PÁLFY ANNA

Doctoral School of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University
gyongyosi.anna@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1985-1998

Implicit Motivational Role of EFL Teachers

Teachers' explicit motivational role in motivating L2 learners has extensively been researched (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Cohen, 2010; Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). However, teachers' implicit motivational agency is still under-researched (Kálmán, 2023). This study seeks to explore how EFL teachers influence EFL learners' motivation without the teacher being aware of it and investigate the motivating aspects of EFL teachers' behaviours, attitudes, and interactions. Qualitative data was collected from twelve EFL secondary school learners in a Hungarian context employing a semi-structured interview guide. The findings of the thematic content analysis revealed that motivated EFL learners perceived and could identify the motivating aspects of their EFL teachers' behaviours, attitudes, and interactions. Encouragement and strengthening the learners' *Ideal L2 Selves* through the teachers' interactions with EFL learners were found to be motivating aspects, as well as the teachers' empathy and friendly, kind, supportive, patient, joyful, and enthusiastic behaviour.

Keywords: EFL motivation, implicit motivational role, secondary education, Hungary

1. Introduction

The teacher's key role in motivating second language (L2) learners has been emphasized by several studies (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Ghanizaded & Moafian, 2010; Kálmán, 2023; Lamb & Wedell, 2014; Mezei & Csizér, 2005). As Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) pointed out: "almost everything a teacher does in the classroom has a powerful motivational influence on students," adding that it "makes teacher behaviour a powerful 'motivational tool'" (p. 109). Moreover, Lamb (2017) emphasized that teachers' behavioural patterns identified with the "human side of teaching" seemed to significantly enhance L2 learners' motivation (Lamb, 2017, p. 45). Although previous research primarily focused on the explicit motivational role of L2 teachers, that is, motivational strategies (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Cohen, 2010; Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008), the implicit motivational aspects of motivating L2 learners are still under-researched, as it was emphasized by Kálmán (2023). Therefore, this study aims to explore English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' implicit motivating agency by exploring how EFL teachers might affect EFL learners' motivation without the teacher being aware of it and investigating the affective dimensions of teacher behaviours, attitudes, and interactions in EFL motivation. Several stakeholders might benefit from the findings of this research, such as EFL teachers, teacher trainers and trainees, and school directors, as they

would become more aware that EFL teachers have an implicit role in motivating learners and that there are specific interactions and attitudinal and behavioural patterns that enhance EFL learners' motivation which the learners would benefit from in the long run.

1.1. L2 motivation and the L2MSS

"Motivation concerns the direction and magnitude of human behaviours, explaining the choice of a particular action, persistence in it, and the effort expended on it" (Dörnyei, 2018, p. 1); that is, motivation prompts people to start learning an L2, and later, it contributes to the maintenance of the learning process (Dörnyei, 2018). Motivation was found to have a significant impact on how successful learners became in L2 learning in the long run (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Lamb, 2017; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014; Schumann, 2015).

Different motivation theories have emerged in the field of L2 motivation. Gardner and Lambert's (1959) theory formed the basis of L2 motivation theories. Other significant motivation theories from the past century include – in chronological order – Weiner's attribution theory (1985), Gardner's socio-educational model (1985), the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (1985), and Williams and Burden's (1997) social constructivist model. Ushioda (1996, 1998) reviewed motivation from a temporal perspective, while Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) devised a model of L2 motivation, viewing it as a process. Ellis (2007) formulated dynamic systems theory, and Dörnyei (2005, 2009) constructed the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) developed vision theory, which was extended by the Directed Motivational Currents theory (Dörnyei *et al.*, 2014).

Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2MSS has three components: the *Ideal L2 Self* and the *Ought-to L2 Self*, complemented by the *Language Learning Experience*. For the *Ideal L2 Self*, Dörnyei (2009) provided the following definition: it is "the representation of the attributes that one would ideally like to possess (i.e., representation of hopes, aspirations, or wishes)" (p. 13). On the other hand, the *Ought-to L2 Self* is defined by Dörnyei (2009) as the "representation of attributes that one believes one ought to possess (i.e., representation of someone else's sense of duties, obligations or moral responsibilities)" (p. 13). The *Language Learning Experience* "concerns situated, 'executive' motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g., the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success)" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). The teacher's influential role is part of the *Language Learning Experience* component of Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) theory.

Several empirical studies' findings supported Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) theory: the *Ideal L2 Self* (e.g., Csizér & Magid, 2014; Hessel, 2015; Lamb, 2012), the *Ought-to L2 Self* (e.g., Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Taguchi *et al.*, 2009), and the *Language Learning Experience* (e.g., Csizér & Kálmán, 2019; Lamb, 2012) were

also investigated. The teacher's role as part of the language learning experience was explored by Kálmán (2023), who pointed out that the *Language Learning Experience* should receive more attention as "it is possibly a decisive factor of L2 motivation" (Kálmán, 2023, p. 28).

1.2. The teacher's explicit and implicit roles in L2 motivation

There is a distinction between the teachers' explicit and implicit roles in motivating L2 learners. As Kálmán (2023) emphasized, FL teachers' explicit motivational agency was proved and validated by empirical research, but the teachers' implicit motivating factors and their influential roles are not conceptualized. According to Kálmán (2023), explicit motivating factors are the motivational strategies used by the teachers, while the teachers' attitudes, emotions, and behavioural patterns are considered to have an implicit role in motivating FL learners, even if language teachers are not necessarily cognizant of this impact.

Dörnyei (2001) defined motivational strategies as follows: "techniques that promote the individual's goal-related behaviour (…) motivational strategies refer to those motivational influences that are consciously exerted to achieve some systematic and enduring positive effect" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 27). Lamb (2017) provided a more recent definition for motivational strategies as they are "techniques deployed by teachers to deliberately enhance learner motivation" (Lamb, 2017, p. 2). Both definitions consider motivational strategies as a conscious and intentional use of techniques that stimulate learners' motivation. Motivational strategies were established and formulated by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998), Dörnyei (2001) and Lamb (2019). Based on Dörnyei's (2001) theory, the teacher's role consists of four main phases. First, the teacher creates the primary conditions for motivation. Secondly, the teacher generates an initial motivation in learners. Thirdly, the teacher maintains and protects learners' motivation, and the last phase is that the teacher encourages learners to evaluate themselves positively. The teachers' explicit role in motivating L2 learners was supported by empirical evidence (e.g., Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Cohen, 2010; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Noels *et al.*, 1999).

Regarding the teacher's implicit motivational roles, Csikszentmihalyi (1997) stated that the teacher's motivated, enthusiastic, and inspired behaviour motivates learners, emphasizing the importance of good teacher-student relationships at the same time. Similarly, Mezei and Csizér (2005) found that teachers' enthusiasm and positive attitude towards the learners contributed to a learning environment that was motivating for learners. In addition, Ghanizaded and Moafian (2010) found that "interpersonal relationships and happiness" have "the highest correlations with success," concluding that "the teacher's support, empathy, and cooperation are indispensable components" of being a successful teacher (p. 430).

Moreover, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) highlighted the importance of teachers' behaviour, which holds enormous potential.

Lamb and Wedell's (2014) findings supported the motivational role of the teacher's personality and having a good relationship with learners. Lamb *et al.* (2014) summarized that "being a successful motivator involves a constant process of adaptation and improvisation in the classroom, underpinned by a genuine empathy with learners and a strong belief in the value that English can add to their lives" (p. 213). Lamb (2017) pointed out that "some individual teachers express more agency than others in developing their learners' motivation, despite working in similar contexts" (p. 14). As of the teacher's motivating agency, Lamb (2017) considered empathy as a "personal quality" which is "built up over years of practice, which defines the successful motivator" (p. 15). Kálmán (2023) concluded his findings as follows: the "language teacher's support, kindness, empathy, enthusiasm, conscientiousness, joy, charisma and appearance, as well as behavioural and attitudinal attributes evoking achievement and social emotions in language learners" are found to have extraordinary motivating agency in FL learners' motivation (p. 42).

2. Methodology

This section presents the research design and the methods of data collection and analysis, including a description of the participants and setting, the research instrument, and the procedures for validating the research instrument and the data analysis. After reviewing the theoretical and empirical background and the aim of this study, two research questions were formulated:

RQ1: How do secondary school EFL teachers' behaviours, attitudes, and interactions influence EFL learners' motivation from the perspective of EFL learners?

RQ2: What aspects of secondary school EFL teacher behaviours, attitudes, and interactions do EFL learners perceive to be motivating?

2.1. Qualitative design

In order to explore how EFL teachers' interactions and attitudinal and behavioural patterns influence the motivation of EFL learners and investigate their motivating dimensions from the perception of EFL learners, a qualitative study was designed and conducted. As Dörnyei (2007) stated, "qualitative research is concerned with subjective opinions, experiences, and feelings of individuals and thus the explicit goal of the research is to explore the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 19). Moreover, Dörnyei (2007) pointed out that "qualitative methods are useful for making sense of highly complex situations" (p. 30). Investigating the effects of EFL teachers' behaviours, attitudes, and interactions on EFL learners' motivation (how and what EFL learners find motivating) entails an

exploratory approach because participants' experiences, perceptions, opinions, and views were studied. Therefore, qualitative data was collected and analyzed, and a semi-structured interview was conducted with twelve EFL learner participants who attended secondary education.

2.2. Participants and setting

The interview study was carried out with twelve secondary school EFL learners in Hungary. Six interviews were conducted in Spring 2022, four interviews in Autumn 2022, and the last two interviews in Autumn 2024. Participants were chosen through *convenience* or *opportunity* sampling, which was *purposive* at the same time (Dörnyei, 2007). It was *purposive* in the sense that "besides the relative ease of accessibility, participants also had to possess certain key characteristics that are related to the purpose of the investigation" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 85). Firstly, by using *purposive* sampling, the target group of participants (EFL learners in secondary education) was specified in line with the objectives and the research questions of the study. Secondly, besides *purposive* sampling, participants were involved in the study by applying *convenience* sampling. EFL learners willing to participate in the study were interviewed according to their availability. EFL learners attending secondary school were reached and invited to take part in the interview via email. Once positive responses were received from EFL learners, the availability of the participants narrowed the group of participants of this study.

Related to the biographical background of the participants, their ages ranged between 15 and 19 years, and a total of four female and eight male EFL learners were involved in the study. Regarding the types of secondary schools the participants attended, they were chosen from different types of secondary schools: most of the participants attended general secondary schools, three participants attended vocational secondary schools, one participant was from a bilingual vocational secondary school, and one participant attended a practice grammar school. The approximate years spent on EFL learning ranged between three and eleven years. Most of the participants have learned English as a first foreign language and started learning it in primary school. English was the second foreign language for one participant who only started learning it in secondary school. In order to ensure the participants' anonymity, pseudonyms were given. The background data of participants are presented in Appendix A.

2.3. The instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore how and what aspects of EFL teacher behaviours, attitudes, and interactions EFL learners find to be motivating. In general, having a set of pre-designed questions supports the participants to "elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 120). The instrument was devised on the basis of the existing literature, the formulated research questions, and the aims of the study. In accordance with

Dörnyei's (2007) suggestions on how to design the semi-structured interview guide, it consisted of an introductory part, participants' background information, EFL learners' motivation, and the teachers' role in it. The introductory section ensured that EFL learners participated in the study voluntarily and anonymously and handled the data confidentially (Dörnyei, 2007). The first section contained a few warm-up questions that aimed to gain data on the participants' background of EFL learning. This section was followed by exploring EFL learners' motivation as it focused on the participants' *Ideal L2 Selves* and *Ought-to L2 Selves* (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The last section of the interview concentrated on the EFL teacher as part of the *Language Learning Experience* (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) in order to recall the participants' perceptions, views, and opinions on their EFL teachers' behaviours, attitudes, and interactions and their influential role in motivating them to learn English.

2.4. Procedures of instrument validation and data analysis

The semi-structured interview guide was designed based on the theoretical background of the study and was piloted and revised until it reached data *saturation* (Dörnyei, 2007). Three pilot interviews were conducted until the validity of the instrument and clarity of the questions were ensured. Following each pilot interview, the instrument was refined, and necessary adjustments were made to the interview guide. The validation process consisted of several steps, including removing some unnecessary questions in order to make the interview shorter, rephrasing some questions to make them more understandable for the participants, and mixing some questions that were similar to each other. The final version of the interview guide is included in the Appendices (Appendix B).

Regarding the participant sampling, EFL learners were invited to participate in the study via email, providing the broad topic of the research and its purpose, the guarantee of voluntary and anonymous participation, and confidentiality and procedures for handling the collected data. At the same time, they were sent a parents' consent form as several participants were under 18. It also contained a call for participants to provide honest answers during the interview, the estimated time of the interview, information on recording their voices and asking for permission to do so, and allowing participants to stop the interview anytime if they felt uncomfortable with any of the questions.

The instrument was designed in March 2022 and validated and piloted in April 2022. Six EFL learners participated in the interviews in Spring 2022, and the interview sessions continued in Autumn 2022 when four interviews were carried out. The study was finished in Autumn 2024 with the last two interview sessions. All interviews were held online on Zoom's platform, and the recording was taken using Zoom's recording function. The interviews were carried out at a time when participants were available. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked if they agreed to the recording. They were assured of their voluntary

participation and the freedom to stop the interview at any point. Most of the interviews lasted approximately 30–40 minutes, and the overall length of the recordings was 7:30:59.

The interviews were carried out in Hungarian, the first language (L1) of the participants. Each interview was followed by listening to the recording and transcribing the data. (The total number of pages of the transcriptions was 108.) Following Dörnyei's (2007) data analysis procedure, the transcribed data were coded (*initial* and *second-level coding*) with the help of Crabtree and Miller's (1999) *template organising style*. It was followed by collecting and organizing ideas, interpreting the data, and formulating the conclusions (Dörnyei, 2007). Thematic content analysis was applied to identify the emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3. Findings

This section comprises the results of the data analysis and the discussion of the findings consisting of three sub-sections: the motivation of EFL learners in terms of their *Ideal* and *Ought-to L2 Selves* and the emerging themes related to the two research questions.

3.1. EFL learners' *Ideal L2 Selves* and *Ought-to L2 Selves*

In order to put the findings in context, the participants' *Ideal L2 Selves* and *Ought-to L2 Selves* should also be explored. All participants had a strong or a certain vision of their *Ideal L2 Selves*. Most of them were confident when talking about their future in five years; they would be comfortable with and confident in most of the given situations, but they were realistic at the same time, mentioning areas for improvement (Andor recognized his speaking skills, Teodor referred to vocabulary, Donát mentioned his listening skills, Katalin emphasized her difficulties in talking to people she does not know well).

Exploring participants' *Ought-to L2 Selves*, participants were all aware of the expectations coming from the broader environment – all participants recognized it in some ways during the interviews. Related to the closer environment (in terms of family, friends, and school), their experiences and perceptions differed. Six participants recognized expectations from their family, four participants reported little expectations from their family members, and two participants thought they were not expected to learn English by their family at all. Six participants considered their friends' role as a strong influence on their motivation (they communicated in English regularly; they used English in social media and even at school out of lessons). Two participants reported perceiving little expectation from friends, and four participants recognized no effect of their peers on their motivation at all – they emphasized learning English for their benefit and not for others. Appendix C shows a summary of the findings on EFL learners' *Ideal* and *Ought-to L2 Selves*.

3.2. The motivational role of EFL teachers' behaviours, attitudes, and interactions from the perspective of EFL learners

This sub-section will discuss the findings regarding how EFL teachers motivate EFL learners – focusing on the implicit motivational factors in terms of EFL teachers' interactions, attitudes, and behaviours. EFL learners used the following expressions to describe how they found their EFL teachers motivating: "She encouraged me very much" (Andor), "I definitely put more effort into…" (László), "She inspired me in her lessons" (Levente) – participants used these and similar expressions to describe how motivating they found their EFL teachers.

From EFL learners' perspective, teachers' general positive interactions encouraged them to learn English. For instance, according to Andor, his EFL teacher was aware of his competencies and communicated accordingly, providing him with positive feedback, which he found to be motivating.

Participants also found that creating a positive (friendly and calm) atmosphere in the EFL classroom through EFL teacher behaviour was motivating. For instance, as Dalma put it, "My teacher created a good atmosphere in which it was enjoyable to learn English…" She also added: "It is always motivating (…) if your teacher creates a good atmosphere in the lesson, and you do not need to be stressed". In addition, as Zalán formulated:

> It was motivating for me when we did not understand something; she did not raise her voice and become angry; she remained calm and patient and started to explain it again, more slowly, and explained until we learnt it. (Zalán)

For EFL learners, it was also motivating to see how EFL teachers created a good teacher-student relationship. Andor characterized his EFL teacher as a friendly person who handled them as if they were partners, but this did not lead to learners not paying attention to or participating actively in the lessons: "I think my teacher keeps the balance between teaching and teacher-student relationships well." If EFL learners perceived that they could turn to their teachers, they could be honest with them, which was also found to be motivating. As Áron highlighted:

> I would say teacher-student relationships are the most important. (…) It matters what kind of relationship they can create with their students. (…) If you feel like you are in a hierarchy. The teacher is above you in that hierarchy. We are just there to learn but cannot talk to them. (…) If in the lesson it is that we do what is in the curriculum (…) but if it is that we can turn to the teacher with our problems, I think it is most important that students have this impression about the teacher. (Áron)

According to EFL learners, it motivates them if they perceive that the EFL teachers are motivated themselves: They are committed to teaching, love the language, and love the learners. Zalán summarized it as follows: "If we see that the teacher is motivated, then it will motivate us as well."

In general, data analysis revealed that the participants of this study were motivated by their EFL teachers' behaviours, attitudes, and interactions. EFL teachers' positive interactions, their ability to create a positive atmosphere in the lesson and to create and maintain good teacher-student relationships through their behaviour, and their commitment to teaching were indicated as implicit motivating aspects in EFL motivation.

3.3. The motivating aspects of EFL teacher behaviours, attitudes, and interactions as perceived by EFL learners

In this sub-section, the findings related to the affective dimensions of EFL teachers' interactions and attitudinal and behavioural patterns that EFL learners perceive to be motivating will be discussed. Participants were asked to describe their EFL teachers in general and share their opinions on their behaviour. They recalled positive and negative experiences with their teachers (if they had any) and described how they perceived their EFL teachers' behaviour in and outside the classes (they also needed to elaborate on if they saw any difference between their behaviours inside and outside of the lessons). Participants evoked how much effort they put into learning English since this EFL teacher taught them. EFL learners recalled specific situations when their EFL teachers motivated them to learn English.

By analyzing the data, several aspects of EFL teacher behaviours, attitudes, and interactions that were perceived as motivating by EFL learners were revealed. Table 1 shows the emerging themes related to the EFL teachers' interactional, attitudinal, and behavioural patterns as perceived by EFL learners.

Table 1. Emerging themes

Interactions	Attitudes and behaviours
positive interactions and encouragement	friendliness, kindness
communicating according to the vision of	helpfulness, supportiveness, caring
students' future L2 self	patience, calmness
speaking students' language	cheerfulness, joyfulness, happiness
having a sense of humour	enthusiasm, passion
	curiosity, open-mindedness
	attentiveness, responsiveness
	adaptiveness
	empathy, understanding, compassion, good-heartedness
	conscientiousness, persistence, hard-working
	setting an example for students
	handling students as partners
	commitment to teaching (love of language, love of students)

3.3.1. The motivating aspects of EFL teachers' interactions

The following themes and patterns emerged during the data analysis in terms of EFL teachers' interactions. From the perspective of EFL learners, *positive interactions* motivated them to put more effort into learning English. In addition, when they were *encouraged* by their teachers, it also stimulated them to learn the language. As Domonkos highlighted:

> My teacher encouraged me a lot, which positively impacted my language learning. (…) I am convinced that it is important for an English teacher to encourage and positively interact with students. (Katalin)

In connection with that, when EFL learners perceived that their EFL teachers drew their attention to what they could become and what language competencies they could possess in the future – in other words, strengthening their *Ideal L2 Selves* – it stimulated them to learn English.

> My teacher saw what I could achieve with my abilities. She gives positive feedback when she realizes my improvement, or when there is no improvement, she also reflects on it. She encourages me to maintain learning and draws my attention to what I can achieve with English in the future. (…) A few weeks ago, we had to collect students' names aiming to take a higher-level final exam in English. When I signed up for it, I could see that she was not surprised at all. She was aware of my abilities and expected me to take the higher-level English final exam. (Andor)

Also, EFL learners perceived them as motivating when teachers were able to *speak their students' language* (for instance, using slang or "being on the same wavelength with students," as pointed out by one of the participants) while reacting to them in the lesson was more motivating for them compared to those language teachers who were not willing to interact this way. Moreover, being able to interact in certain situations with a *sense of humour* (being able to laugh with students or make fun of certain situations in the lesson) also seemed to enhance EFL learners' motivation.

> I always attend my English teacher's lessons with pleasure, which are enjoyable. I think the reason is that my teacher is funny, youthful, and has a good sense of humour. I felt that we were on the same wavelength. (Dalma)

3.3.2. The motivating aspects of EFL teachers' attitudes and behaviours

Considering the attitudes and behaviours of EFL teachers, the following themes emerged from the analyzed data. According to EFL learners, *friendly* and *kind* behaviour were motivating aspects of EFL teachers. According to Donát, his teacher had a "really nice and kind personality" who could create a positive atmosphere with her behaviour at the same time:

> She is a really kind person (…), and she is really friendly with us. (…) She could transfer her personality and her positive energy to us when coming into the classroom. (Donát)

> My teacher is very kind to students; she is very social, which is essential for English teachers because they must communicate in the lesson. (…) So, in general, I think my teacher is very kind either in the lesson or outside. (Domonkos)

EFL teachers' *helpful*, *supportive*, and *caring* attitudes were also found to enhance EFL learners' motivation – as Katalin put it:

> It was most motivating how helpful and supportive my teacher was. (…) Even if we did not ask for it, she was always there to help and support us (…), and she was actively doing what we did not even need to ask. (…) I would say she was more like a mentor. (Katalin)

Regarding the *patience* and *calmness* of EFL teachers, these behaviours of the EFL teacher stimulated EFL learners' motivation. Zalán summarized it as follows:

> She is a really-really patient and calm person, and we could see that and feel that we are the first for her, our knowledge. If there was someone for whom it was more difficult to learn English or a specific grammatical structure that we were learning at the moment, she always put effort into it in order for that person to acquire that as well. (Zalán)

> When I feel that my teacher understands me and is patient and calm as well, which has an effect that calms me down, I will not stress. (Domonkos)

The teachers' *cheerfulness*, *joyfulness,* and *happiness* emerged from the data analysis, along with the teachers' *enthusiasm* and *passion* during the lessons – EFL learners perceived these as motivating aspects. As Donát described: "She is a cheerful person who is passionate about teaching." Furthermore, Levente summarized it as follows:

> She is my listening and speaking teacher (I have more teachers because I am attending a language class at my school), and she is supportive and always cheerful. She knows what she teaches, and she loves teaching. She is an enthusiastic person. Her joy and happiness come through the whole learning process. (Levente)

> It might have been at the beginning of this year when my English teacher told a story about how she became an English teacher. We could see that she was enthusiastic while speaking, and indeed, she told her story in a way that made her seem happy, and we could understand how happy she was that she was teaching English. Her joyfulness while talking about how she loved English was very motivating to us. (László)

EFL teachers' *curiosity* and *open-mindedness* stimulated participants to learn English. According to Zalán, his EFL teacher had a "curious and open personality." Moreover, as Domonkos put it:

> We talk a lot with her. She is teaching in a way that topics are coming up in the lessons, and she is curious about our opinions. She is interested in what is going on with us, and we talk a lot in the lessons (…) Her lessons are very interesting, and I like to talk in the lessons. I like to talk to the teacher, so I enjoy the lessons; I like her lessons. (Domonkos)

When EFL learners perceived that their teachers were *attentive* (paid close attention to them, *responsive* at the same time (able to react quickly), and *adaptive* to new situations in the lesson, it enhanced EFL learners' motivation. In addition, the EFL teachers' *empathy*, *understanding*, *compassion,* and *good-heartedness* were reported as motivating dimensions of EFL teachers' behaviours. László described his EFL teacher as follows:

> She is very kind and compassionate, understanding, and empathizing with students, but she can also be strict if necessary. She is very flexible; we speak with her during lessons. We can have good discussions with her both in the lessons and outside. She is very understanding; she always realizes our current state and can adapt to us, and the most important for her was not the grades but that we learnt what we should learn. (László)

> If it was the last lesson on Friday, she understood our situation, and we rather have speaking lessons and roundtable discussions. We talk a lot about different and valuable topics, and we learn from our teacher and the others' experiences as well. (Donát)

Motivating EFL teachers were also *conscientious*, *persistent,* and *hard-working*. Donát described his EFL teacher as follows:

> She likes seeing the fruits of the labour, and if she sees the smallest return of the energy and effort that she put into something conscientiously, she can be happy about it very much. (Donát)

> Surely, she always has a positive attitude that if someone in the group does not understand something for the first time, then he or she will understand the second time. Fortunately, she has a personality that never gives up teaching something, whether it is a new expression or way of pronunciation. (…) I appreciate my teacher's personality. She never gives up, she will explain things until everyone in the group understands them. (…) We are lucky to have this teacher. (Levente)

If teachers *set an example* with their behaviour and *handle students as partners*, students perceive them as motivating to learn English. As Domonkos stated:

> A good English teacher sets an example for students; it is a plus, definitely, because it matters what kind of person they are, their personality matters a lot, and what attitudes they have towards their work and what attitudes they have towards their learners matter a lot, too. If we see that we are the most important teachers, it is a good example for us, and it matters a lot. (Domonkos)

> My English teacher is, I do not know how to put it, well, she is youthful, unlike my other teachers. She handles us like a partner. She is not so strict, but we pay attention to her during the lessons, and she can keep the balance between being a teacher and having good relationships with her students. (Andor)

According to participants, motivating EFL teachers are *committed to teaching* (they love the language and love their students).

> My teacher is committed to teaching for sure; for her, it is not only to be in the school from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and get a salary for it, but I see that she loves teaching; she really enjoys it. (…) It is indeed her dedication and her life. (Donát)

4. Discussion

Considering the above results, the participants of this qualitative study perceived their EFL teachers' behaviours, attitudes, and interactions as motivating. Related to the interactions of EFL teachers during the lessons, it was found that the teachers' positive feedback and encouragement, communicating according to the EFL learners' *Ideal L2 Self*, enhanced EFL learners' motivation. Moreover, when EFL teachers were able to speak students' language and react to them accordingly, they had a sense of humour, which meant that they were willing to laugh with the students – these were also perceived as motivating aspects.

Regarding the affective dimensions of EFL teachers' attitudes and behaviours, several themes and patterns emerged from analyzing the data. The EFL teachers' friendliness, kindness, helpfulness, supportiveness, caring, patience, calmness, cheerfulness, joyfulness, happiness, enthusiasm, passion, curiosity, open-mindedness, conscientiousness, empathy, and understanding were perceived as the most motivating aspects of EFL teachers' behaviours. These results confirm that the teachers' happiness, empathy, and support (Ghanizaded & Moafian, 2010; Kálmán, 2023), along with their enthusiasm, joy, kindness, and conscientiousness (Kálmán, 2023), motivate learners. Besides these, EFL learners found that their EFL teachers' attentiveness, responsiveness, adaptiveness, and persistence motivated them. This study also proved that the teachers' setting an example for students with their behaviour, handling students as partners and having good relationships with them, and commitment to teaching itself motivated the learners. The results of this study confirm the importance of motivated teacher behaviour and creating a good relationship with learners (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Ghanizaded & Moafian, 2010; Lamb & Wedell, 2014).

5. Conclusion

This interview study explored twelve EFL learners' perceptions of their teachers' behaviours, attitudes, and interactions in secondary education in a Hungarian context. The study aimed to reveal how EFL teachers motivate learners through their interactions and attitudinal and behavioural patterns and what aspects EFL learners find motivating. The findings of this study supported the importance of conducting studies on EFL teachers' implicit motivational role since the participants perceived several affective dimensions of their EFL teachers' implicit role that enhance their motivation. On the one hand, EFL learners perceived their EFL teachers' behaviours, attitudes, and interactions in the lessons. On the other hand, EFL learners identified specific motivating aspects as well. Similarly to Kálmán's (2023) findings, EFL teachers' friendly, kind, calm, patient, and empathetic but at the same time, enthusiastic and joyful behaviour along with a conscientious, helpful, and supportive attitude who are adaptive and open-minded stimulate EFL learners to put more effort into language learning.

As for the limitations of the study, only EFL learners were involved; other stakeholders, such as EFL teachers, teacher trainers, and school leadership, were not involved in the study. Moreover, another possible limitation of this study is that it explored only EFL learners' perspectives attending secondary education (aged between 15 to 19), which implies that other age groups, for instance, adult learners and young learners, are not involved in it.

Some future research could involve carrying out an interview study with EFL teachers to explore the role and motivating aspects of their behaviours, attitudes, and interactions. Further research could also include conducting a mixed-methods study to provide more generalizable results for the emerging themes of this study and test the findings on a larger sample (Creswell, 2009; Dörnyei, 2007).

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Appendix A

The participants

No	Name	Gender	Age	Type of school	Years of EFL learning
1.	Andor	male	18	bilingual vocational secondary school	Approx. 10 years
2.	Levente	male	16	general secondary school	Approx. 6 years
3.	Judit	female	15	general secondary school	Approx. 9 years
4.	Domonkos	male	15	general secondary school	Approx. 9 years
5.	László	male	15	general secondary school	Approx. 9 years
6.	Dalma	female	18	practice grammar school	Approx. 11 years
7.	Donát	male	19	vocational secondary school	Approx. 10 years
8.	Áron	male	18	vocational secondary school	Approx. 9 years
9.	Zalán	male	19	vocational secondary school	Approx. 10 years
10.	Alexandra	female	19	general secondary school	Approx. 11 years
11.	Teodor	male	16	general secondary school	Approx. 8 years
12.	Katalin	female	18	general secondary school	Approx. 3 years

Appendix B

The final draft of the EFL learners' interview guide in English – translated from Hungarian

1. Introductory questions

- How old are you?
- What kind of school do you attend?
- What was your first experience with English?
- When did you start learning English?
- How much time do you spend learning English at school?
- How much effort do you put into learning English outside the classes?
- How persistent are you in learning English?
- How satisfied are you with choosing English as a foreign language?

2. Motivation

How do you imagine yourself regarding your English skills five years later?
- What do you think your English will be like in five years?
- How do you see yourself living abroad and having to talk to someone in English?
- How do you see yourself studying at a university where all courses are taught in English?
- How do you see yourself if you had to use English in your work?
- How can you imagine speaking English to foreign friends and colleagues? Why?
- How can you imagine that you have perfect language skills? Why?
- How do you think your future activities will require you to use English?

Why is learning English important/necessary for you?
- What role does it play in your learning English that your close friends consider important (if they consider it important)?
- What role does the following play in that you consider learning English important: people in your environment expect you to learn English (if this is the case)?
- How does the following affect that you consider learning English important: people you respect think that you need to learn English (if this is the case)?
- How do you feel people would be disappointed if you failed to learn English?
- How do you feel that learning English is important for you to be accepted by your classmates, teachers, and family?
- How do you feel about learning English because your parents would be disappointed otherwise?

- How does it affect your learning English that your parents think you need to learn English to be an educated person (if this is the case)?
- How does the following affect that you consider learning English important: people think that an educated person speaks good English?
- How does it affect that you consider learning English important: you think other people will respect you better if you have good English skills?
- How do you feel it would affect your life negatively if you did not learn English?

3. The behaviour of the teacher

- What do you think of your English teacher?
- Recall a good memory about him/her and tell it in detail, and a bad one and tell it (if you have any)!
- Describe the behaviour of your English teacher.
- How do you see your teacher's personality in class?
- What do you experience about your teacher's personality outside of class?
- What is the difference between what you see in class and how he/she behaves outside the class?
- Tell me about your most motivating language teacher!

4. Teacher's behaviour and motivation

- How much effort have you put into learning English since he/she taught you?
- How could your teacher encourage you to learn English?
- Tell me about a time when your teacher's emotional expressions encouraged you to learn English.
- Tell me about a situation when your teacher's interactions encouraged you to learn English.
- Tell me about a situation when your teacher's behaviour encouraged you to learn English.
- What do you think about the statement that there are teachers whose personalities (emotions, interactions, and behaviour) can encourage students better to learn English?

Appendix C

EFL learners' *Ideal* and *Ought-to L2 Selves*

No	Name	*Ideal L2 Self*	*Ought-to L2 Self*
1.	Andor	Certain vision of future L2 self	Little expectation from family, expectation from friends
2.	Levente	Strong vision of future L2 self	Expectation from family, no expectation from friends
3.	Judit	Strong vision of future L2 self	Expectation from family, no expectation from friends
4.	Domonkos	Strong vision of future L2 self	Expectation from family and friends
5.	László	Certain vision of future L2 self	Expectation from family and friends
6.	Dalma	Strong vision of future L2 self	Expectation from family and friends
7.	Donát	Strong vision of future L2 self	No expectation from family, but expectation from friends
8.	Áron	Strong vision of future L2 self	Little expectation from family and friends
9.	Zalán	Strong vision of future L2 self	Expectation from family and friends
10.	Alexandra	Strong vision of future L2 self	Little expectation from family, no expectation from friends
11.	Teodor	Strong vision of future L2 self	Little expectation from family and friends, expectation from the school/teacher
12.	Katalin	Certain vision of future L2 self	No expectation from family and friends, expectation from the school/teacher