

# THE DYNAMICS OF MOTIVATION AND INFORMAL ENGLISH EXPOSURE Evidence from a case study<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** – This qualitative case study investigates the dynamic nature of motivation in language learning, grounded in Dörnyei and Ushioda’s L2 Motivational Self-System theory. This framework emphasises complexity arising from patterns rather than simple cause-and-effect relationships, focusing on motivational thinking rather than viewing motivation as a fixed entity. Data are open-ended interviews. The participants consist of 26 university students attending various undergraduate and graduate courses at a medium-sized university in Southern Italy. The findings highlight the intricate and multifaceted influences of social and family relationships, internal factors, and learning experiences on extramural English exposure, while also revealing emerging patterns in students’ motivational thinking. The data underscore the pivotal role of teachers in fostering or diminishing motivation to learn a second language (L2) during childhood and adolescence. A significant similarity in experiences was noted during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, indicating a release from perceived external pressures from parents and teachers. By contrast, a distinct pattern of difference was observed in how teachers affected students’ motivation. Effective teachers inspire students, while encounters with pedagogically challenged teachers do not always lead to demotivation. Some learners proactively seek alternative means, such as non-formal instruction, to enhance their language proficiency. This transition marks a significant shift in students’ motivational thinking, as many began taking ownership of their language learning, aligning with their Ideal L2 Self. Additionally, a causal pattern emerged regarding the role of media in motivating language learning, with video games and English-language videos cited as catalysts for interest in the language. These media sources evoked positive emotions and sustained motivation. A motivational pattern related to the frequent exposure to video was also observed during the COVID-19 lockdowns, with students increasing their use of video-based content over reading, a shift interpreted as a reaction to the pandemic and its associated restrictions, which decreased their attention levels.

**Keywords:** motivation; English; second language; informal language exposure; learning practices; media.

<sup>1</sup> The authors worked together in analysing data, participated in discussions to address any differing opinions, and ultimately reached a consensus or shared perspective. The paper is the result of a writing partnership. Though, to accomplish some countries’ academic requirements, we specify that Paola Leone is responsible for sections and subsections 1, 2, 3 (including 3.1, 3.1.1, 3.1.2); Emanuela Paone is responsible for sections and subsections 2.1., 2.2., 2.3, 4. Both authors are responsible for the abstract.

## 1. Introduction

English holds a unique position among second languages (L2) due to its status as a global language. It serves as a bridge connecting people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds worldwide. Consequently, there are many contexts and resources in which this language is used. In diverse manners and extents individuals feel motivated to enhance language skills in this language both in and outside the institutional contexts.

This paper investigates how students perceive the factors driving university students to engage with English across various media platforms (e.g. TV series, music, social networks, blogs/vlogs, YouTube, video games, websites, online press, radio, and music, outside the institutional context). Methodological considerations related to qualitative research and findings regarding the factors influencing students' exposure to the English language are presented. Specifically, the study focuses on informal language contacts, which refer to any spontaneous language encounters by students that are not prompted by the institution (Caruana 2021; Pavesi, Ghia 2020; Pavesi *et al.* 2023; Sundqvist, Sylvén 2016). Throughout the paper, in line with Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016), this type of exposure will be referred to as 'extramural'.

The study is rooted in the L2 Motivational Self System theory (Ushioda 2001; Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011; Dörnyei *et al.* 2015). It encompasses three dimensions, all of which will be examined: a) L2 learning experience, concerning the perception of how the immediate learning environment and experience influence language learning (e.g. the teacher's impact; Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011); b) Ought-to L2 Self, reflecting the attributes that individuals believe they should possess to meet others' expectations (e.g. parents, friends) and avoid potential negative outcomes; c) Ideal L2 Self, representing the learner's positive self-image as a successful L2 user.

The approach described in this paper is in line with the complex dynamic systems theory, which asserts that 'no behavioral phenomenon has a single explanation' (Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011, pp. 98-99) and suggests that complexity within a phenomenon emerges through patterns rather than predictable cause-effect relationships. Embracing this view, termed socio-dynamic (Ushioda, Dörnyei 2017), implies moving beyond those cognitive and psychosocial theories (Gardner 1985) that consider the context as a static element and as an external variable influencing the individual. The fundamental objective of studies in this latter perspective is to create generalizable linear models capable of forecasting which types of motivation may influence certain learning behaviors within particular contexts. This understanding would consequently guide appropriate pedagogical interventions aimed at altering unproductive motivation patterns and ultimately enhancing learning behaviors and results. Instead, our approach aligns more closely with a contemporary situative

perspective, which regards the individual as an integral part of the context and as an agent capable of influencing and being influenced by the dynamic and changeable nature of that context. As a result, the focus of inquiry moves away from viewing motivation as a static, quantifiable concept to considering motivational thinking. According to Ushioda (1998), this refers to students' evolving perceptions of the factors influencing motivation and their perspective on different facets of their motivational experience over time. In simpler terms, motivational thinking refers to how individuals conceptualise what motivates them and how their ideas about motivation evolve with increasing experience over time. Essentially, it pertains to our understanding and perception of what drives us to action and how this understanding evolves throughout life.

Following Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) recommendation, the current investigation employs in-depth interviews as a research instrument capable of capturing the inherent complexity of motivation, in the sense of motivational thinking. Data have been collected from 26 participants attending the University of Salento (Lecce, Italy) who took part in a nationwide quantitative study, carried out in 4 Italian Universities.

Extensive research (see Al-Hoorie, MacIntyre 2020 for a review) has shown that motivation is pivotal for language learning. However, the influence of this internal factor on informal language exposure has so far received little attention in the research literature. The current paper contributes to this field, recognising that language exposure in extramural contexts (Sylvén, Sundqvist 2012; Sundqvist, Sylvén 2016) is becoming increasingly important in individuals' daily lives.

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 outlines the study's objectives and research design, including details on participants, data collection and analysis procedures. In Section 3, findings are presented. Finally, Section 4 provides insights into the main points and key findings of the study and suggests potential avenues for further research.

## 2. Researching university students' motivation

Dynamicity, a fundamental concept within Dörnyei and Ushioda's L2 Motivational Self-System theory, embodies the complex, changeable and intricate nature of the phenomenon of motivation. As described by Dörnyei (2009), dynamicity is characterised by the interplay of attracting or propelling forces, which are influenced by various factors. The strength of a particular force can be heightened or diminished by specific combinations of environmental and temporal conditions. Thus, something that seemed insignificant recently may now exert a temporary or lasting influence, depending on the circumstances.

The methodology chosen for the present study aims to capture the complexity of how motivation is perceived, emphasising the need to avoid concentrating solely on a singular deterministic explanation. In this light, the analysis required a broad perspective to identify and highlight patterns in the data that reflect this complexity.

Patterns, in this context, correspond to the elements of Dörnyei's model, where motivation is shaped by the interplay between Learning Experience, the Ought-to L2 Self and the Ideal L2 Self. These patterns (see also Saldaña 2013) can be manifested as follow:

- *Similarity and difference patterns* reflect for instance how students' L2 Selves are similarly shaped by their personal aspirations or goals or vary according to external pressures or expectations in distinct contexts.
- *Frequency* shows how often certain motivational factors, like the influence of personal goals or external obligations, arise in learners' experiences.
- *Sequence* refers to how motivational processes unfold over time, such as when the Learning Experience evolves and impacts the Ideal or Ought-to Self.
- *Causation* explores how one aspect of motivation, like self-confidence or the learning environment, can drive other behaviors.
- *Correspondence* links motivational patterns to related factors, like how Learning Experience might reinforce or hinder the development of the Ideal L2 Self.

The following subsections begin by describing the interview, namely research tool used for eliciting data. They go on to present subjects that have been used for the study and the coding method employed for the analysis. Finally, findings on Dynamicity are presented.

### **2.1. Interview structure and data collection procedure**

In line with the methodological guidelines proposed by Ushioda and Dörnyei, we developed a semi-structured interview framework aimed at exploring students' motivational perspectives. The interview was structured into four sections, with each section featuring questions based on a synthesis of insights from two quantitative studies (Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011; Ushioda 2001). We incorporated elements from both the structured questions typically found in quantitative research and suggestions from qualitative interviewing literature. As the conversation progressed, questions related to each section arose organically, allowing topics to unfold naturally in the flow of dialogue.

The initial section (*What English language learning motivation means*, Ushioda 2001) aimed to explore the concept of motivation in English language learning and its underlying factors. It included questions such as *Ti definiresti una persona motivata allo studio della lingua inglese? In che misura? In che modo*

*manifesti la tua (scarsa/elevata) motivazione all'esposizione alla lingua inglese fuori dai contesti istituzionali? Ti senti (più o meno) motivato/a rispetto ai tuoi compagni?* ('Would you consider yourself a motivated person in the study of the English language? To what extent? How do you express your (low/high) motivation for exposure to the English language outside institutional contexts? Do you feel (more or less) motivated compared to your peers?').

The second section (*Ought-to L2 Self*, Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011; Ushioda 2001) delved into the influence of relationships such as family, parents, teachers, and friends in shaping the students' perception of their 'Ought-to L2 self' and its impact on their motivation. It included questions like: *C'è qualcuno che ti ha incoraggiato a studiare la lingua inglese/I genitori, gli amici?; è importante per te non deludere le loro aspettative?* ('Has anyone encouraged you to study the English language? For instance, your parents or friends? Is it important for you not to disappoint their expectations?').

The third section examined students' extramural exposure to English through media, exploring the modalities of access, the affordances, the attitude towards the English language. It included questions like: *In quali occasioni svolgi attività in modo del tutto autonomo – senza sollecitazione da parte dei tuoi professori – in lingua inglese? In generale guardi film in lingua originale anche in lingue diverse dall'inglese?* ('On what occasions do you engage in activities in an entirely autonomous manner – without prompting from your teachers – in the English language? Do you generally watch movies in their original language, even in languages other than English?').

Lastly, the fourth section sought to gain insights into students' 'Ideal L2 self' (Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011), investigating how they envision themselves in the future and the role of English in their lives, e.g. *Come ti immagini in futuro? Quello che vuoi fare in futuro richiede la conoscenza della lingua inglese? Ti immagini in futuro a lavorare adoperando esclusivamente la lingua inglese?* ('How do you see yourself in the future? Does what you want to do in the future require knowledge of the English language? Can you imagine yourself working exclusively using the English language in the future?').

The data were collected and recorded by a PhD student who conducted the interviews in Italian. To create a relaxed atmosphere conducive to informal interactions, we intentionally chose a young interviewer. This approach aligns with Lambert's concept of 'wine and conversation,' as highlighted by Lambert (1968 in Spolsky 2000), and Ushioda's emphasis on the reliability of informal interactions in assessing motivation (Ushioda 2020). The interviewer prepared for the task by studying literature on conducting interviews. The interviews underwent a pilot phase, involving individuals not included in the sample. Subsequently, researchers and interviewers discussed the recorded interviews in terms of question quality and opportunities to further develop some issues that emerged during the conversations.

## 2.2 Participants

Participants were selected from a nationwide quantitative study (Pavesi *et al.* 2023; Pavesi this volume), focusing on individuals enrolled at the University of Salento, a mid-sized institution in Southern Italy. Specifically, participants were those who willingly volunteered to participate in our qualitative investigation. Considering the open-ended nature of the questions, we opted for a limited sample size of 26 students. The number was deemed appropriate as it provided a manageable amount of data, enabling the identification of common patterns and facilitating comparisons among students. The selection criteria comprised participants' level of informal exposure to the English language<sup>2</sup> (low/high) and their academic discipline, which included humanities, social sciences, and STEM fields. Although variations in degree programs could potentially influence student motivation data, this factor was not examined in the current study but may be investigated in future research. The sample is composed of 12 students with low exposure and 14 with high exposure to English. Although the participant group had a higher proportion of female participants (18 female and 6 male students), this was not considered significant to the study for two key reasons. First, gender differences were not included in the focus of the research (for those interested in this topic, see Yashima *et al.* 2017). Second, contemporary L2 acquisition theories view gender as a social identity that intersects with other identities such as ethnicity and social class (Norton, McKinney 2011). This perspective recognises that gender is inherently complex and varies from person to person. Consequently, behaviors cannot be generalised based solely on this aspect (McKay, Wong 1996).

Each participant was offered a voucher worth 25 euros to be redeemed at a bookshop in exchange for the participation in the interview. In accordance with Ushioda (2001), this strategy effectively fostered a collaborative attitude.

Table 1 outlines the composition of disciplinary groups as elicited in the previously mentioned quantitative study, shedding light on their demographic characteristics.

	N. Subjects	Age range
<b>SAA Group</b> (Humanities)	15	21-27
<b>SAB Group</b> (Social sciences)	5	19-21
<b>SAC Group</b> (STEM)	6	21-25

Table 1  
Subject demographics.

<sup>2</sup> Exposure indices were created by multiplying the average frequency of activities by their average duration (Pavesi, Ghia 2020; Pavesi *et al.* 2023).

### **2.3 Coding and analysis procedure for highlighting dynamicity**

To conduct this investigation, we adopted a qualitative research design using content analysis (Neuendorf 2017; Saldaña 2013), using the Transana software.<sup>3</sup> The interviews were automatically transcribed through Speechmatics, a plugin integrated with Transana.

A preliminary content analysis was conducted on a limited dataset to formulate initial codes, guided by Charmaz's (2001) suggestion that, in qualitative data analysis, a code functions as a construct, imbuing specific data pieces with interpreted meaning.

The coding decisions were grounded in the theoretical framework guiding this research, incorporating key elements of Dörnyei and Ushioda's L2 Motivational Self-System, the emergent conceptual framework, and the research objectives. Thus, we developed codes such as 'Ideal L2 Self' and 'Ought-to L2 Self', aligning with the concepts outlined in the model. Moreover, our study goals influenced certain choices in defining these codes. For instance, given that our research focuses on understanding the dynamic nature of students' motivational thinking regarding informal language exposure, we recognised the need to not grant particular prominence to classroom learning experience, as in Dörnyei and Ushioda's model. Instead, we expanded our scope to include the roles of teachers and peers as additional factors influencing motivation, categorised under 'Factors Affecting Motivation' (FAM), with a specific focus on the relationship dimension rather than the classroom learning experience as delineated in the Motivational Self-System model. This category (FAM) also encompasses parents and family as subcodes. Furthermore, we introduced a category labeled 'Media Access' to precisely capture students' extramural English language input. Conversely, the 'practice' code was utilised to highlight behaviors associated with the use of various resources, outside the classroom and unsolicited by teachers.

Following the preliminary coding, all data underwent two cycles of analysis. The first cycle involved applying initially defined codes to the entire dataset, accompanied by a comprehensive review and refinement of the previously established codes. In the second coding cycle, the meanings previously attributed served as a foundation for a more refined task, which included identifying patterns, establishing more in-depth categories, and developing theories.

This analysis utilised Transana's code mining function, which organises data based on their codes (Saldaña 2013), and streamlines analytical procedures, thereby establishing a more stable bridge between data and their significance according to the adopted analytical framework.

<sup>3</sup> Woods D. 2024, *Transana v5.2x*. <https://www.transana.com>. Madison, WI: Spurgeon Woods LLC.

Employed coding methods were mixed and matched (Saldaña 2013). Consequently, we primarily utilised two types of coding:

- Structural or holistic coding: this method was instrumental in generating comprehensive lists of major categories, such as the previously mentioned FAM and the Ideal L2 Self.
- Pattern coding: used to explore explanations within the data, according to the model. A code such as ‘dynamicity’ was employed, particularly to elucidate fluctuations in language learning motivation.<sup>4</sup> The ‘dynamicity’ code cuts across the other developed structural codes (i.e. Factors Affecting Motivation, Ought-to L2 self, Ideal L2 Self, Media Access).

To grasp the dynamic essence of motivation within the data, we sought contextual factors (e.g. relationships with teachers, parents, and peers) or internal factors (individual self-concepts: ought-to L2 self and ideal L2 self), or media access and practices that could either enhance or diminish students’ opportunities for exposure to English. This task was facilitated when students explicitly used the word ‘motivation’ or ‘demotivation’, or related vocabulary (i.e. ‘he demotivated’) following changes in the broader context (e.g. different teachers) or time-related factors (e.g. before it was X, now Y). Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge the complexity inherent in capturing these oscillations. As Ushioda (2009, p. 215) contends, attempting to delineate a linear causality between contextual factors and individuals’ self-perceptions oversimplifies the intricate relationship.

Although some interviewees discussed changes in their learning experiences and language input, these were not coded as motivational dynamicity if they did not influence motivation. For instance, one participant briefly used language-learning apps like Duolingo and Babbel but did not find them effective, leading to disuse. This reflects a shift in resource preference rather than a change in motivation for language exposure.

Similarly, another participant described a shift in her approach to learning unfamiliar words while watching media in a foreign language. While she initially paused to note and search for word meanings, she no longer feels the need to do so, likely due to improved language competence. This change in learning practice was not coded as motivational Dynamicity, as it did not directly affect motivation.

Essentially, the coding and analysis approach primarily aimed to capture the complexity and uniqueness of participants’ motivational responses to specific life events and experiences, while avoiding reductionist cause-and-effect interpretations.

<sup>4</sup> We did not have the opportunity to employ ‘In Vivo coding’, an approach that involves using participants’ direct language as codes to anchor the analysis in their perspectives.



### 3. Findings: Insights into the dynamic nature of motivation

The results highlight the dynamic nature of motivation as it emerges in the narratives of interviewees' personal lives. Analysing various key factors discussed in response to interviewer questions reveals patterns in the data, illustrating the complexity and variability of the phenomenon. Additionally, the interaction between environmental and temporal conditions influencing English learning and exposure brings out unique characteristics and behaviors in individuals.

This section is organised as follows: subsection 3.1 delves into school, social and family relationships as factors influencing student exposure to English; subsections 3.2. and 3.3. illustrate how dynamicity emerges in interviewee' motivational thinking, specifically, in terms of ought-to L2 self and ideal L2 self, and media access and practices.

#### 3.1. School, social and family relationships impacting students' motivation

This subsection explores the relationships students believe affect changes in their lives and shape their motivation toward English language exposure. Early in the interviews, students reflect on whether they feel motivated or unmotivated, revealing factors that either boost or hinder motivation. These include the influence of teachers, friends, parents, and experiences such as travel or time spent abroad.

##### 3.1.1. Teacher's role dynamics: Catalysts and barriers to student motivation

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping student motivation, either fostering it or causing demotivation. Students describe their experiences with 'good' and 'bad' teachers, focusing on teaching methods, relationships with students, and overall attitudes. A shift from a good to a bad teacher reduces motivation, while the reverse increases engagement and interest in studying English. When it comes to characteristics, effective teachers are those that inspire students to develop a passion for the subject (SAB0512: *'nelle scuole superiori mi è – mi ha appassionata tanto perché la professoressa era un sacco in gamba e ti faceva insomma amare la materia'*; 'in high school I was so passionate about it because my teacher was really skilled and she/he made you love the subject').

Students also value certain aspects of the 'instructional context' (Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011, p. 26) that are attributable to teachers. During their childhood 'very playful and enjoyable teaching activities' made interviewees love the English language, as stated by SAA0517: *'attività didattiche molto giocate, molto piacevoli anche da quel punto di vista e senza neanche*

*accorgermi stavo imparando un sacco di cose quando sono arrivata alle medie* ('very playful and enjoyable teaching activities even from that perspective, and without even realising it, I was learning a lot when I reached middle school).

Conversely, in more advanced schools, attention towards language accuracy is appreciated and the importance of the study of grammar is estimated as relevant for shaping student's English expertise. Indeed, SAA0575 says: *'la professoressa ci teneva molto specie a inquadrarci dal punto di vista grammaticale poi effettivamente mi è servito e durante gli anni'* ('The teacher cared a lot, especially about helping us focus from a grammatical point of view, which actually served me well over the years').

On the other hand, it is positive to be a remarkably innovative teacher, suggested by SAA0575: *'avevo dei docenti che erano veramente all'avanguardia per l'inizio 2000'* ('I had teachers who were truly ahead of their time for the early 2000s'). For instance, a student appreciates one of her teachers who uses more updated teaching methodologies paying attention to communication and not to language accuracy. In fact, she mentions what the teacher used to say, as shown in extract 1.

(1) SAA0556\_FAM\_TEACHER\_DYNAMICITY<sup>5</sup>

SAA0556: *a me non interessa una frase sintatticamente corretta, mi interessa che voi sappiate parlarlo o che questa è la cosa più importante. Mi interessa che voi siate fluidi perché poi la correzione sintattica arriva nel tempo e questo è ovviamente parliamo 2010, quindi i primi del 2010 è un metodo di insegnamento molto avanti rispetto a quello che viene sempre insegnato a scuola quello grammatico traduttivo.*

"I don't care about a syntactically correct sentence; what matters to me is that you know how to speak it or that this is the most important thing. I care that you are fluent because then the syntactic correction comes with time, and obviously, we're talking about 2010, so early 2010 is a teaching method far ahead compared to what is always taught in school, the grammatical-translation approach."

A teacher must also be 'acknowledging,' valuing students' skills and competences, as asserted by SAA0556, *'più che spronarmi hanno riconosciuto le mie abilità'* ('More than just encouraging me, they recognised my abilities'). In this statement, the interviewee emphasises that acknowledging students' abilities is an effective way to empower them. She later mentions that she has never been in situations where a teacher told her that she was worse than she

<sup>5</sup> Each extract reports the clip name created for analysis, which includes: a) information regarding the interviewee's degree course (SAA GROUP, HUMANITIES; SAB GROUP, SOCIAL SCIENCES; SAC GROUP, STEM; see section on Participants); b) a unique identification number; c) one or more abbreviated words capturing the salient features of the data contents.

actually was, highlighting the importance of interacting with educators who never diminish their value.<sup>6</sup>

Teachers can also hinder students' motivation and progress. These language instructors, perceived as 'pedagogically challenged', evoke negative feelings related to a particular subject, as highlighted by an interviewee who states that her teacher did not motivate her and instilled fear of English in her (SAA0521: *'quella del primo anno non mi motivava infatti avevo quasi paura diciamo del di questa materia'*; 'The one from the first year didn't motivate me; in fact, I was almost afraid of this subject.').

Poor and demotivating relationships with teachers can stem from various reasons. For example, a student suspects that her teacher was jealous or felt 'offended' by the student's pre-existing knowledge of English: (SAA0517: *'Alle superiori in realtà è stato controproducente il mio sapere già un pochino l'inglese perché avevo professoressa posso dire che si sentivano un po' offese dal fatto che io sapessi già qualcosa'*; 'In high school, it was actually counterproductive that I already knew a little English because I had teachers, I can say, who felt somewhat offended by the fact that I already knew something'). For this reason, she perceived that the teacher 'threw a bit of a spanner in the works for me' (SAA0517: *'Però questa è una mia illazione e quindi diciamo che mi ha messo un po' i bastoni tra le ruote'*; 'However, this is just my speculation, so let's say she threw a bit of a spanner in the works for me'). A student underlines that, as a personal initiative, to compensate for the poor instruction he received in school, he attended a course for language certification (SAA0575: *'durante gli anni del liceo invece sapevo di quella di quel lato negativo quindi ho provveduto a studiare con altri docenti all'esterno'*; 'During high school years, however, I was aware of that negative aspect, so I took it upon myself to study with other teachers outside of school'). Thus, non-formal language instruction was a compensatory strategy for instruction offered by institutional state education. Still, informal learning in autonomy is not mentioned as a solution to the problem. Besides, SAA0575's experience emphasises the intricate nature of the system and the intertwined contextual factors that contribute to the maintenance or emergence of motivation. We see here that motivation, arising organically from a person's unique experiences and interactions, is protected like a precious asset. A similar scenario unfolds with SAA0517. In her narrative, she emphasises how personal interests and self-directed learning act as safeguards against the erosion of motivation for learning English within the school environment. Reflecting on her encounter with a teacher lacking motivation and who

<sup>6</sup> SAA0556\_FAM\_TEACHER\_DYNAMICITY

SAA0556: *una cosa importante da dire, così come anche a livello di insegnamento, non ho mai avuto situazioni in cui un professore mi ha detto che ero peggio di quello che ero.*

"An important thing to say, as well as in terms of teaching, I have never had situations where a teacher told me that I was worse than I was."

devalued her (as discussed earlier), she underscores the crucial role of her own initiative. Had she not sought resources beyond formal education, her enthusiasm for English might have dwindled. However, by prioritising cultural immersion over mere language acquisition, she successfully sustains her interest autonomously. In fact, she explains: *‘se non mi fossi messa io da sola, magari a fruire di materiali esterni al contesto didattico, probabilmente il mio interesse per l’inglese sarebbe morto sinceramente, però forse per questa attenzione un po’ più all’aspetto culturale e non linguistico, sono riuscita a portarlo avanti personalmente’* (‘If I hadn’t taken the initiative myself, perhaps by accessing materials outside the educational context, my interest in English would probably have honestly died however, perhaps due to this slightly more cultural rather than linguistic focus, I managed to sustain it personally’).

In conclusion, the findings align with established research, indicating that learners view teachers as influential figures affecting their motivation and behavior (Atkinson 2000; Radel *et al.* 2010; Roth *et al.* 2007). Interviewees describe effective teachers as catalysts for motivated learning, while those with pedagogical challenges are seen as demotivators. This interaction between student and teacher motivation can lead to either positive or negative outcomes. The data also highlight the significance of real-life experiences in understanding motivation dynamics. For instance, one interviewee actively seeks lessons outside the institutional setting to counteract potential demotivation from ineffective teachers, supporting Ushioda’s (2009) assertion that cause-effect relationships in motivation are complex and not always predictable. Importantly, not all students respond to pedagogically challenged teachers with demotivation; individual attitudes can drive learners to pursue alternative enriching experiences that help preserve their language competence.

Overall, the investigation reveals both similarities and differences in interviewees’ perceptions of teachers’ roles. While the influence of teachers is consistently recognised across different students, its impact on shaping behavior varies. Additionally, the complexity of motivation is underscored by the interplay of environmental and individual factors that either promote or inhibit motivation for English language exposure.

### *3.1.2. Parental and peer Influence on motivation: Interviewees’ perspectives*

In the interviews, parents and peers do not appear to play an active role in motivating students, as they are not frequently mentioned. However, when parents are discussed, they are often portrayed as supportive. For instance, they may suggest experiences that enhance their children’s learning (SAA0159\_FAM: *‘questi viaggi studio in realtà non c’entravano con la*

*scuola, ma sono è stata proprio mia mamma a scoprirli e a consigliarmi*’; ‘These study trips weren’t actually school-related but it was my mom who discovered them and recommended them to me’), or they may be depicted as individuals who encourage students to pursue their interest in the language. In extract 2 SAA0169 recounts how her parents paid for a certification course for her and explains their rationale and supportive attitude.

(2) SAA0169\_PARENTS

I: *Quindi questo [...] corso che hai fatto che si può definire extra scolastico non l’hai fatto perché sei stata motivata, stimolata o perché semplicemente volevi farlo tu, un po’ tutti e due?*

SAA0169: *Perché i genitori mi hanno detto visto che sei così brava, perché non devi avere delle certificazioni che dimostrano che tu hai un livello di inglese che ti potrebbe servire per il mondo del lavoro. E io mi sono convinta per questo.*

“I: So, for the course you took, which can be considered extracurricular, did you do it because you were motivated, stimulated, or simply because you wanted to do it, or a bit of both?

SAA0169: My parents told me, ‘Since you’re so good, why don’t you get certifications that prove you have a level of English that could be useful for the world of work?’ And I was convinced because of this.”

The correlation between various family characteristics and practices and academic performance has been extensively studied by educational psychologists. To the best of our knowledge, there are currently no studies that explore the correlation between family characteristics and exposure to the English language outside of formal educational settings, independent of institutional solicitation (although some research has addressed this topic in the Italian context; see Sordella 2016). However, when considering research on school achievements, it emerges that a supportive family atmosphere plays a significant role compared to the other three parenting factors traditionally recognised as influential in shaping student motivation: appropriate timing of achievement demands, confidence in children’s abilities, and having highly motivated role models (Eccles *et al.* 1998; Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011).

When considering social factors, peers do not appear to be particularly influential. Students do not perceive a temporal evolution in friends and schoolmates motivating them, but rather, the interviewees highlight the varying degrees of motivation exerted by friends as a situational influence. There are contexts in which a student feels positively influenced by her peers and contexts in which she is not, as underlined by SAB0327 in the following extract.

(3) SAB0327\_FRIENDS

I: *ci sono state occasioni in cui magari confrontandoti con non lo so un amico un collega un po’ più motivato questo è servito da stimolo a te per avvicinarti ancora meglio alla lingua oppure no*

SAB0327: *Sì e no. Nel senso, dipende anche dal contesto, magari in contesto scolastico, con qualcuno con cui diciamo eravamo sulla stessa linea d'onda e allora la motivazione veniva fuori. Nel senso che magari non lo so, anche per scherzare ti mettevi a masticare qualche parola così, anche se non era corretto. Invece magari con chi? Appunto. Come ho detto prima alcuni colleghi anche adesso con cui magari l'inglese non lo calcolano proprio diciamo rimane lì rimane piatta la questione.*

“I: There have been occasions when, perhaps, comparing yourself with, I don't know, a friend, a colleague who was a bit more motivated, served as a stimulus for you to approach the language even better, or not.

SAB0327: Yes and no. I mean, it also depends on the context. Maybe in a school context, with someone with whom, let's say, we were on the same wavelength, then motivation would come out. In the sense that maybe, I don't know, even just for fun, you started chewing on some words, even if they weren't correct. Instead, maybe with whom? Exactly. As I said before, some colleagues even now, with whom maybe they don't really consider English, it just stays there, the matter remains flat...”

In conclusion, parents and friends do not appear to exert significant influence. It should be observed, however, that this research likely lacks sufficient data in this regard for two main reasons. First, the scope of the interview was limited, focusing on whether students acknowledged the direct influence of parents and peers on their decisions. As a consequence, it did not examine how parental and peer lifestyles and behaviors may have affected the interviewees' choices. Second, the adult age of the interviewees may contribute to explaining the lack of data. Previous research indicates that parents and peer groups have a greater impact during earlier educational stages (e.g. Pomerantz *et al.* 2007 for parental influence; Berndt, Keefe 1995; Lewis, Sullivan 2007 for peer influence). Particularly among adolescents, peer groups can exert substantial influence, often surpassing that of parents during this period (Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011). By contrast, as adults, the interviewees' identities and self-concepts are more established. Additionally, as university students transitioning into new environments and social circles, social influences tend to play a less prominent role in their decision-making.

Dörnyei and Ushioda's theory suggests that the process of identification, underlying integrativeness in Gardner and Lambert's (1959, 1972) model, might be better explained as an internal process of identification within the individual's self-concept, rather than identification with an external reference group, whether peers or the community speaking the target language. This internal dimension of L2 learners' motivational thinking is further discussed in the following subsection.

### 3.2. Ought -to and ideal L2 selves: Exploring evolving identities

As previously mentioned, the ought-to self-guides have a prevention focus, regulating the absence or presence of negative outcomes, and are concerned with safety, responsibilities, and obligations (Dörnyei 2005, p. 101), whereas the ‘ideal L2 self’ orientation has a promotion focus, concerned with hopes, aspirations, advancements, growth, and accomplishments. Our examination reveals numerous factors influencing changes in the dimension of students’ ought-to self, alongside discernible patterns. In fact, certain factors appeared to be consistent across some students, for instance the temporal factor along with personal evolution of their self-perception. As students progress through developmental stages, their growth is marked by transitions towards heightened autonomy in decision-making processes, reflecting a decreased reliance on external pressures, such as parental or pedagogical expectations, and a concomitant increase in self-directed motivations, as made explicit in extracts 4 and 5:

(4) SAC0523\_OUGHTTOSELF\_DYNAMICITY\_PARENTS

I: *è importante per te non deludere le aspettative della tua famiglia in merito all’argomento lingua inglese?*

SAC0523: *Forse quando ero più giovane sì, però poi chiaramente maturando e passando gli anni si comprende che certe scelte, fare un corso di lingua o anche studiarlo da autodidatta – dipende sempre però dalle basi che hai – è essenziale se vuoi raggiungere determinati obiettivi o se vedi che quelle competenze potrebbero servirti in ambito non solo istituzionale ma anche di vita e quindi poi diventa una spinta intrinseca quella di migliorarsi.*

“I: Is it important for you not to disappoint your family’s expectations regarding the English language topic?”

SAC0523: *Maybe when I was younger, yes, but then as I matured and the years passed, you understand that certain choices, taking a language course or even studying it as a self-taught learner – it always depends on the foundations you have – are essential if you want to achieve certain goals or if you see that those skills could be useful not only in institutional but also in life settings. So, it gradually becomes an intrinsic drive to improve.”*

(5) SAA0170\_OUGHTTOSELF\_DYNAMICITY\_PARENTS

SAA0170: *Prima quando ero più piccola e quindi ero meno sicura delle mie abilità sicuramente di più adesso che ritengo che siano appunto consolidate magari di meno però c’è stato sicuramente questo questo fattore.*

“Before, when I was younger and therefore less confident in my abilities, definitely more so now that I believe they are indeed consolidated, perhaps to a lesser extent, but there has certainly been this factor.”

Both SAC0523 and SAA0170 exhibit a progression in their attitudes towards English language learning, initially shaped by familial expectations. SAC0523

acknowledges that family expectations played a significant role in his younger years, but as he matured, he recognised the intrinsic value of language proficiency for personal and professional development. This shift reflects a movement from external pressures to a focus on self-improvement and the practical benefits of language skills, aligning with the ideal-self dimension, which emphasises self-promotion over avoidance of negative outcomes.

Similarly, SAA0170 highlights how her family's expectations influenced her early on, particularly when she lacked confidence in her language abilities. Over time, as her skills solidified, the pressure to meet these expectations lessened, indicating a transition from external validation to a more self-assured sense of competence. Both cases reflect a common theme of evolving motivations, shifting from external to internal drivers for learning, resonating with the ideal-self framework.

Concurrently, environmental catalysts play a crucial role in shaping the dynamicity of individuals' 'ought-to L2self.' Life-altering events, such as the loss of a parent, can provoke profound shifts in self-conceptualization, particularly in instances where the deceased individual represented a source of external pressure, as in the case of the student SAA0556:

(6) SAA0556\_OUGHTTOSELF\_DYNAMICITY\_PARENTS

*SAA0556: Mia madre purtroppo è venuta a mancare nel 2021 e in questa situazione devo dire che la sua morte mi ha portato sicuramente dei lati molto negativi, però mi ha comportato, mi ha portato anche dei lati estremamente positivi. Per esempio, il fatto che io sia riuscito ad appropriarmi delle mie capacità senza applicarle sugli altri, perché ripeto gran parte della mia vita in generale non solo a livello di dell'utilizzo dell'inglese ma in generale su tutto su tutti gli ambiti derivava dal fatto di in qualche modo doverle far piacere ed è una cosa che non poteva restare per sempre [...]. Per questo motivo io oggi con mio padre mi trovo molto meglio perché lui vuole risultati e io i risultati glieli porto perché non ha bisogno di sapere tutto [...] mi sento molto meno diciamo attanagliato da questa cosa, semmai la sensazione di dover rendere al meglio possibile adesso lo applico a me stesso come senso di sfida.*

“Unfortunately, my mother passed away in 2021, and in this situation, I have to say that her death certainly brought some very negative aspects, but it also brought some extremely positive ones. For example, the fact that I managed to develop my skills without applying them to others, because I repeat, much of my life in general, not only in terms of the use of English but in general in all areas, stemmed from the need to please her, and that couldn't last forever [...]. For this reason, I now get along much better with my father because he wants results, and I bring him the results because he doesn't need to know everything [...]. I feel much less overwhelmed by this, and if anything, the feeling of having to perform at my best now applies to myself as a sense of challenge.”



In this excerpt, the student reflects on the multifaceted impact of his mother's passing: while acknowledging the negative aspects, he also highlights the positive outcomes, particularly in terms of personal growth and autonomy. He describes a shift from seeking external validation, primarily from his mother, to a more self-directed approach in utilising his skills and meeting expectations, particularly with his father.

Regarding the dynamicity within the ideal-self dimension, our data unveil a notable trend: certain students, who previously held a clear vision of their future selves embracing English, have demonstrated a shift in perspective, as elucidated in the following excerpt:

(7) SAA0169\_IDEAL L2 SELF\_DYNAMICITY

I: *Per ragioni lavorative per ragioni di studio, perché ti piace?*

SAA0169: *Cioè sì, mi riesce bene utilizzare l'inglese principalmente nella mia vita, nel futuro però sinceramente cercherei di non di non accantonare la lingua e cercare sempre di mantenere un minimo di l'italiano lo spagnolo giapponese delle altre lingue preferirei magari 90% usare l'inglese e quel 10% lo divido tra le altre lingue. Comunque sarebbe un peccato lasciare l'italiano come lingua, lasciarla così nel cassetto, dimenticatoio, certo, anche perché quando ero piccola volevo tantissimo andare a vivere in Inghilterra. Mi vedevo già quindi a vivere principalmente in con usando la lingua inglese. Però riflettendoci vorrei non lasciare le altre lingue. Vorrei comunque dare un 50 e 50 a tutte le lingue.*

“I: For work reasons, for study reasons, why do you like it?”

SAA0169: Yeah, I'm good at using English mainly in my life. In the future, however, I would honestly try not to set aside the language and always try to maintain a minimum of Italian, Spanish, Japanese, and other languages. I might prefer to use English 90% of the time and divide that remaining 10% among the other languages. However, it would be a shame to leave Italian as a language, to leave it in the drawer, forgotten, of course, because when I was little, I really wanted to go and live in England. I could already see myself living mainly by using the English language. But on reflection, I would not want to leave the other languages. I would still like to give an equal share to all languages.”

The student reflects on her language use and future aspirations. She perceives herself as proficient in English and acknowledges its predominant role in her life. However, she expresses a desire to maintain a balance between English and other languages, such as Italian, Spanish, and Japanese. Despite her childhood aspirations to live in England and predominantly use English, she now values the importance of preserving her proficiency in other languages. She wishes to allocate equal attention to all languages, emphasising the significance of linguistic diversity and the retention of her plurilingual skills. This sensibility for languages beyond English may stem from her enrollment in a Linguistic Mediation degree program, which exposes her to various

languages and fosters a profound understanding of plurilingualism and its significance in her life. The need to preserve personal identity is exemplified also in the following excerpt:

(8) SAA0556\_IDEAL L2 SELF\_DYNAMICITY

SAA0556: *Io vorrei essere cioè nella mia testa io voglio essere un cittadino del mondo cioè non voglio essere una persona che viene da Lecce o da Taranto o da Bari voglio essere una persona che non si capisce. Però la verità dei fatti è che anche se quella è un po' la parte, un po' l'anello debole di tutto il discorso, se cambiassi troppo il mio accento non mi sentirei più me.*

I: *Ho capito.*

SAA0556: *Cioè, credo che sia un tratto caratteriale, un tratto personale.*

I: *Ok, è una cosa bella questa c'è comunque, lo vuoi tra virgolette mantenere, vuoi preservare, però magari lo vuoi anche un po'*

SAA0556: *Voglio affinarlo, quello senz'altro. Forse se dovessi affinare qualcosa in questo momento mi concentrerei molto sul migliorare il tipo di pronuncia, magari avvicinarlo, cioè, fare un po' di ibrido cercare di trovare una mia versione della pronuncia ovviamente senza fare strani mix cose, cioè, mantenendo sempre il mio inglese che a questo punto io direi che è globalizzato perché non ha influenze relative al British o all'americana o all'Australia.*

“SAA0556: I mean, in my head, I want to be a citizen of the world, you know? I don't want to be someone who comes from Lecce or Taranto or Bari; I want to be someone who isn't easily identified. But the truth is, even though that's a bit of the weak link in the whole story, if I were to change my accent too much, I wouldn't feel like myself anymore.

I: I see.

SAA0556: I think it's a personality trait, a personal characteristic.

I: Okay, that's a beautiful thing to have, though. Do you want to maintain it, to preserve it, but maybe also.

SAA0556: I want to refine it, definitely. Perhaps if I were to refine something right now, I would focus a lot on improving my pronunciation, maybe getting it closer, you know, making it a bit of a hybrid, trying to find my own version of pronunciation, obviously without making strange mixes, you know, always maintaining my English, which at this point I would say is globalised because it doesn't have influences related to British or American or Australian.”

The student reflects on his evolving identity in relation to the English language and his accent. He expresses a desire to be recognised as a global citizen rather than being tied to a specific city or region. While he acknowledges that his accent is a core element of his identity, he recognises that altering it too much could undermine his sense of self. Therefore, he seeks to strike a balance – refining his accent to align with a global identity while preserving its original essence. This evolution in his ideal L2 self is driven by his understanding that English is now a global language, no longer confined to British or American norms. His

perspective highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of context, demonstrating how it shapes his motivations and identity.

### **3.3. Dynamic media access and practices: Exploring evolving trends**

Analysis reveals that students' engagement with English-language media is shaped by both environmental factors and personal interests. Shifts in living conditions and access to technology significantly influence media consumption habits, while individual preferences and the positive emotions from these activities also play a key role. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, has driven increased reliance on digital platforms for entertainment and learning due to changes in lifestyle and routines, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

(9) SAA0517\_COVID\_READING

I: *Ok, di solito sui social network incontri più testi scritti o orali?*

SAA0517: *Orali ma perché credo che siano anche più facilmente fruibili, soprattutto dopo la pandemia, o almeno io mi rendo conto che la mia soglia dell'attenzione dopo la prima quarantena del 2020 si è estremamente abbassata. Quindi un contenuto ma anche ad esempio un articolo di giornale in cui vedo sette sette colonne in fila di articolo. Sono un po' demotivata dal leggerlo o comunque me lo spezzetto in più fasi perché mi rendo conto che anche se continuo a leggerlo tutto, non riesco a interiorizzare magari il concetto che l'autore o l'autrice vuole esprimere. Invece un video, essendo anche magari più coinvolgente visivamente, nel senso magari colori, gesti, ma anche semplicemente il fatto che sia una persona a parlare interrompendo il discorso, magari con una battuta o comunque con una parentesi, penso che sia per me più facilmente fruibile.*

"I: Okay, usually on social networks, do you encounter more written or spoken texts?"

SAA0517: Spoken, but because I believe they are also more easily accessible, especially after the pandemic, or at least I realise that my attention span has greatly decreased after the first quarantine in 2020. So, for example, a newspaper article where I see seven columns in a row of text. I'm a bit demotivated to read it or, in any case, I break it down into multiple phases because I realise that even if I continue to read it all, I may not be able to internalise the concept that the author wants to express. Instead, a video, being perhaps more visually engaging, in the sense maybe of colours, gestures, but also simply the fact that it's a person speaking, interrupting the discourse, maybe with a joke or anyway with a parenthesis, I think it's more easily accessible for me."

The finding that videos are more engaging than written texts resonates with previous research on informal exposure to English through media. Prior studies have highlighted that an inherent attraction to language is closely intertwined

with the hedonic dimension, emphasising the importance of enjoyment when accessing audiovisual content, even in a foreign language (Pavesi, Ghia 2020, p. 99). This observation is especially pertinent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to increased isolation among students and a shift in their media consumption habits towards social media, TV series, etc., consequently diminishing their attention levels.

Personal factors, including individual interests and preferences, exert a considerable influence on the frequency and intensity of their interactions with English-language media, serving also as pivotal catalysts for students' motivation. For instance, music is one of the factors that stimulate learners' interest toward the language, as stated by SAA0538:

(10)SAA0538\_MEDIA\_ACCESS\_DYNAMICITY

SAA0538: *La musica mi ha aiutato molto in questo senso, mi ha fatto interessare tantissimo all'inglese [...] mi piaceva il ritmo, però non capivo cosa stessero dicendo' [...] 'per poi arrivare a una fase in cui vedevo che anche la traduzione magari proposta [...] era sicuramente una traduzione automatica e cercavo di diciamo capire quello che poteva essere realmente il senso di là del della musica [...] e quindi mi ci sono avvicinata in questo modo poi man mano le serie tv [...] Facebook e poi da lì Instagram tutto il resto YouTube tantissimo anche quindi diciamo siamo stati esposti molto di più rispetto alle generazioni precedenti all'inglese quindi credo che nasca da questo anche l'interesse.*

“Music helped me a lot in this sense, it got me very interested in English because I was there, maybe I liked the rhythm, but I didn't understand what they were saying. So, gradually, first there was the search for what they were saying, let's see what it means, then the translation, and then reaching a phase where I saw that even the translation proposed was definitely an automatic translation and I was trying to understand what the real meaning of the music was, and so I approached it in this way, then gradually the TV series.”

Initially drawn to the rhythm and melody, the student progressed from receptive listening to actively seeking out song lyrics, realising the limitations of automated translations and striving to grasp the true meaning behind the music. Overall, the student credits the growing accessibility of English-language content, compared to past generations, for sparking her interest in the language.

This latter excerpt also highlights the interconnectedness of media consumption habits, where exposure to one form of media can serve as a gateway to exploring other types of content (audiovisuals and social networks). This trend is evident in the experiences of other students as well, such as SAA0556, who recounts how English-language Disney videotapes served as a significant catalyst during his childhood, stating: *'devo dire che in quel periodo forse un altro fattore molto importante sono state le videocassette che davano*

*in lingua inglese della Disney. Mia madre me ne comprava diverse e ricordo distintamente che quelle furono forse il fire starter, se si può dire* ('I have to say that at that time perhaps another very important factor was the videotapes they were giving in English from Disney. My mother bought me several of them and I distinctly remember that those were perhaps the fire starter, as it were'). The term 'fire starter' suggests that these tapes were instrumental in sparking or initiating his interest and enthusiasm for learning English. He further emphasises the significance of another form of media in his life: video games. He reflects:

(11)SAA0556\_MEDIA\_ACCESS\_DYNAMICITY1

*SAA0556: Io praticamente ho in qualche modo imparato a parlare in lingua inglese già dalle dalle scuole medie sostanzialmente non grazie allo studio diciamo scolastico ma grazie ai videogiochi perché mi sono avvicinato a due giochi nello specifico che erano Kingdom Hearts due e GTA San Andreas che mi ha dato due varianti completamente diverse dell'inglese e da cui ho preso particolare spunto senza neanche rendermi conto [...] Quindi l'interesse per l'inglese io credo che sia scaturito soprattutto da quel momento specifico da dal fatto che il gioco mi ha divertito mi ha emozionato [...] come già ho detto in altri momenti cioè mi sono sentito trasportato e questo trasporto continuo è un po' con me come se fosse stato un big bang e quindi continua quel moto di espansione fino alla fine [...] insomma fino all'infinito.*

"I practically learned to speak English from middle school, essentially not thanks to school studies but thanks to video games because I got into two specific games, Kingdom Hearts II and GTA San Andreas, which gave me two completely different variations of English and from which I took particular inspiration without even realising it. So, my interest in English, I believe, mostly stemmed from that specific moment, from the fact that the game amused me, excited me... as I've already said on other occasions, I felt transported, and this continuous transport is somewhat with me as if it were a big bang, and so it continues that expansion motion until the end... in short, until infinity."

This excerpt highlights the transformative impact of video games on the student's language learning journey. Immersion in games exposed him to various forms of English, boosting both his proficiency and motivation. He describes a strong emotional connection to playing games in English, saying he feels 'transported', and likens his language learning motivation to a 'big bang' – a continuously expanding force. This reflects the powerful role of positive emotional experiences in enhancing language acquisition, reinforcing findings from previous studies on the influence of affective (see Sylvén, Sundqvist 2012).

Continuing with the same student's narrative, we may also notice another relevant factor, i.e. personal circumstances influence students'

extracurricular engagement with English media, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

(12)SAA0056\_MEDIA\_ACCESS\_DYNAMICITY2

*I: Secondo te le attività che svolgi fuori dal contesto istituzionale le svolgi in modo maggiore o minore rispetto ai tuoi colleghi coetanei a livello proprio di attività extra attività extra istituzionale extra accademica?*

*SAA0556: Fino all'anno scorso sì, erano molto erano molto più presenti molto più influenti ma perché il mio tempo di studio era molto minore. Io ho avuto una vita accademica un po' particolare perché a causa di situazioni sono stato costretto a dover rinunciare agli studi. [...] Mi sono ritrovato con tantissimo tempo libero tra le mani e quindi mi sono ritrovato spesso e volentieri a dovermi riversare in nei videogiochi che sono sempre stati diciamo la costante nella mia vita. Sostanzialmente quindi se dovessi fare un paragone in quel periodo direi di sì era sicuramente molto più presente il videogioco oggi dato che comunque è una diciamo le lezioni sono diverse c'è molto più tempo in università da dover gestire allora è già più difficile però credo che resti comunque di più perché tendenzialmente io ritaglio quelle 2 ore alla giornata quell'oretta e mezza alla giornata per dedicarmi a giocare e quindi o comunque guardare i video i video che trattano di argomenti che mi interessano, che non sono solamente sui videogiochi ma anche su cartoni animati, su anime, cose che possono interessarmi in larga parte e quindi tendenzialmente sono è sempre uno spazio maggiore credo rispetto al resto.*

**I:** Do you think that the activities you engage in outside the institutional context are more or less than those of your peers in terms of extracurricular activities?

**SAA0556:** Until last year, yes, they were much more present, much more influential, but because my study time was much shorter. I had a somewhat particular academic life because due to certain situations, I was forced to give up my studies. [...] I found myself with a lot of free time on my hands, so I often found myself having to immerse myself into video games, which have always been basically a constant in my life. So, if I had to make a comparison during that period, I would say yes, video games were definitely much more present. Today, since the classes are different and there is much more time to manage at university, it's already more difficult, but I still think it remains more because I generally carve out those 2 hours a day or that hour and a half a day to dedicate myself to playing, or watching videos on topics that interest me, which are not only about video games but also about cartoons, anime, things that can interest me to a large extent. So, generally, it's always a larger space, I believe, compared to the rest."

The student reflects on a shift in his activity levels, noting that his engagement in extracurricular activities was higher in the past due to having more free time during a break from his studies. During that period, he dedicated significant time to video games, a constant in his life. Despite changes in his academic

schedule, he still prioritises gaming and leisure activities, consistently setting time aside for them. This suggests that his engagement with English-language media is driven not only by external circumstances but also by personal interests and the positive emotions these activities provide.

Our data analysis reveals a dynamic shift in students' media access experiences, which indirectly influences their motivation. In response to the question about why she accesses English media, SAA0538 acknowledged that initially she felt compelled to engage with English-language media to improve her skills (*'Inizialmente me lo imponevo'*; 'Initially, I felt compelled to do so'). However, over time, this engagement became more spontaneous and natural (*'poi man mano iniziò a diventare sempre più spontanea come cosa'*; 'but over time it became increasingly spontaneous'). This shift highlights a transition from obligation-driven media use to a more intrinsic and voluntary involvement, reflecting an evolving relationship with English media.

(13)SAA0538\_07\_07\_2023\_MEDIA\_ACCESS\_DYNAMICITY2

I: *Lo fai te lo imponi perché devi avvicinarti all'inglese o lo fai proprio nel tempo libero in modo spontaneo?*

SAA0538: *Inizialmente me lo imponevo, poi man mano iniziò a diventare sempre più spontanea come cosa.*

"I: Do you do it because you need to get closer to English or do you do it spontaneously in your free time?

SAA0538: Initially, I felt compelled to do so, but over time it became increasingly spontaneous."

In conclusion, our examination of students' media access and practices reveals a complex interplay of personal, environmental, and experiential factors influencing language acquisition and motivation. Students' varied experiences with music, TV series, and video games underscore the significant role of media exposure. Notably, qualitative shifts in behavior, which cannot be captured by quantitative analysis, indicate that learning experiences can transform initial obligations into spontaneous habits of engaging with the English language outside the classroom. This suggests that exposure and learning experiences are critical variables in shaping students' motivational thinking. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing tailored strategies that effectively support language learning and foster student engagement beyond the classroom, ultimately enhancing their interests.

#### 4. General discussion and conclusions

Our qualitative case study explored the dynamic nature of motivational thinking. Using content analysis and two cycles of interview coding (structural

and pattern coding), we aimed to capture the nuanced and contextually embedded shifts in students' commitment to extramural English exposure.

The findings confirm the intricate, multifaceted influence of social and family relationships, internal factors, and learning experiences on extramural English exposure, while also highlighting emerging patterns. Interestingly, a pattern of *similarity* in students' experiences appeared during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, suggesting a release from external pressures typically perceived as imposed by parents and teachers.

Conversely, a noticeable pattern of *difference* was observed in how external factors, such as the influence of teachers, affected students' motivation in various ways. The data underscore the pivotal role of teachers in either fostering or diminishing motivation to learn a second language (*frequency pattern*). Effective teachers inspire students, but notably, not all encounters with pedagogically challenged teachers lead to demotivation; some learners actively seek alternative ways to enhance their language proficiency, such as non-formal instruction, which sometimes results in certification. This response was also identified as a *sequence pattern*. Essentially, a release from the perceived pressures imposed by parents and teachers marks a key transition in students' motivational thinking, as many began taking ownership of their language learning, aligning with the development of their Ideal L2 Self. This finding reinforces the dynamic and evolving nature of motivation, as described in Dörnyei's model.

A *causation pattern* also emerged, particularly when students discussed the role of media in motivating language learning. Video games, English-language videos, and other forms of media were frequently cited as catalysts for interest in the English language, aligning with previous research (Sylvén, Sundqvist 2012). These media sources evoked positive emotions, which is a component of motivation, and contributed to sustained motivation, illustrating the significant role of external motivators in shaping learning behaviors.

A *correspondence pattern* was observed during the COVID-19 lockdowns, when students increased their use of video-based content, as opposed to reading. This shift was interpreted by interviewees as a reaction to the emergence of the pandemic and subsequent restrictions, which decreased their level of attention.

The study highlights the necessity of seeing each learner as a unique and complex individual, shaped by a distinct combination of experiences, personal traits, and external influences. Rather than viewing learners as impersonal figures, the findings emphasise the importance of recognising the dynamic interplay of factors that influence motivation in individuals. This approach supports a more holistic and nuanced perspective on language learning motivation, consistent with Dörnyei's and Ushioda's frameworks.



Future research could focus on two promising goals to advance knowledge in this field. First, exploring whether students in language degree programs exhibit different motivational patterns compared to those in other disciplines could reveal variations in English learning motivation trajectories across academic settings. Second, examining the influence of parents and peers as role models – considering factors such as their English proficiency, lifestyle, and informal exposure to foreign languages – could provide deeper insights into the impact of family and social relationships on students’ motivational thinking in language learning.

**Bionotes:**

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