., they teach at the same university as the researcher, and they gave their consent to participate in all of the stages of the data generation). They were all women teachers of EFL based in Mali, a Francophone country situated in sub-Saharan West Africa. Table 1 presents the participants' biodata. Two participants participated in a Fulbright program, and one participant partook in an international postdoctoral research program in the USA, which, for anonymity's sake, I will

call "Africa Connects." I used pseudonyms to preserve the participants' anonymity. All the participants are Malians and were postdoctoral teacher-researchers except for Ayo, who was a Master's student during her stay in the USA. However, Ayo was a professional, who already had more than 10 years of teaching experience when she participated in the Fulbright program. The study was approved by the ethics committee at a public university in Mali.

Researcher Positionality

Describing my position is important in this retrospective case study because it helps elucidate the biases linked to my position. For example, I am an insider because I am a woman EFL teacher familiar with my participants' traditions, including their teaching context. However, as a woman academic, I was not more privileged than my participants, and I did not have a superior role, which would have given me more power than them, and which thus could have brought certain biases to this study. Additionally, at the beginning of each interview, I explained my position to my participants, which helped establish a good researcher–participant rapport and encouraged the latter to share their motivational experiences in a relaxed atmosphere (Duff, 2008). Yet, I ensured them that they could stop their participation in the study at any time and that it would not have any negative impact on our relationship as female colleagues.

Instruments and Data Collection

The current research is a retrospective case study (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Duff, 2019) with three participants. Duff (2019, p. 145) noted that:

Case study offers strong heuristic properties as well as analytic possibilities for illustrating a phenomenon in very vivid, detailed, and highly contextualized ways from different perspectives. It can offer evidence to support new models or theories [e.g., the DMC theory], or to refute existing ones. It can provide an analysis of a phenomenon that cannot easily be reduced to static or singular variables (traditionally, in certain kinds of quantitative research, called independent variables).

These aspects align with the present study's aim to examine cases of DMCs among visiting EFL scholars. I used two face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2022) and a focus group interview (Krueger & Casey, 2015) to collect qualitative data. The first interview, which lasted between 20 to 30 min, was organized with individual participants in June 2022 one month before the focus group interview. It aimed to prepare the focus group interview session. The focus group interview session was organized with the three participants together in July 2022, and lasted approximately 90 min. I adapted the focus group

interview protocol (see the Appendix) from Muir (2016) and Zarrinabadi and Soleimani (2024), but certain questions emerged from the discussions (e.g., “You said you were frustrated and isolated. How can you experience the enduring, motivational feelings you described in such conditions?”). The second individual, semi-structured interview, which also lasted between 20 to 30 min, was organized in August 2022, one month after the focus group interview session. It aimed to elicit new ideas or experiences that were not discussed or remained uncovered during the focus group interview.

I considered these interview formats useful to better understand how the participants could be exceptionally absorbed in their academic activities knowing all the tensions (e.g., professional identity tensions, unequal power distribution between native and nonnative speakers of English, racism, colonizing ideologies, etc.) that study-abroad programs in Inner Circle countries can involve. This is because interviews are more personally retrospective and elicit the views of an individual that they are willing to share, while focus group interviews are more socialized and relaxed, and they also shed light on the participants' collective experiences as a group. It is worth noting that a professional note-taker (a graduate student majoring in applied linguistics) was present at the two interviews and the focus group interview session to take notes. I, the researcher, also took notes of the interviews to ensure that I would reliably report what the participants said. Due to the small size of the cohort, I also performed member checking (Duff, 2008) after the data were analyzed and drafted in report form. That is, each participant was allowed to read the results in their report form and comment on the results and outcomes. Each participant was also allowed to correct or anonymize any reporting, so that the stories and research I report are vetted and allowed to be reported by the participants themselves. For example, the participants chose their pseudonyms, and they also suggested that the researcher display their comments without fillers, such as “uhm, eh, etc.” Concerning the report, they made few minor changes so that it could represent what they said during the interviews.

Data Analysis

After the data were collected and transcribed, resulting in approximately 45,000 words, I used deductive thematic

analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017) to manually analyze and understand the factors that triggered and sustained the participants' DMCs. I first read through the data to obtain a general understanding of them. Then, I interacted with the data to develop the initial themes. After this step, I used the initial themes that emerged from the data to code the printed copies with colors that represent each specific theme. This part was iterative because I moved

back and forth over the data to code them. In the last steps, I reviewed and named the final themes to better reflect the experiences that the women participants described. For example, I grouped certain themes into one major, larger theme. The initial themes on DMC generators were grouped into one main theme, Professional tensions and emergent opportunities. Table 2 provides an overview of the initial and final themes.

Table 2. *Initial and Final Themes*

Initial Themes	Final Themes
DMC Features	
1. Making exceptional efforts to achieve the routines	1. Productivity out of expectations
2. Making exceptional efforts to become more organized and professional	
3. Feelings of becoming more confident and satisfied	2. Feelings of living something unique
4. Feelings of becoming more powerful	
5. Resistance to homesickness	3. Extraordinary feelings of resilience to any forms of emotional challenges
6. Resistance to colonizing ideas: racism/native speakers' supremacy, etc.	
DMC Triggers	
7. DMC generator: Frustration	4. Professional tensions and emergent opportunities
8. DMC generator: Isolation	
9. DMC generator: Professional opportunities	
DMC Supports	
10. Family members as motivators	5. Significant others
11. Colleagues and friends as motivators	
12. US mentors as motivators	
13. Skills match the challenge	6. Sense of competence
14. Progress checks balance difficulties with skills	

Note. DMC = directed motivational current, US = American.

It is necessary to note that I have been inspired by some features that are considered as characteristics of DMC experiences based on conceptual and empirical research on DMCs (e.g., Dörnyei et al., 2014, 2015, 2016; Henry, 2019; Henry et al., 2015) while I was at the stage of naming the final themes. I proceeded this way because some of these features aligned with the final themes of the current study. These major DMC features, based on Henry et al. (2015), Ibrahim (2016), Zarrinabadi and Tavakoli (2017) and Zarrinabadi and Soleimani (2024), include:

- the existence of a clear goal/vision that directs motivated behavior;
- intense, unique motivational feelings that sustain goal achievement tasks;
- surpassing oneself to achieve the desired and valued goal despite obstacles;
- establishment of behavioral routines to pursue the desired goal;
- absorption, that is, being passionate by the desired goal and its achievement; and

- positive emotionality deriving from being satisfied with one's achievements.

The participants or authors of the earlier mentioned studies used these listed features to describe the four core DMC features reviewed above (i.e., goal-orientedness, salient facilitative structure, positive emotionality, and triggering parameters). The absence of some of these features may not forcibly mean that the participants did not experience DMCs because they still have some hidden features that have not been revealed (Başöz & Gümüs, 2022). I also shared my analysis with a colleague whom I met weekly to discuss our discrepancies and solved them by agreeing on the best option as critical friends. The data analysis process spanned over two months.

FINDINGS

I have organized the findings around the three main research questions, which pertain to DMC features, DMC triggers, and DMC sustaining factors.

DMC Features

The women's DMCs were characterized by a productivity out of expectations, living something unique, and extraordinary feelings of resilience to any forms of emotional challenges.

Productivity out of Expectations

The women were passionate about becoming legitimate members of the English pedagogical committee of their home university to challenge their male colleagues' biases. This is in line with Thompson's (2021) research on anti-ought self, which aims to challenge a system, social expectations, and social norms, such as the biases of the participants' male colleagues, to achieve a significant goal. While the interaction of these selves (ideal and anti-ought) guided the women's motivated behaviors, the study-abroad context, alongside the women's exceptional investment into the achievement of their goals, provided them with the necessary condition to take ownership of their motivated actions. This is because they wanted to resist their male colleagues' biases. For example, in Interview 1, Ayo explained: "I could work in the library from 10 am to 6 pm

five times a week without feeling tired or bored." She highlighted that she had to proceed this way because "I knew I could not give myself the luxury to fail, and I wanted to maximize each single opportunity that could help me succeed in my program and position myself as a teacher of English." Ayo's devotion resulted in the production of a Master's thesis and acquisition of new knowledge about the latest trends of teaching EFL (e.g., critical pedagogy, project-based learning, performance-based assessment, language teacher's identity, and topics on L2 learner motivation). Regarding Molobali's exceptional productivity, she commented that she remained focused on her goal and its related tasks although she later realized that it was sometimes challenging to accomplish them:

I read as much as possible, took notes and authored a research project. Every day, I set myself a certain number of tasks that contributed to the completion of my research project. Sometimes I succeeded, but sometimes I just realized half of it. But the thing was that every day, I had some goals. I was remarkably busy, but I did love it that way. (Molobali, Interview 1)

During the focus group interview, Diata revealed that she learned to be organized and to have a study plan for every week. For example, she read and wrote three times a week. Two days were reserved for online webinars, meeting with colleagues or her mentor, and Sundays were for her family:

I could not just stop writing or reading, especially if I understood what I was reading, I did not want to lose the flow. I did not even feel hungry or tired. It was strange, but this was how I could attend and present at conferences, produce two papers before leaving the USA, and learn how to write grant proposals. It is a few papers for an academic from Inner Circle countries, but in my case, I had to learn everything from scratch. (Diata, Focus group interview)

To conclude, the routines established by the participants to be productive in their goal achievement tasks are in many ways identical to those included in the salient facilitative structure of DMCs (Dörnyei et al., 2014, 2016; Henry et al., 2015) to achieve a significant goal.

Feelings of Living Something Unique

During the focus group interview, the women argued that they would never forget their motivational experiences during their study-abroad programs in the USA. They described them as positive and contributing to their becoming valuable English teachers, although they sometimes felt lonely and homesick. Ayo's persistence in efficiently pursuing her goal whenever she received positive feedback from her faculty members propelled her motivational drive as shown in this comment:

I could be tired, and I knew that I was pushing a lot, but I could not just stop. I was only focused on my goal: obtaining a Master's degree from an American university with the best GPA [Grade Point Average]. Whenever I obtained a good grade or a positive comment from my faculty members, I felt more powerful and willing to give more. This feeling of extra power and positivity never left me during my program even though I sometimes faced challenges. (Ayo, Focus group interview)

The women's positive emotions, such as confidence and satisfaction, also supported the emergence of motivational currents that become self-propelling. Molobali, for example, revealed that the special feelings of being confident and satisfied with her performance enhanced her commitment in the pursuit of her goal: "I felt more confident and more engaged to do more and move forward" (Molobali, Focus group interview). Diata also believed that her intense motivation increased her commitment to the pursuit of the end goal:

It was difficult to resist these special motivational moments that invaded me during my stay. I was so motivated that I just wanted to materialize each single opportunity I was offered at these specific periods. There was nothing that could distract me at that time. (Diata, Focus group interview)

In summary, the participants spontaneously adjusted their effort investment as reaction to positive feedback on their performance and also to achieve the sub-goals. This is in line with DMC research (Dörnyei, 2016; Ibrahim, 2016, 2020; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021) on the roles of positive affect and feedback in sustaining goal commitment.

Extraordinary Feelings of Resilience to any Forms of Emotional Challenges

The positive feedback the women received on their high productivity from their mentors and significant others may have interacted with the negative feelings they experienced in their home country: frustration for Ayo, isolation for Molobali, and dissatisfaction for Diata to generate the women's resilience. For instance, Ayo explained that the frustration she experienced in her home country along with the separation from her husband and children while she was in the USA made her more productive rather than impeding her efforts to succeed in her studies:

Whenever I thought of my family during my stay, I became more motivated to achieve my goal and return home with my degree. I wanted to be a model for my family and for my students by facilitating the processes of teaching and learning English for them. I wanted to develop strategies that could help them learn English in a Francophone setting. (Ayo, Focus group interview)

Molobali revealed that she developed resilience because of her vision and the inner strength that drove her to resist difficulties, such as isolation in her home university, to remain committed to completing her program activities.

My willingness and determination to develop professionally and expand my skills were stronger. The separation from my family was in fact difficult, but it did not decrease my enthusiasm to achieve my dream. It was even productive because I wanted to succeed for them, and I knew that I had to resist challenges. (Molobali, Interview 2)

Although Diata acknowledged that it was sometimes difficult for her to be separated from her husband and children and to live in a country where people constantly reminded her that she was a foreigner, she finally argued that this did not decrease her levels of motivation, as shown in the following comment:

'What did you mean, can you please repeat what you said?' This reminded me that I am a nonnative speaker and that my English is not perfect. However, my goal was clear, and nothing could stop me from achieving it even those racist native speakers' negative attitudes. Within time, I learned

to cope with all these and succeed in my program (Diata, Interview 2).

In short, the women's resilience combined with the established routines to achieve their goals helped them bounce back from negative circumstances to experiencing DMCs.

DMC Triggers: Professional Tensions and Emergent Opportunities

The professional identity tensions in the women's home country and the visiting program to the USA available to challenge them provided a framework for their intense motivational experiences. For example, Ayo became passionate about studying abroad to change her position to react to her male colleagues' negative comments aimed at undermining her position as a teacher of EFL:

I could no longer stand seeing them treating me like a secretary just because I did not benefit from an opportunity to study in an English-speaking country. I was ready to face any types of difficulties abroad rather than being classified as a second-zone class English teacher. (Ayo, Interview 1)

However, Ayo's passion culminated in DMCs when she was awarded the Fulbright grant to study in the USA: "It was like my solution was here, and I had to grasp it [Fulbright Scholarship] before it vanished. This is how I started envisioning a new professional life for myself" (Interview 1).

Molobali revealed in Interview 1 that she was attracted by the professional opportunities offered by study-abroad programs to gain legitimacy in her field and to save face: "I was fed with being treated as an inefficient teacher just because I am a woman." However, she explained that she started investing more effort in her career to succeed at all costs when she went to the USA as a Fulbright visiting scholar and met new academics there: "Changing environment and meeting other academics who were ready to help me take my career to the next level changed everything for me." Molobali's meeting with new colleagues and her determination to save face acted together to spark her DMCs.

Along the same lines, Diata, in Interview 1, pointed out that she decided to apply for Fulbright to achieve her goal

because of a colleague's prejudice: "It all started with this question: Can she teach this subject? You know, she has never been to an English-speaking country, she did all her studies here [Mali]. This was enough for me." However, Diata's DMCs were launched when she went to the USA and met her mentor who became her confidant: "I relied on her because she treated me as an equal colleague and helped me co-construct my knowledge. This was important for me to move on" (Diata, Interview 1).

To summarize, emergent opportunities alongside the women's passion to achieve their goals at all costs undid negative emotions (e.g., frustration, and dissatisfaction) to trigger long-term DMCs.

DMC Supports

The women in the current study revealed that their DMC experiences were supported by significant others' positive behaviors and a sense of competence.

Significant Others

Significant others provided the women with positive progress checks enabling them to accomplish the tasks that contributed to the achievement of their most significant goal of becoming experts in their fields. For example, Ayo explained that she would never forget her mentor's constructive feedback positioning her as a practitioner-researcher. The mentor's feedback increased Ayo's confidence, which, in turn, drove her to invest more energy in her goal achievement activities:

This outstanding and famous professor qualified me as a good writer despite my simple writing style. He added that my papers contained only minor grammatical errors and word choices that could be easily fixed. This was important to me because it means that I already have some potential to become an expert. He was like a driving force for me. (Ayo, Interview 2)

Although Molobali was separated from her children, her husband accompanied her to the USA. His presence gave Molobali extra energy during difficult periods:

A few of my colleagues and my husband always reminded me that I could make it and even read my publications and provided me with quality feedback allowing me to improve the future projects or proposed to collaborate with them. This recognition was particularly important for me as it established me as a community member. (Molobali, Interview 2)

According to Diata, her children, husband, and friends provided her with positive comments enabling her to become more resilient and determined to succeed. Her mentor's patience and tolerance were other sources of energy, as described in this comment:

She [mentor] never let me feel inferior or undervalued, she always praised my achievements with sincerity but also pointed out my weaknesses. Her comments, whether positive or negative, guided my future actions. Her sense of collaboration and knowledge-sharing also helped me develop my writing skills. She was more than a mentor for me, she was a confidant. (Diata, Interview 2)

To conclude, significant others' constructive feedback was indispensable for the women to sustain their intense motivational experiences.

Sense of Competence

What is interesting is that the women believed that their skills (e.g., linguistic knowledge, actions to save face, and preparedness to cope with difficult periods) allowed them to handle the challenges and the activities related to the completion of their study-abroad programs to become valued EFL teachers in their home country. Their sense of competence sustained the achievement of their goal-related tasks until the motivational currents faded as commented by Ayo during the focus group interview:

In the second semester of my program, I began functioning beyond my normal regime. I used to argue with my professors and classmates over teaching theories and their applications because I was equipped to back up my point with evidence from research and I was no longer complexed. In a word, I was inspired than ever and I could

accomplish my class readings and assignments with an incredible easiness. A classmate, a TA [teaching assistant] even invited me to observe her course and provide her with feedback after each class. We became friends and remained in touch after the program. With her, I improved my computer skills, too. (Ayo, Focus group interview)

The significant others' positive feedback also strengthened the women's perception of goal feasibility as revealed by Molobali (Interview 2), "I published two articles that were written during my stay and completed two others upon my return home." Ayo and Diata were supported by their mentors, who provided constructive feedback on their performance so that they could set future goals. In other words, the progress checks, whether positive or negative, helped the women participants stay focused until the end of their programs. Ayo emphasized that she was motivated to work on her Master's thesis knowing that she could access new knowledge that was beyond her control through her mentor, other faculty members, and classmates:

The fact that someone revises or edits your paper before you submit it and provides you with constructive feedback was something I had not experienced in my context. These novel resources boosted my confidence and determination to write. That way, writing became easier and interactive. (Ayo, Focus group interview)

For Diata, meeting new people, who were more experienced and willing to collaborate with her sustained her motivation to read and write. Knowing that she had access to additional resources allowing her to move forward increased Diata's confidence, which, in turn, motivated her to achieve her vision.

Every meeting with my mentor was a new discovery for me. She was so patient and supportive that I continued telling myself that I could make it. It was at that stage that I learned to become an academic, that is, producing scientific articles and working hard to make transformation in my context. I mean to adapt the current trends or strategies in TESOL [Teaching English to speakers of other languages]. (Diata, Focus Group Interview)

The women had action plans for their return to their home country because they were convinced that their new

professional skills and the teaching resources that they had acquired would enable them to construct their professional lives as they had imagined them during their stay in the USA. Their sense of competence and confidence energized them to design projects that they would implement in their context. This aspect is interesting as it highlights the presence of a future time perspective, which is a DMC marker (Dörnyei et al., 2014). For instance, Ayo described how she was able to adapt critical pedagogy in her context to contextualize the teaching and learning of English:

Upon my return home, I was confident and empowered to discuss national issues, such as democracy, terrorism, war, and peace with my students. We carried out projects related to these topics so that they could enjoy learning English. I also adapted my syllabus to my learners' needs without compromising the requirements of my college. These changes or negotiations have definitively motivated my students to massively attend my courses although their major is not English. (Ayo, Interview 2)

Molobali also revealed that she had bought books and learned how to be a good mentor for her younger colleagues after her stay in the USA:

My motivation stays with me, and I am still mentoring and encouraging my younger colleagues and my students to apply for research grants and build their capacity. I did not relinquish my ambition to share and empower other colleagues and my students, who are not interested in capacity-building, research, and who are satisfied with their daily routines. (Molobali, Interview 2)

In the same vein, Diata explained how she softly navigated through her career after returning home:

I also kept on working and improving my own skills and then improving my classroom practices to motivate my own students to be more interested in their English learning activities. Now, I am more experienced and open-minded and more confident to share what I have learned with my colleagues and students. (Diata, Interview 2)

In the end, the women's strong sense of competence helped them achieve their goals.

DISCUSSION

This retrospective case study with three women visiting scholars aimed to shed light on language teachers' DMC features, triggers, and supports. The findings indicated that productivity out of expectations, feelings of living something unique, and resilience were the markers of the women's DMCs. The women's productivity out of expectations was energized by their anti-ought-to self (Thompson, 2021), a factor that can interact with the achievement of a significant goal at all costs to generate long-term DMCs that have the potential to support the completion of the activities involved in the study-abroad programs. The women's persistence in achieving their goals is also explained by their motivational dispositions to take advantage of the resources available in the study-abroad programs to reconstruct their identity. This finding echoes Sak's (2021) results indicating that certain persons are more predisposed to experience DMCs than others because of their motivational dispositions.

The women's resilience appears to have helped sustain their motivational experiences. What is interesting is that DMCs have not been associated with resilience in previous studies (e.g., Henry et al., 2015; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli, 2017). While negative feelings induce people to save face (Ibrahim, 2017), positive feelings sustain persistence (Ibrahim, 2016, 2020). The successful interaction of these feelings may have made the women resilient so that they can be predisposed to experience DMCs. This is reasonable in the sense that the women in the present study entered in DMCs when they met new people and new opportunities in the study-abroad programs. This finding supports Fredrickson and Levinson's (1998) undoing hypothesis stating that people may use the experiences of positive emotions to gradually recover from negative ones. Additionally, resilient teachers use strategies to cope with adversity to remain efficient (Hiver, 2018). The regulation of motivated behaviors to meet the challenges included in the recurrent routines are also involved in DMCs' facilitative structure (Dörnyei et al., 2014). Therefore, further studies should collect data from high-resilient, motivated language teachers to closely examine how resilience can energize ongoing DMC-driven motivated behaviors. This will help advance research on language teacher motivation, as it is an under-studied area in DMC research, despite the significant role played by teachers in the processes of teaching and learning a new

language, and the fact that they work amid adversity (Stewart & Reinders, 2024).

Additionally, the women's DMCs were supported by their sense of competence and the encouragement of significant others who provided them with quality feedback called progress checks. The finding echoes those of the previous DMC-related conceptual and empirical studies on the importance of feedback (Dörnyei et al., 2014, 2016; Zana & Soleimani, 2024) in sustaining motivated behaviors. The absence of progress checks, whether positive or negative, can impair the occurrence of sustained motivated behaviors (Dörnyei et al., 2015). This is because positive feedback boosts people's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), while negative feedback empowers them to evaluate and adjust their effort investment to meet the challenges involved in goal achievement tasks (Zarrinabadi & Soleimani, 2024). The finding, additionally, confirms Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory stating that the reconciliation of negative and positive feelings broadens people's minds and increases their motivation to take actions that are conducive to success. It is worth mentioning that these dynamics are also included in the DMCs, as explained by Dörnyei et al. (2014, p. 14): "In an upward spiral the energy level associated with the behavioral sequence grows incrementally as one build up momentum or expertise, or the outcome becomes increasingly more within arm's reach, the common observation that success breeds further success." The only way for individuals experiencing DMCs to be aware of the achievability of their goal and stay on track to build their success is through progress checks that provide them with quality feedback on their performance (Dörnyei et al., 2016).

Study Limitations

The present study has a methodological limitation related to the retrospective nature of the collected data that did not allow the researcher to capture all the dynamics included in the women's DMCs ongoing over time as they were experiencing them. However, the period was limited to two years to minimize memory distortion in the remembered and discoursed narratives (Zarrinabadi & Soleimani, 2024). Retrospective narratives were the best options to ensure that this research is reported by the participants themselves, and also to uncover details that could not be captured by any numbers (Dörnyei, 2014; Duff, 2019). Although the

narratives are specific to these Malian EFL teachers, they can be used to understand and research other language teachers' DMCs in similar conditions (Dörnyei, 2014). Further studies should adopt a longitudinal approach with teacher reflective journals, motigraphs, and pre-and-post interviews to collect ongoing DMC data from visiting scholars to ensure that the maximum of DMC dynamics is captured over time.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study add to the prior literature on language teachers' DMCs, namely, Zarrinabadi and Tavakoli's (2017) study with Iranian teacher trainees, in many ways. First, it examines an area that is understudied and underrepresented in DMC research: West African visiting EFL women teachers' DMCs in the context of study-abroad programs in Inner Circle countries. Second, the study confirms the occurrence of DMCs among these women despite the challenges associated with study-abroad programs and the biases they faced in their home country. Third, the findings showed that positive and negative feelings sparked the women's DMCs due to their motivational dispositions to use the resources available to them in the study-abroad programs. Finally, the construct of resilience, which was not associated with DMCs in previous studies (Başöz & Gümüş, 2022; Henry et al., 2015; Safdari & Maftoon, 2017; Sak, 2019, 2021; Zarrinabadi & Soleimani, 2024; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli, 2017), revealed to be a core DMC feature that interacted with the other variables (e.g., women's passion to succeed in their careers, persistence, and opportunities) to sustain the women's DMCs.

These findings are meaningful for visiting EFL teachers from contexts that lack teaching resources and professional development opportunities. For example, visiting scholars can use their study-abroad experiences, such as knowledge of new pedagogical tools, including new trends in EFL assessment, to make educational changes and innovations in the processes of teaching and learning EFL in their home countries. The adaptation of these new methods can compensate for the limited access to updated teaching materials. To achieve these goals, the organizations that sponsor study-abroad programs should ensure that the scholars are hosted by universities, including mentors, who are willing to treat them as equal partners and help them co-

construct their knowledge in a friendly and safe atmosphere so that their motivated behaviors can be triggered and sustained like those of the women in the present study. Thus,

the Malian university authorities should establish social justice for women teachers so that they can navigate through their tensions and achieve their most significant career goals.

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Author's Contributions

KK designed this study, collected data, analyzed them, interpreted the results, and drafted the manuscript. KK also read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Ethics Approval & Consent to Participate

This study was approved by the University Ethics Committee of Research – an IRB number is not provided for studies of this kind in this university. The participants gave their written consents to participate in the study before the data collection.

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APPENDIX. Focus Group Interview Discussion Questions

1. Can you tell me about your motivational experience?
2. How did it start?
3. How did you feel about it?
4. How was your daily schedule?
5. What was particularly interesting about your experience?
6. What was your goal? Did you achieve it?
7. Was there any change in your daily routine or study plan?
8. Do you remember when it started?
9. Do you remember what triggered your motivation?
10. When did it start to lessen?
11. What do you feel after that experience?
12. Would you like to have such a motivational experience again?
13. How do you think this experience influenced your feelings and beliefs about English teaching and learning?
14. Do others' (e.g., family members, colleagues, friends) reactions influence your motivation?
15. What kinds of comments did you receive? How did they affect your motivation and energy?
16. Did others' feedback influence your energy to pursue your goal? How?
17. What really helped you stay focused and achieve your goals?