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Mariusz Kruk – Masoud Mahmoodzadeh: Motivational dynamics of language learning in retrospect: Results of a study

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## **Motivational dynamics of language learning in retrospect: Results of a study**

Der Zweck dieses Artikels besteht darin, die dynamische Natur der Motivation im Englischlernen retrospektiv aufzuzeigen. 25 Studierende im dritten Studienjahr im Fach Anglistik nahmen an der Studie teil. Die Teilnehmer der Studie wurden gebeten, eine Umfrage auszufüllen. Diese Umfrage betraf die Motivation im Englischlernen, langfristig betrachtet (d.h. von der Grundschule über das Gymnasium, Oberschule bis hin zur Universität, einschließlich des anfänglichen, mittleren und letzten Moments auf jeder Bildungsstufe). Darüber hinaus sollten sich die Studierenden darüber äußern, was sie früher über ihre Englischkenntnisse gedacht und wie sie sich diese in der Zukunft vorgestellt haben. Es wurde auch ein Interview mit einigen Teilnehmern geführt. Die Ergebnisse wurden einer quantitativen und qualitativen Analyse unterzogen. Die Ergebnisse der Studie zeigen, dass sich die Motivation der Studierenden während ihres Sprachunterrichts verändert.

### **1. Introduction**

With more than five decades of continuing research, the field of second language (L2) motivation has greatly enriched the psychological literature of second language acquisition (SLA) beyond doubt. Throughout these years theorising on the nature of L2 motivation from its earliest pioneering conceptualisations, including *integrative* and *instrumental* orientation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), to the more recently influential ones in mainstream motivational psychology such as *L2 motivational self system* (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) has clearly signified the key role of L2 motivation in psychology of language learning and teaching. In emphasising the great importance of motivation witnessed in SLA research, Dörnyei and Skehan (2003: 614) point out that “motivation is responsible for *why* people decide to do something, *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity, and *how hard* they are going to pursue it.” In the same vein, interestingly enough Dörnyei (2005: 65) states that “indeed all other factors involved in SLA presuppose motivation to some extent.” However, it is unfortunate that the recognition of motivational dynamics has not been fully reported in the literature; in fact, surprisingly temporal variations in learner motivation has

not been the main focus of interest to SLA theorists and researchers until quite recently (e.g., Lasagabaster, 2017; Pawlak, 2012; Pawlak, et al., 2014; Kruk, 2016).

For decades, in mainstream psychology L2 motivation was very often viewed as a relatively stable psychological trait which did not change over time, and the temporal dimension of motivation was not explored as such (Dörnyei, 2001). In fact, as Muir and Dörnyei (2013) argue, the traditional view of L2 motivation considers learners as either ‘motivated’ or ‘unmotivated’. By the same token, the theoretical discussions historically characterised through the concepts of integrative/instrumental orientations of L2 motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) practically failed to account for the dynamic character of motivation identified in SLA. Following the early attempts inspired by an emerging *process-oriented approach* (see Shoaib & Dörnyei, 2005) to L2 motivation in the 1990s, however, research on motivational dynamics of language learning was largely fueled by some prominent models of motivation theorists, including Williams and Burden (1997), Ushioda (1996a, 1998), Dörnyei and Ottó (1998), among others. As discussed by Shoaib and Dörnyei (2005: 23), the process-oriented approach “can account for the daily ‘ups and downs’ of motivation to learn, that is, the ongoing changes of motivation over time.” This intriguing line of research into L2 motivation referred to as “the challenge of time” (Dörnyei, 2000: 520) has led to some empirical investigations aimed at raising awareness about the conception of “motivational flux rather than stability,” which had not previously been taken into consideration as such (Ushioda, 1996a: 240). In view of this temporal agency of L2 motivation, Papi and Tiemouri (2012) consider the role of ‘time’ in maintaining L2 motivation over a range of timescales as one of the great challenges learners face in their learning experience.

According to Dörnyei (2001, 2003), motivational dynamics manifestly occurs during a single class as well as over a longer period of time. At the micro-level, motivational ebbs and flows have been recently observed even on a minute-to-minute basis in the L2 classroom in a relatively recent study (Pawlak, 2012), and indeed there has been some evidence showing the small-scale temporal variation of L2 motivation. Similarly, some longitudinal or cross-sectional studies have examined the motivational fluctuations in language learning at various longer timescales, mostly over the period of several weeks or months (e.g., Ushioda, 2001; Shoaib & Dörnyei, 2005; Hsieh, 2009; Kim, 2009; Nitta & Asano, 2010; Piniel & Csizér, 2015).

The objective of this study is to stress the dynamics of L2 motivation at a macro-timescale in retrospect. This is because only a few empirical works have already been conducted investigating the individuals’ motivational variation and intensity over a longer period of language learning (see for example, Shoaib & Dörnyei, 2005

for studying a motivational period of about two decades). With an eye to understanding the changes in L2 motivation over time, it is necessary to delve further into the individuals' past learning experiences over an extended period of time in particular. This is because studying and acquiring L2 would indeed entail a lot of serious effort, work, practice, involvement, and commitment which then may take years or even decades in some cases. As for the "dynamic character and temporal variation" of L2 motivation, Shoaib and Dörnyei (2005: 23) explain that even during a single L2 course one can notice that "language learning motivation shows a certain amount of changeability, and in the context of learning a language for several years, or over a lifetime, motivation is expected to go through very diverse phases."

With hindsight, on one hand, language learners might thus clearly reveal a good deal of interesting discussion on the temporal motivation of their prolonged English language learning experience. On the other hand, seeking to examine language learners' lifelong accounts of their past motivational trajectories one at a time may also help to study the motivational dynamics of their *future L2 self-guides* (see Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) in retrospect. With this in mind, the paper aims at shedding light on L2 motivational dynamics in retrospect with a view to highlighting the dynamic nature of this construct in individual learner differences in SLA.

## **2. Background to the study**

As a motivational theory, the dynamic conceptualisation of L2 motivation (see Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) represented a major shift in the traditional socio-psychological motivation theories. The proposed idea, inspired and theorised following the groundbreaking theoretical paradigms of motivational psychology (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986) and L2 motivation (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Gardner, 2001; Ushioda, 2001), was developed into a workable model called *L2 motivational self system* (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). According to Dörnyei (2009), this model was inspired by the growing dissatisfaction with the long researched motivational concept of '*integrativeness*', which aims at taking into account the process-oriented nature of L2 motivation. That is, by adopting a process-oriented approach in L2 motivation field, the model particularly addresses the internal aspects of the individual's dynamic self system rather than the static representations of his/her self-concept underlying the external view of Gardner and associates' *integrativeness/integrative motivation* by (Gardner, 1985, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In view of this, such a model explains an individual's L2 motivation from "within the person's self-concept, rather than identification with an external reference group" (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002: 453). Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) tripartite model of L2 motivational self system, however, consists of three constituents: *ideal L2 self* (i.e., the motivation related to learners' perceptions of

themselves as successful speakers of the target language), *ought-to L2 self* (i.e., the need and expectation to learn L2 in the eyes of ‘significant others’, including peer group norms, parents’ and teachers’ beliefs, and other external pressures), and *L2 learning experience* (i.e., the motivation triggered by the agents and factors closely linked to the immediate learning environment and experiences, such as the effect of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success, etc.).

The ‘self’ part of this model, in fact, represents the active, dynamic nature of the individual’s self-system advocated by self theorists, which as Markus and Ruvolo (1989) discuss, gradually replaced the traditionally static concept of self-concept. In this view, a person’s self-concept is no longer seen as the summary of “the individual’s self-knowledge related to how the person views him/herself at present” (Dörnyei, 2009: 11). As such, the notion of possible selves (see Markus & Nurius, 1986) was intellectually introduced through some convincing arguments to account for the individual’s future rather than current self states (Carver, et al., 1994). According to Markus and Nurius, there are three main types of possible selves: “(1) ‘ideal selves that we would very much like to become’, (2) ‘selves that we could become’, and (3) selves we are afraid of becoming” (1986: 954). Given the notion of Markus and Nurius’s possible selves, Dörnyei (2005) developed the idea of future self-guides (ideal and ought-to L2 selves), claiming that “possible selves act as ‘future self-guides’, reflecting a dynamic, forward-pointing conception that can explain how someone is moved from the present toward the future” (Dörnyei, 2005: 11).

To come up with successful future selves, learners need to construct their ideal L2 self using imagery to create a personal ‘vision’ of their possible future selves (Dörnyei, 2005, see Dörnyei, 2014; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Muir & Dörnyei, 2013 for a full discussion on ‘vision’). Yet, a vision is not necessary to stimulate motivated action in individuals and it is merely fantasy unless there is a potent motivational surge set up toward a vision of possible future selves called *Directed Motivational Current* (DMC) (see Dörnyei, et al., 2015; Dörnyei, et al., 2014 for further details), which aims to channel and structure the motivational energy towards a predefined, explicit goal (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013).

Of the three constituents of L2 motivational self system, however, the individual’s ideal self has often been found to be a central motivational drive due to its “focused, personal and realistic vision of a possible future” (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013: 360). While the individual’s ideal L2 self can act as an effective motivator, however, there are still some conditions necessary to allow for the full capacity of future self-guides to be realised (Dörnyei, 2009). In short, these conditions call for an elaborate, vivid, plausible, but not comfortably achievable ideal L2 self which is sufficiently different from the learner’s present self and is regularly activated in the learner’s working

self-concept while their ideal L2 self is in harmony or at least does not clash with their ought-to L2 self (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Research questions**

In the present study, the following questions were formulated to address the dynamic character of L2 motivation over a prolonged period of learning in retrospect:

- 1) Is there retrospective variation to be found in the participants' L2 motivation over their prolonged period of language education (from elementary school to university)?
- 2) How have their levels of L2 motivation developed over time?
- 3) Is there retrospective variation to be found in the participants' future self-guides over their prolonged period of language education (from elementary school to university)?
- 4) How have their future self-guides developed over time?

#### **3.2. Participants**

The participants were a group of 25 Polish students (21 females and 4 males) majoring in English philology, enrolled in the final year of a three-year bachelor program (BA). At the time the study was conducted, they were on average 21.9 years of age ( $SD = 1.51$ ) and their mean experience in learning English was 12.3 years ( $SD = 2.87$ ). 18 (72%) students started learning English at elementary school, 4 (16%) at junior high school and 3 (12%) at senior high school. As for prior language learning experience, 14 (56%) participants admitted to attending private lessons or going to study English at private institutions before entering university. In addition, the participants' English proficiency level could be described as ranging from B2 to C1, as specified in the levels laid out in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* (Council of Europe, 2001).

#### **3.3. Data collection tools and analysis**

The data collection tools used in the present study included the *language learning motivation in retrospect* (LLMR) questionnaire (see Appendix 1) along with a follow-up *electronic interview* (see Appendix 2). The aim of the questionnaire was to gather data concerning motivation in learning English. With this in mind, the participants were asked to think back on their L2 motivation since they started learning English formally, namely elementary school. They were asked to describe in what way and why they experienced L2 motivation at each educational level (i.e., elementary school, junior high school, senior high school and university) with their



three different points in time in particular (i.e., beginning, middle and end). In addition to this, the students were asked to explain how they thought of their future English, and imagined themselves in the future at each of these individual timescales. The subjects were also requested to rate the intensity of their L2 motivation at each of these specific educational levels on a scale ranging from 0 (lowest) to 6 (highest). The value of Cronbach's alpha amounted to 0.69, which testifies to acceptable internal consistency (Dörnyei, 2007) and therefore the reliability of the instrument was endorsed. Furthermore, the tool contained a short demographic section to gain information on the participants' sex, age, and prior language learning experience. To ward off potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations and ensure that the responses were indeed reflective of the participants' L2 motivation, the instructions in the questionnaire were also given in the students' mother tongue (Polish) and the learners were given a choice as to whether to respond in English or Polish. However, it is worth noting that 8 (32%) students went for the latter option. The questionnaire was completed by the students anonymously. As for the electronic interview, the participants were queried about their current English proficiency and whether or not they were satisfied with it. Of the 25 students, seven students volunteered to answer the questions raised in the e-interview.

The collected data were then analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The former refers to the numerical data rendered by self-evaluations performed and indicated by the students on an L2 motivational grid in the LLMR questionnaire, while the latter concerns the participants' descriptions of their L2 motivation in the questionnaire and the data collected by means of e-interviews. The numerical data were used to calculate means and standard deviation values for L2 motivational levels at different stages of their education. The qualitative enquiry encompassed carefully reading through the students' descriptions and responses, identifying the common themes and also coding the recurrent ideas. In doing so, notes and annotations were used to record any immediate observations. In addition, using the "quantising" technique, which allows for the transformation of the qualitative data into quantitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 42), the most frequently occurring items in the participants' reports were identified, marked and counted as such.

## **4. Results and discussion**

### **4.1. Motivational fluctuations at different educational levels**

As can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 1, the self-reported levels of L2 motivation at each educational level vary. The levels of L2 motivation reported by the participants were pretty high oscillating between 4.27 (lowest) and 5.28 (highest). With the exception of senior high school, the levels of L2 motivation were always the lowest

at the beginning and the highest at the end of elementary school, junior high school and university, respectively. As for the senior high school, the levels of L2 motivation kept increasing from the start of this school and reached the highest value of all at the end of it. When the average levels of L2 motivation at each educational stage are compared, it also becomes evident that the students appeared to be the most motivated at senior high school ( $M = 4.88$ ) and the least engaged in learning English at junior high school ( $M = 4.44$ ). It should be noted, however, that the *Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test* did not find any statistically significant differences between the levels of L2 motivation ( $p > 0.05$ ). As evidenced later in the data, the increase in the levels of motivation observed throughout the senior high school might be largely ascribed to the participants' willingness to pass the end-of-the school exam or the *Matura* examination in the English subject (for details see the subsection below) as well as their desire to continue learning English at tertiary level. As for the overall decrease in L2 motivation at junior high school, it may be related to learners' overall attitude to school at adolescence.

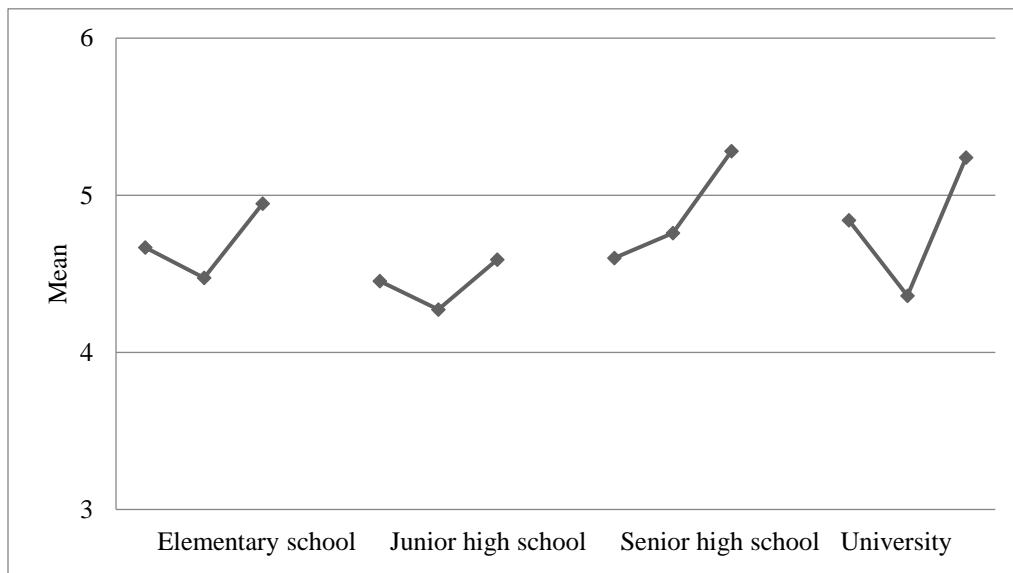


Figure 1: L2 motivational fluctuations at different educational levels

Table 1: The means and standard deviations for L2 motivation at different educational levels

Level of education	Time frame	Mean	SD
Elementary school	Beginning	4.67	1.53
	Middle	4.47	1.31
	End	4.95	1.08
Junior high school	Beginning	4.45	1.41
	Middle	4.27	1.24
	End	4.59	1.47
Senior high school	Beginning	4.60	0.96
	Middle	4.76	0.93
	End	5.28	0.89
University	Beginning	4.84	1.07
	Middle	4.36	1.29
	End	5.24	0.88

#### 4.2. Retrospective variations in L2 motivation

A thorough survey of the students’ descriptions of their experience of L2 motivation at each educational level (i.e., elementary school, junior and senior high schools, and university) with their three different points in time in particular (i.e., beginning, middle, and end) yielded the following thematic categories: *positive perceptions*, *extrinsic factors*, *people factors*, *self factors* and *other factors*.

##### *Positive perceptions*

The category of *positive perceptions* comprised the largest source of L2 motivation (84 references), including three subcategories: *positive feelings* (38), *perceived progress* (29) and *the experience of something new* (17). The analysis of the data demonstrated that, overall, this category remained rather stable throughout the said period of language education (see Figure 2). This is because the number of references for elementary, junior and senior high schools as well as university equaled 21, 23, 18, and 21, respectively.



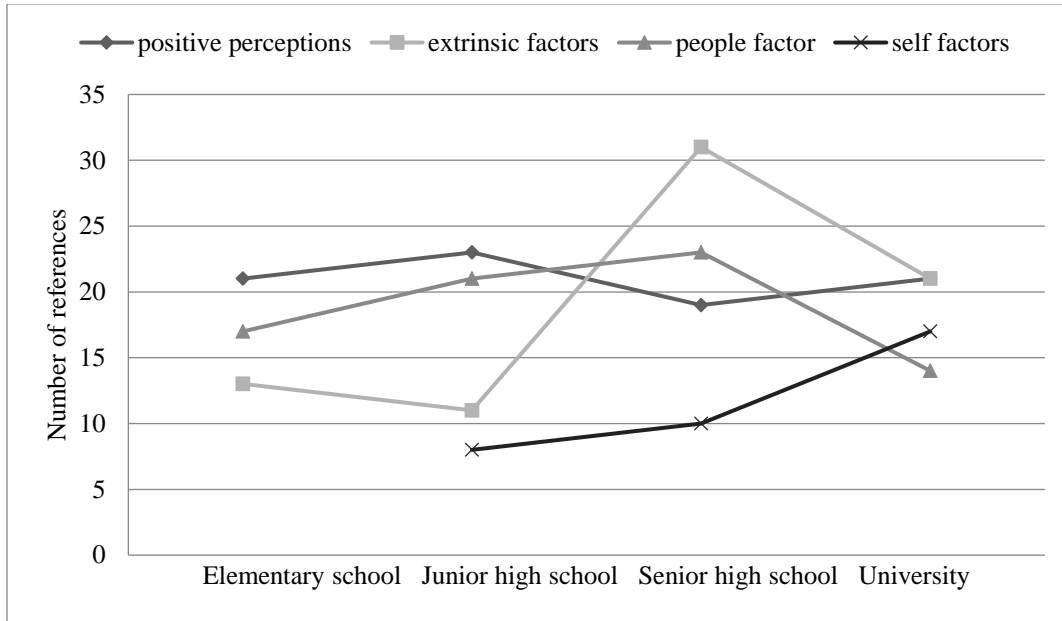


Figure 2: Retrospective variations in L2 motivation at various educational levels

It should be noted, however, that the participants clearly expressed more positive feelings towards learning English at the very beginning of their education, namely at elementary school (12) and junior high school (11), than at later stages of their education, namely senior high school and university (7 and 8, respectively). Interestingly enough, the students were really motivated by the progress they perceived they had made at junior and senior high schools (both 9) along with the experience of something new (elementary school – 4). Some of these points are illustrated in the following excerpts taken from the students’ descriptions of L2 motivation in the LLMR questionnaire<sup>1</sup>:

- S10:** *I don’t remember much but I think I was quite interested in English because I had a teacher who made lessons funny. Sometimes he took his guitar and we sang together simple English songs. (elementary school – beginning)*
- S15:** *I was still very motivated. In junior high school English appeared as even more interesting subject than in elementary school. (junior high school – middle)*
- S20:** *The more I learned this language, the easier it became for me. I was one of the best students in my class and I felt very confident in my English. (junior high school – beginning)*
- S12:** *English was introduced in the middle of elementary school and as a curious child I was very excited to learn something new and foreign, especially since I did not learn any other foreign languages. (elementary school – beginning)*

Although several viable explanations could be offered for why this category remained relatively stable through the entire period of learning the target language in question, one that most readily comes to mind is that the participants had to change schools every few years in order to continue their education and thus they had a chance to experience something new and potentially interesting.

*Extrinsic factors*

*Extrinsic factors* constituted the second major source of L2 motivation in this study (76 references). This category comprised three subcategories: *grades* (35), *exams* (31) and *future profession* (10). As can be seen in Figure 2, this source of motivation was subject to considerable fluctuations throughout the period of time in question. In fact, the number of references to extrinsic factors at the first two educational levels amounted to 13 (elementary school) and 11 (junior high school), whereas the number of references to these factors at the subsequent educational levels increased significantly and equaled 31 (senior high school) and 21 (university). In this respect, the number of references was indeed the highest in case of senior high school.

The desire to obtain good grades underwent substantial changes throughout the period of language education in question. Grades became the most motivating source for English language learning at the first stage of education, namely elementary school (12 references), and then their importance gradually kept decreasing (9 – both junior and senior high schools and 5 – university). Moreover, it is interesting to observe that passing exams at the end of each semester at the university level, and in particular the prospect of taking the *Matura* examination<sup>ii</sup> in the English subject at the end of senior high school, were reported by as many as eight and twenty times during the period of university and senior high school, respectively. Conversely, the students were less motivated by taking and passing exams at the two earlier stages of education (1 – elementary school and 2 – junior high school) despite the fact that students in Poland also take compulsory external tests at the end of each of these levels. As for the last subcategory, future profession emerged at the last two stages of education and became a source of L2 motivation for as many as two senior high school learners and eight university students. This is clear in the following comments made by some students:

**S22:** *I was motivated by grades. (elementary school – end)*

**S7:** *Since I had good grades in the primary school I also wanted to have very good grades in the junior high school. (junior high school – beginning)*

**S3:** *Learning English was still a pleasure to me; however, the Matura examination was in the air and the pressure relating to it. During English*

*lessons we were always reminded about this exam. (senior high school – middle)*

**S5:** *I was the most motivated in the third grade of my senior high school because I wanted to pass the Matura exam in English at the advanced level. I spent a lot of time then learning English. (senior high school – end)*

**S6:** *I want to be a good teacher doing my best to make my dreams come true. I believe that soon everything will be fine and I will finish my studies and I will be a great teacher. (university – end)*

Some of these findings may, on the one hand, testify to the powerful impact of taking and successfully passing exams on L2 motivation and, on the other hand, may show the students' awareness of their outcome and their effect on their future education and career. This is because, simple extrinsic motives such as getting good grades lost their significance with time and gave way to more serious ones (i.e., passing exams that open doors to future education and professional career). It should also be noted that these findings may be reflective of what Kyriacou and Benmansour (1997) labeled a 'short-term instrumental motivation' factor (i.e., the factor that focuses on getting good grades) and 'long-term instrumental motivation' (i.e., the focus on acquiring the target language to enhance one's future professional career).

### *People factors*

Another important source of L2 motivation was related to *people* (75 references). This category encompassed three subcategories: *teachers* (42), *family and peers* (26) and *English speaking people* (7). The analysis of the data showed that the people factor became one of the most crucial sources of L2 motivation for the participants from the very beginning of their language education whilst it was the most important source for the students at senior and junior high schools (23 and 21 references, respectively). Despite the fact that its significance waned as time went by (i.e., at the university level – 14 references), this category remained still relatively influential (see Figure 2).

As mentioned earlier, the participants of the study pointed to teachers as the most motivational source for learning the English language. On the other hand, the analysis of the data revealed that the motivational role of teachers was mostly seen at the junior and senior high school levels (17 and 15, respectively) and rarely seen at the university level (only 2 references). For example:

**S25:** *Our new teacher was great. She was really demanding. I think I learned more grammar and vocabulary than at any other level of education. I remember*

*that at the beginning of each lesson we were speaking about English culture. She gave us English quotes and we were speaking about English films, etc. (junior high school – beginning)*

**S5:** *In senior high school I had a wonderful English teacher. I can say that thanks to her I decided to study English philology. She was so involved in lessons and she explained everything so well that I attended the lessons with a great pleasure. At the same time, she was very demanding so I studied English at home every day. (senior high school – beginning)*

In addition, the analysis of the gathered data demonstrated that the students regarded teachers as a demotivating source of learning the target language (21 references in total), especially at the elementary and junior high school levels (5 and 11, respectively)<sup>iii</sup>. For example:

**S10:** *My English teacher changed and lessons became more boring. I didn't have problems with it but it wasn't my favourite subject either. (elementary school – middle)*

**S24:** *There was a change. I was taught by another teacher. A young one. She was more like a mate therefore it was really easy to get a good grade. I was not motivated at all and I didn't do any progress. (junior high school – middle)*

When it comes to the second largest subcategory including family and peers, it remained at a relatively the same level at elementary, senior high and university stages (8, 8, and 7 references, respectively). It is noted, however, that family and peers played a less important role at junior high school (only 3 references). For example:

**S5:** *At the very beginning I didn't do my best because as a seven-year-old child I didn't realize how important it was to learn a foreign language. My parents wanted me to study English at elementary school. (elementary school – beginning)*

Additionally, having contacts with English speaking people emerged as a motivational source for learning English for five students at the university level, one student at the elementary level and one at the junior high school level. For example:

**S17:** *My motivation is that my fiancé is from Belgium, so I really need to improve my English to avoid the communication barrier. (university – end)*

These findings point to the role of significant others (Williams & Burden, 1997) and their importance in students' motivation to learn a foreign/second language (e.g., Chambers, 1999; Tam, 2009; Lasagabaster, 2017).

*Self factor*

The *self* factor comprised yet another significant source of motivation (35 reference). This category consisted of two subcategories: *self-development* (26) and *self-awareness* (9). As illustrated in Figure 2, similar to other categories, the self factor category was also subject to some change. In fact, it was observed that it was the most important source of motivation for the students at the university level (17 references) but it was not present in the earliest stage of their education. That is, no references to this category were found in the data during the period of elementary school.

When it comes to the *self* subcategories (i.e., self-development and self-awareness), it is interesting to observe that the first references to the former appeared at the junior high school level (7 references) and more references to this subcategory continued to be made over time at senior high school (9) and university (10). The latter emerged in the data at the junior and senior high school levels (both one reference) but only became a relatively large source of L2 motivation after their transition experience from school to university (7 references). This relatively late emergence of these two factors may be related to the fact that, with time, some participants became more independent language learners. As indicated by Ushioda (1996b: 2), “autonomous language learners are by definition motivated learners.” The following excerpts exemplify some of these findings:

- S2:** (...) *I also started to read books in English, watch films in English, which developed my language skills.* (junior high school – middle)
- S7:** *I started to see the point in learning English and I started learning it for myself in order to watch English films without Polish subtitles or to be able to talk to foreigners in English without any problems.* (senior high school – end)
- S11:** *I was pleased that I had the possibility to study what I wanted. I wanted to improve my English thanks to studying it at the university level. I wanted to improve very much. I realised that my command of English wasn't as good as I had thought.* (university – beginning)
- S19:** *I still have the need to improve my language. I know it could be better.* (university – end)

*Other factors*

The analysis of the data also showed that the students were motivated by their English lessons and competitiveness (both 22 references, respectively); however, they pointed out competitiveness and language lessons as the major sources of L2 motivation at junior high school (12) and senior high school (13), respectively. On the other hand, the individual students also found their L2 motivation in travels to other countries (e.g., England, Greece), conducting an English lesson, receiving rewards for good results in learning English, doing easy/challenging tasks, appreciating the importance of English in life or simply passing exams. For example:

- S12:** *Since I was very competitive I wanted to prove to my new class that I was the best! Unfortunately, there was always one person better than me at English but that only increased my level of motivation. (junior high school – beginning)*
- S18:** *My teacher was annoying but I like his classes because despite of being annoying he was a really good English teacher. We did a lot of grammar exercises and speaking tasks. (senior high school – beginning)*
- S4:** *At the end of junior high school, my English was at a good level. I was one of the best English students and then I conducted an English lesson for a younger class of students (it was a project I took part in). It was very motivating for me. (junior high school – end)*

Some of the above findings may be interpreted as relating to the existence of a *critical incident* (Tripp, 2012). This is because, in case of motivation, “a critical incident would (...) be an event that would trigger a significant motivational response in the learner” (Lasagabaster, 2017: 115).

The changes in the students’ L2 motivation were also caused by some demotivating factors. In total, 44 instances were related to a negative impact on L2 motivation were identified during the process of data analysis (it should be recalled at this point, however, that, teachers were also referred to as a source of demotivation as indicated above). Among other things, their reports also included boredom during English classes, tiredness, backlog, family tragedy, unfair assessment, bad grades, the course book, the quantity and quality of the language material to learn, the amount of other subjects at school, failed exams or language anxiety. The following excerpts exemplify some of these findings:

- S16:** *I realise my attitude may seem bad, but really, I simply was ahead of others and I was bored most of the time. (senior high school – end)*



- S18:** *I started to get tired of the university because of too much unnecessary classes which didn't help me to develop my English. More and more I started to lose the desire to learn. (university – middle)*
- S7:** *I lost my motivation for learning English when I was unfairly graded by the teacher for the project I spent a lot of time and effort preparing. (senior high school – middle)*
- S3:** *At the start of learning English at this level it happened what I was most the afraid of the gaps in my knowledge of English I didn't know about before. I was demotivated by being behind with English (...). (university – beginning)*
- S20:** *At the beginning I didn't know how it all looks like and I was a bit scared and confused, but after some time I started to enjoy it. (university – beginning)*

Overall, the results of the study seem to characterize the time- and context-sensitive nature of L2 motivational attributes (Busse & Walter, 2013), as the participants' retrospective accounts of their L2 motivation from school to university, indeed, varied at different educational levels.

### **4.3. Retrospective variations in the participants' future self-guides**

The analysis of the data showed that the participants only occasionally made references to their future self-guides (44 references in total) over the period of their language education. Interestingly, seven students did not address the issue in question in their responses. Nevertheless, the participants' thoughts of their future L2 and the ways they imagined themselves in the future when it comes to learning English were subject to some variation from the very beginning of their language education to the third year at university. As shown in Figure 3, future self-guides were most frequently reported at senior high school level (21), whereas they were quite rare at elementary school (6).

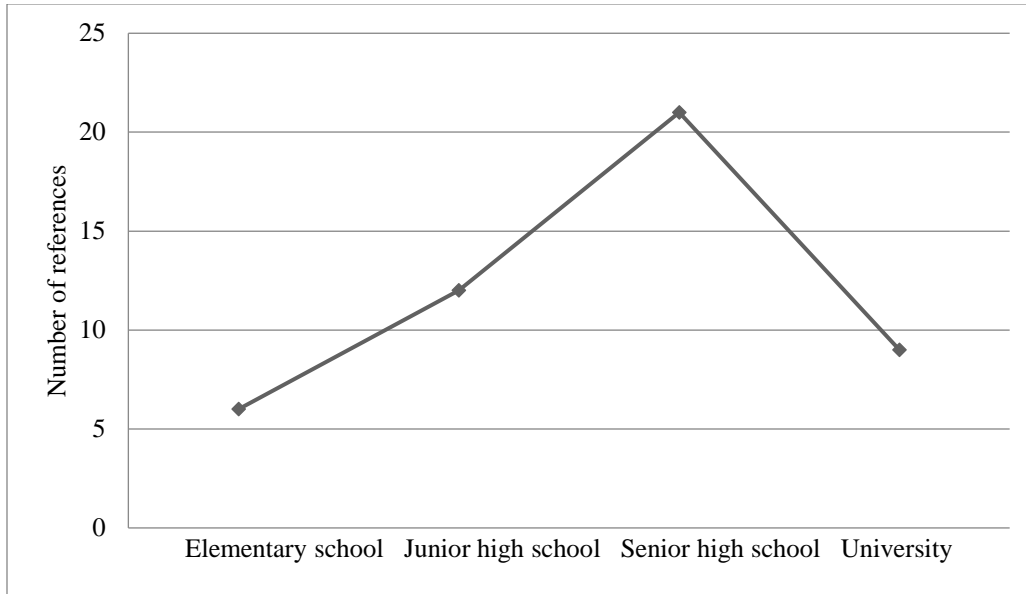


Figure 3: Retrospective variations in the participants' future self-guides at various educational levels

Whilst thinking and imagining about their future L2, some participants wanted to continue learning English at the next stage of their school education (e.g., junior or senior high school) or they even expressed their willingness to study English at the university level. In addition, some individual students imagined themselves as persons who would know the language well; they hoped to be fluent in English, wanted to continue learning a foreign language due to the enjoyment it brings, or realized that they needed to start learning English on their own to get to university. These findings thus clearly support and shed light on the important motivational role of vision in language learning, which is created using imagery by individual learners to manifest their own ideal future L2 selves. As discussed by Dörnyei et al. (2015), this motivational power and energy of 'vision' (Dörnyei 2005, 2009) avoids letting L2 motivation die down in individuals during the whole process of learning; in fact, this made the full capacity of our participants' future self-guides be more realized so that they would remain motivated enough to reach their learning goals. Some other students pointed to mixed feelings about studying English in the future or thought that they would not be able to speak English due to the learning problems they had experienced in the past. Some of these findings can be summarized in the following statements:

- S3:** *I imagined myself as a person who would know the English language well. (elementary school – beginning)*
- S8:** *I still didn't enjoy English classes but I was learning English a lot because I knew I will be learning English in senior high school. I thought I would never*

*speak English because of difficulties which I had faced. (junior high school – end)*

**S15:** *I started to think about learning English in order to become a student at university – I wanted to study English philology so I was motivated. I still considered English as my future subject. (senior high school – beginning)*

**S17:** *I was hoping to improve my English. I really wanted to learn it. I thought that I'd have a big chance to be a good speaker. (elementary school – end)*

The qualitative analysis of the data gathered from the electronic interviews demonstrated that, on the one hand, the interviewees were quite pleased with their current language proficiency, but, on the other hand, they still wanted to be better and they thus wanted to improve their English fluency. Moreover, some students wished to be very good at English, as they considered their English knowledge important for their future career (e.g., teaching profession). For example:

- *Yes, I am happy with my English proficiency. It is not yet what I wanted it to be, but I am working on it.*
- *I'm happy with my English proficiency. It's important for me to be as good at English as possible because I've set a life goal to acquire English and be able to speak and write fluently. It is also important due to my future profession which is teaching English.*

## **5. Conclusions**

This paper set out to investigate the motivational dynamics of L2 learning in retrospect among a group of BA students in a Polish context. In this classroom-based survey, the results showed that there was variation in the participants' L2 motivation over their entire language education (i.e., from elementary school to university) with three different points in time (i.e., beginning, middle and end). In addition, the five categories of factors (i.e., positive perceptions, extrinsic factors, people factors, self factors and other factors) that had brought about the variations in motivation reported at each of these educational levels were also subject to change over time. Finally, the findings also demonstrated that the study participants infrequently made references to their future self-guides throughout their prolonged period of language education; however, their future self-guides were subject to variation.

Such findings, however tentative they may be at this stage, provide a basis for a handful of pedagogical implications. First of all, teachers should pay more attention to a more autonomous language education, particularly at junior high school, by planning and conducting lessons in which students have, for example, more

opportunities to develop their independence, awareness of their needs or self-management of their own learning. Moreover, teachers should try to become role models for their students. Among other things, they should be proficient in the target language, be fair but assertive, always prepared for lessons and conduct them in an interesting and inspiring way. Last but not least, it is crucial for language teachers to try to know their students (especially those at higher levels of education) best by way of investigating their past learning experiences. This can be achieved by distributing among students a variety of questionnaires and conducting a meticulous analysis of the gathered data or by carrying out group discussions during language lessons.

Although the study has, to some extent, contributed to the understanding of the changes that L2 motivation and their future L2 self-guides undergo in a prolonged period of time (i.e., several years), it is not free from limitations that need to be addressed. The first line of shortcoming can be leveled against the procedure that required the participants to think back on their motivation for learning English. Of course, the study just explored the individuals' retrospective accounts to become aware of the developmental route of their L2 motivation and future self-guides; in fact, it did not seek to trace back their histories to explain firmly why they might end up in some particular ways but not others, as we are depending entirely on the participants' L2 motivational past memories in this study that are both possibly incomplete and subject to hindsight bias. Another limitation of the study is related to a small number of participants, which reduces the validity of generalizing the findings. Yet another limitation may concern potential flaws in the data collection tools. Such limitations demonstrate that further research into the dynamics of language motivation from a retrospective viewpoint is still needed. Future studies, for instance, should focus on groups of students from different countries and rely on data collection instruments that should be frequently improved and adjusted to contexts in which such studies are carried out.

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**Appendix 1. Language learning motivation in retrospect (LLMR) questionnaire**

*The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect data concerning motivation in learning foreign languages. That is why we kindly ask you to think back on your motivation for learning English (i.e., your interest and engagement, more and less enjoyable moments, significant events, the importance of English in your life, the role played by your teachers, parents, peers, or teaching materials, etc.) since you started learning English formally, namely elementary school.*

*First, please try to describe in what way and why you have experienced such motivation for learning English at each educational level (including elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, and university) with their three different points in time in particular (i.e., beginning, middle, and end), and then explain how you would think of your future English and would imagine yourself in the future at each of these individual timescales. Finally, please rate the intensity of your motivation for learning English at each of these specific educational levels on a scale ranging from 0 to 6 in the space provided below. If you were not motivated at all, write 0, and if you were very motivated, write 6.*

\*Gender: Male / Female

\*Age: .....

\*Have you ever studied English at private language institutes? If yes, when and how long? And how old were you at that time? .....

**Elementary school**

Beginning: .....

Middle: .....

End: .....

\*Now please rate the intensity of your motivation for learning English in elementary school on a scale of 0 – 6.

Beginning	Middle	End

**Junior high school**

Beginning: .....

Middle: .....

End: .....

\*Now please rate the intensity of your motivation for learning English in junior high school on a scale of 0 – 6.

Beginning	Middle	End

**Senior high school**

Beginning: .....

Middle: .....

End: .....

\*Now please rate the intensity of your motivation for learning English in senior high school on a scale of 0 – 6.

Beginning	Middle	End

**University**

Beginning: .....

Middle: .....

End: .....

\*Now please rate the intensity of your motivation for learning English at university on a scale of 0 – 6.

Beginning	Middle	End (now)

**Appendix 2. Electronic interview**

Please tell me a little about your current English proficiency. Are you happy with it? Is that what you always wanted it to be? Yes/No.

- If yes, to what extent and why? Explain in detail please. What made you motivated enough to improve your English and finally make this possible over the years?
- If no, why not? What happened? Explain in detail please. Did the expectations of your future English change as you were studying at different educational levels? If so, what made you lose your early motivation for learning English at school or university?

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<sup>i</sup> Both here and throughout the remainder of the paper, the excerpts are either translations of the participants’ responses by one of the present authors, or are the original texts in case the students chose to use English to comment instead of their mother tongue (Polish).

<sup>ii</sup> The *Matura* examination is a type of high school finals in Poland.

<sup>iii</sup> It is noted that, in general, there were 63 references to teachers (42 positive and 21 negative).