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A quantitative comparison of Hungarian high school students' language learning motivation
Exploring regional differences

Motivation is a well-researched field of applied linguistics; however, the abundance of publications does not ensure diversity within the field. Accordingly, the comparison of high schools in some Hungarian contexts are yet to be fully explored. Therefore, this quantitative study compares four Hungarian high schools, two from the capital city and two from county seats in western Hungary and eastern Hungary. Within the framework of the MTA-ELTE Foreign Language Teaching Research Group a total of 457 students were administered the standardised questionnaire measuring four concepts, namely motivated learning behaviour, the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. The collected data was analysed using IBM's SPSS. The results show that only the ideal L2 self influenced students' motivated learning behaviour. The experiences affected motivation positively in the two county seats only. The data could not prove any effect on motivation in the case of the ought-to L2 self. Further research is needed to establish the reason behind the lack of impact in the latter case, and to discover whether the underlying cause is a direct or indirect effect.

Keywords: motivation, language learning, L2MSS, contextual differences, geographical differences

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of L2 motivational theory, a wide array of different ideas has surfaced within the field to describe what constitutes motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). From integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1959) to directed motivational currents (Henry, 2019), the way researchers view L2 motivation has changed considerably. These changes will be described in more detail in the literature review of this study. However, while L2 research in general, and especially studies into the workings of one of the most well-researched theories, Dörnyei's second language motivational self-system (L2MSS; Dörnyei 2005, 2009), have covered considerable ground (Boo, Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015), there are still contexts which are underrepresented within the field (Al-Hoorie, 2018). While some time has passed since these studies were conducted, Vonkova et al. (2021) in their own meta-analysis found similar gaps, and in their later research directions, they also called for more diverse studies.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to shed light on the importance of contextual differences within the field of L2 motivation by way of examining data collected in different parts of Hungary to see how the components of Dörnyei's L2MSS contribute to motivated learning behaviour in each case. Our goal is not to provide a comprehensive and detailed picture of the above issue, but to emphasise the importance of context within the field, and to provide an outline of key research aims which should be pursued in the future, namely, to expend further effort upon researching hard-to-reach geographical areas and communities within the country.

To achieve this aim, a brief literature review will provide insight into the complex field that is L2 motivation, pointing out the existing research gaps and the current trends regarding research into geographical differences, while also emphasising the changing landscape, as an indicator of prior efforts towards a more complex and overarching field. In the following sections, we will describe our methods including data collection and the description of our participants. Finally, we shall present our results and discuss them in the face of our research question and aims.

2. Literature Review

Second language learning motivation or L2 motivation "concerns the choice and direction of a particular action, the effort expended on it and the persistence with it" (Dörnyei, 2019, p. 61). While finding a definition for motivation is no hard feat, conceptualising the term is a more complex issue. This is clearly shown by the transformation motivational theories have gone through since the field first gained attention. The following paragraphs will provide a brief historical overview of these changes, but for a more detailed description of the history of the field of L2 motivation, see Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) or Dörnyei (2019).

L2 motivation research has covered a lot of ground in the past decades, while the construct of motivation has slowly undergone a theoretical overhaul (Boo, Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). The history of motivation theories began with Gardner and Lambert's research in Canada (1959), and what has followed can be split into three distinct phases based on the continuing shifts in focus, as described by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011). These shifts signify how researchers keep developing and broadening their theories to cover different contexts and facets of motivation. Indeed, while the first theories were developed within the field of psychology by researchers interested in second language acquisition, in the second phase researchers of second language acquisition interested in psychology moved the field towards a focus on language education (Dörnyei, 2019). This is described by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) as a shift from a social-psychological period towards a cognitive-situated period. This first shift already illustrates the changing viewpoints within the field, but the development of motivational theories was still far from over.

Towards the end of the 1990s, a new aspect was incorporated into the theories, namely the effects of time. In this third period, described by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) to be a process-oriented period, Ushioda's temporal framework (1998) and Dörnyei and Ottó's process model (1998) for L2 motivation were developed, among others. However, the arrival of this third period did not mean that the transformation of theories within the field was complete. Indeed, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) felt that a fourth shift was imminent, starting what they aptly named a socio-dynamic period, as they saw researchers incorporate social and contextual factors into the field. Though as mentioned above, this study is by no means meant to provide an exhaustive historical overview of the field, the described changes clearly show the efforts towards developing and broadening the concept of motivation.

As one can imagine, the above periods brought about several theories regarding L2 motivation. One that to this day remains one of the key approaches, as described below, is the second language motivational self-system (Dörnyei, 2009). First published by Dörnyei in 2005 and later expanded upon in 2009, the L2MSS was mostly based on two previous psychological theories, the self-discrepancy theory by Higgins (1987), and a theory of possible selves by Markus and Nurius (1986). The L2MSS consists of three components, namely *the ideal L2 self*, the *ought-to L2 self* and the *L2 learning experience* (Dörnyei 2005, 2009).

The three components form a model which can be used to predict language learning motivation. The ideal L2 self represents how the learners can imagine themselves as future users of the language or languages learnt, the ought-to L2 self is the component incorporating external pressures into the theory, such as input from family members, and the third component, the L2 learning experience is used to incorporate – as the name suggests – classroom experience and context (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The importance of the L2MSS is shown by Boo, Dörnyei and Ryan (2014), who found that between 2005 and 2014 it was by far the most widely used L2 motivational theory. Al-Hoorie's (2018) meta-analysis of the L2MSS further illustrates this point by the fact that even with the strict criteria set forth for the study, he was able to gather 32 research reports using the theory. The current study will also use the L2MSS to measure learners' motivation.

While the growing population of the field of L2 motivation in general (Boo, Dörnyei & Ryan, 2014), and the above-mentioned number of publications using the theory of the L2MSS suggests that a lot of ground has been covered, still there are certain contexts which are underrepresented in the literature, and the field is therefore far from being saturated. For example, in his above-mentioned meta-analysis, Al-Hoorie (2018) drew the readers' attention to the age of learners, the differences between L2 and foreign-language contexts, and the differences between learners of English and languages other than English, none of which he was able to examine in his meta-analysis. In a more recent meta-analysis, Vonkova et al. (2021) show the need for "a greater diversity of social and linguistic backgrounds, and to include cross-cultural and cross-national studies"

(p. 9). Lamb (2012) calls attention to similarly underrepresented topics, such as geographical context and socio-economic factors within L2 motivation research.

However, the current lack of research does not mean that these contexts would not provide us with useful insight into the way L2 motivation operates. Indeed, as seen in Indonesia, in the rural context learners might have lower levels of motivation and fewer resources for learning or interacting with a target language such as English, and clear differences can be shown in the way the L2MSS predicts learning effort in metropolitan, provincial, and rural learners (Lamb, 2012). In line with this, the current study concentrates on the research gap based on geographical differences. While the data used for the current study allows for the comparison of metropolitan and urban learners only, we aim to point out the power of context on language learners' motivation and to urge researchers to move towards bridging even larger gaps. These would include for example rural and underprivileged learners in areas of Hungary which are less convenient to reach due to their geographical distance from research institutions, or possible apprehensiveness regarding outsiders. For this purpose, the following section of the literature review will provide a brief insight into recent publications on the topic of rural and underprivileged learners' L2 motivation around the globe. It is important to note that within the context of Hungary such focused research is yet to be conducted.

2.1 Geographical Differences in Motivation Research

The goal of this section of the literature review is to explore current international trends in L2 motivational research regarding rural and underprivileged learners to familiarise the reader with the current state of the literature. Three different papers will be considered: one regarding rural and war-affected learners in Sri Lanka (Prasangani, 2018), one regarding learners in vulnerable rural schools in Colombia (Abaunza et al., 2020), and a third regarding rural teachers and learners in Bangladesh (Faisal & Ali, 2021). The papers will be compared based on the theoretical background and tools used, the findings related to their own context, and finally the overall characteristics of the papers themselves.

The three papers, though they all consider motivation at least to a certain extent, approach second language motivation from different perspectives. Prasangani (2018) bases the research on Dörnyei's L2MSS but extends upon the framework to include psychological and social factors, such as attitudes. Abaunza et al. (2020) focus on demotivation, building the construct based on an exhaustive literature review of the field to include the characteristics of English classes, any experiences of failure or difficulty, the course book, inadequate learning environments, testing concerns, a lack of interest, and the teacher's personality or style. Faisal and Ali (2021) only touch upon motivation in their much broader research and do not define L2 motivation itself.

Interestingly, all three papers are based on quantitative research in the form of questionnaires, but the number of participants differs greatly. Prasangani (2018)

administered the questionnaire based on their expanded construct to 918 Sri Lankan university students but included non-rural and non-war-affected learners as well. In Colombia, 124 students at a vulnerable school were administered the questionnaire compiled by the authors, which is a considerably smaller sample size, but only those from the target population were included. It must be mentioned here, that of the three, this is the only paper where a pilot study of the questionnaire is mentioned (Abaunza et al., 2020). Faisal and Ali (2021) created two different questionnaires, and administered them to 25 students and 10 teachers, a strikingly low number of participants. Though they mention open-ended questions as part of the questionnaire, these were not analysed in the paper.

Although all three articles are focusing on rural learners in different countries, there are a handful of issues which appear in each context. The lack of resources, inadequate or outdated classrooms and materials, inadequate training for teachers and lack of opportunities are mentioned in each case. In both Colombia and Sri Lanka learner's ideal L2 selves are quite strong, as they view English as a way to move ahead in society, and to escape their low socio-economic status. However, due to the above-mentioned issues, they find it difficult to reach their ideal selves (Abaunza et al., 2020; Prasangani, 2018).

At the same time, there are a few context-based differences between the three countries as well. In Sri Lanka, due to the above-mentioned issues, learners hope to achieve proficiency in English when they begin their university studies, even though English is often used as a tool for communication between different ethnic groups within the country. The author finds that they struggle to gain an academic level of proficiency in English, and thus they face difficulties in the international academic community. In the past, learners here have also faced difficulties due to language-related policies, which restricted their exposure to English (Prasangani, 2018). In Bangladesh, overcrowded classrooms with around 100 students pose difficulties to both learners and teachers in rural areas, while more privileged learners are able to attend private schools where English is the language of instruction (Faisal & Ali, 2021).

While these articles were chosen for their focus on rural learners, they are not without flaws. From a lack of theoretical background or pilot studies (Prasangani, 2018, Faisal & Ali, 2021) to sometimes very few participants for a quantitative study (Faisal & Ali, 2021), there is a multitude of issues which could raise questions in the mind of the readers. The differences raised in the texts, which are often cited from other sources, based on the historical background of the area or the personal experience of the authors, are not explored in detail from the point of view of the learners. The qualitative questionnaires seem to be created with the preconceived notions of the authors in mind and leave no space for nuance or individual experiences. It is also important to mention that while each target population was a group of rural, underprivileged learners, the authors often failed to draw a comparison between rural and urban or privileged learners, which leaves

the reader wondering whether these differences are indeed caused by spatial and financial differences.

Even today it is difficult to find research articles focusing on rural or underprivileged learners, and a gap still exists in the literature. However, by looking at the above-mentioned articles, it is once again clear that this underrepresentation is not due to a lack of differences in these contexts. Even despite their flaws, the articles clearly show that there are important issues regarding learners' motivation in rural areas, and even if the local learners understand the importance of learning English, they have limited opportunities for quality language education.

Despite these differences, the articles which do exist, as exemplified above, are not perfect, and for this reason, there is a need for a more rigorous exploration of rural and underprivileged learners. It is also important that future researchers take learners' individual experiences into account and compile a nuanced description of the rural L2 motivational landscape by using mixed-method research. A comparison between rural and urban contexts, as well as privileged and underprivileged learners, would also be beneficial before experimental studies could be conducted to bridge these differences wherever possible. However, perhaps the most important takeaway from this literature review is the following: however similar the rural contexts might be in each country, they all have their own special challenges which need to be considered before solutions can be found.

Based on the above, this current study aims to discover whether such geographical differences are present within Hungary using pre-existing data collected by the MTA-ELTE Foreign Language Teaching Research Group. As the data did not include learners from rural contexts, only the capital city Budapest and two county seats will be contrasted in the hopes that any differences found in just these two contexts would urge researchers to map the L2 motivation of learners in other areas of the country as well. Budapest will be referred to as a metropolitan area, and county seats will be referred to as urban areas, to avoid the negative connotations associated with the word *provincial,* which was used in Lamb's study (2012). To achieve the aim of the current study, the below research questions will be answered:

1) What characterizes participants' level of motivated learning behaviour, ideal L2 self, ought to L2 self and language learning experiences?
2) How does each component of the L2MMS affect motivated learning behaviour in the three different regions within Hungary?

3. Methods

From the data collected, four schools were selected for analysis to answer the research questions in a way that would allow us to include two schools from Budapest (metropolitan school 1 and metropolitan school 2), and two urban schools, that is, schools from large cities other than Budapest. These cities are

both county seats and were chosen so that both the western and the eastern parts of the country would be represented (western urban school and eastern urban school). This final dataset included 457 participants, 231 metropolitan learners, and 226 urban learners, distributed between all four high school grades, who ranged from 14 to 20 years of age (M = 16.16, SD = 1.28). The western urban school had 116 participants, while the eastern urban school had 110 participants.

Table 1. Learners' distribution based on school and grade

	western urban	eastern urban	metropolitan 1	metropolitan 2	all
unknown	-	-	-	23	**23**
9th	44	45	31	32	**152**
10th	45	12	52	19	**128**
11th	0	45	49	3	**97**
12th	27	8	0	22	**57**
all	**116**	**110**	**132**	**99**	**457**

The data was originally collected using a quantitative questionnaire consisting of five-point Likert-scale items. To conduct the above analysis, four scales were used as follows:

1. Students' motivated learning behaviour defined as the intended effort to invest in learning English.
   Five items, Cronbach's alpha = .823
   Sample item: I can safely say, that I do everything in my power to learn English well. [*Bátran mondhatom, hogy mindent megteszek azért, hogy nagyon jól megtanuljak angolul.*]
2. Students' ideal L2 self defined as their future self-image as English speakers.
   Five items, Cronbach's alpha = .853
   Sample item: I think speaking English would help my future career greatly. [*Szerintem az angol nyelvtudás nagyban segítené jövőbeli pályafutásomat.*]
3. Students' ought-to L2 self defined as external expectations regarding English learning as interpreted by the student.
   Eight items, Cronbach's alpha = .668
   Sample item: Nobody cares about whether I am learning English or not. [*Senki sem törődik azzal, hogy tanulok angolul vagy sem.*]
4. Students' L2 learning experience defined as the students' feelings towards English classes.
   Five items, Cronbach's alpha = .908
   Sample item: I have good experiences regarding English class. [*Jó élményeim vannak az angolórával kapcsolatban.*]

The above data was analysed using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) by descriptive and inferential (multiple linear regression) analysis. The test was run for all four schools using motivated learning behaviour as the dependent variable, and the three components of the L2MSS as independent variables. The results of these tests are described below.

4. Results

The questionnaire results of the above variables measured on a 5-point Likert scale are presented in Table 2 below. Prior to the multiple linear regression analysis, the groups were compared based on the above four scales using one-way ANOVA, which revealed a statistically significant difference among the groups in all four cases. The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Questionnaire Results

	Min	Max	M	SD
Learning Experience	1.40	5.00	4.09	.84
Ought-to L2 Self	1.00	5.00	3.91	.73
Ideal L2 Self	1.00	5.00	4.54	.65
Motivated Learning Behaviour	1.00	5.00	3.95	.77

Table 3. Results of the one-way ANOVA

	F	p
Learning Experience	(3,453) 15.99	.011
Ought-to L2 Self	(3,453) 3.78	< .001
Ideal L2 Self	(3,453) 3.79	.010
Motivated Learning Behaviour	(3,453) 6.512	< .001

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to test if the learning experience, the ought-to L2 self and the ideal L2 self significantly predicted the motivated learning behaviour. The result of each regression analysis is presented in Tables 4-7, where statistically significant results are marked in bold. The analysis of the results is described in the discussion section of this study.

Table 4. Metropolitan School 1

	β	p
Learning Experience	.002	.983
Ought-to L2 Self	.081	.348
Ideal L2 Self	**.391**	**< .001**

The first metropolitan school had 132 students in the sample. The overall regression was statistically significant (R^2 = .181, $F_{(3,128)}$ = 9.4, $p < .001$), however, the explanatory power of the model was weak. As seen in Table 4, in this school it was only the ideal L2 self that significantly predicted motivated learning behaviour (β = .391, $p < .001$). The results for the L2 learning experience and the ought-to L2 self were not statistically significant.

Table 5. Metropolitan School 2

	β	p
Learning Experience	.083	.296
Ought-to L2 Self	.166	.296
Ideal L2 Self	**.543**	**< .001**

The second metropolitan school had 99 participants. Similarly, the overall regression result was statistically significant (R^2 = .409, F = 21.9, $p < .001$), and the explanatory power of the model was moderate. Table 5 details the results of the test. In the case of the students at metropolitan school 2, it was once again only the ideal L2 self that could significantly predict the motivated learning behaviour (β = .543, $p < .001$), similarly to the students in metropolitan school 1. However, while in the case of school 1 only a weak effect was measured, the beta value of school 2 signals a moderate effect.

Table 6. Western Urban School

	β	p
Learning Experience	**.428**	**< .001**
Ought-to L2 Self	.042	.618
Ideal L2 Self	**.446**	**< .001**

The western urban school's results also show a statistically significant overall regression (R^2 = .567, $F_{(3,112)}$ = 48.82, $p < .001$), while the explanatory power of the model is moderate. In contrast to the two metropolitan schools, it was only the ought-to L2 self that could not significantly predict motivated learning behaviour (p = .618) among the students, while both the learning experience (β = .428, $p < .001$) and the ideal L2 self (β = .446, $p < .001$) had a statistically significant effect on motivated learning behaviour.

Table 7. Eastern Urban School

	β	p
Learning Experience	**.440**	**< .001**
Ought-to L2 Self	-.030	.703
Ideal L2 Self	**.466**	**< .001**

In the case of the eastern urban school, the overall regression was once again statistically significant (R^2 = .558, F (3,106) = 44.53, p < .001). Similarly to the western urban school, both the learning experience (β= .440, p < .001) and the ideal L2 self (β = .466, p < .001) had a significant moderate effect on the students' motivated learning behaviour.

5. Discussion

The above results show a clear difference between the urban and metropolitan areas within Hungary. While in the case of the students from the two metropolitan schools only the ideal L2 self had a statistically significant effect on motivated learning behaviour, in the two urban schools the language learning experience could also significantly contribute. This result contrasts with Lamb's study in Indonesia (2012), where he found the L2 learning experience to be a significant predictor of learning effort in all contexts, while the ideal L2 self was mostly effective in the metropolitan area. The Indonesian context is reflected in the results of this study (Lamb, 2012) in that none of the schools had the ought-to L2 self contribute significantly to the students' motivated learning behaviour. While this study has some clear limitations outlined below, the measured differences do provide some valuable insight into the context-related differences in language learning motivation and the L2MSS.

One of the main takeaways lies in the importance of context when discussing motivation research. Even in such a small sample, with data collected for a different aim completely, there is a clear line between metropolitan schools, that is, schools in Budapest, and urban schools in different parts of Hungary. This further exemplifies the importance of considering the context whenever language learning motivation is discussed, be it for research or teaching purposes. Though individual differences are often talked about within the field, it is important to note that context, as seen in this study, can have a considerable effect on students' motivational profiles, and therefore they need to be motivated differently.

The results have also outlined the importance of the ideal L2 self component of the L2MSS. As the ideal L2 self was the strongest predictor of motivated learning behaviour, that is, it was the only component that had a significant effect it in all four schools, educators should consider building a learning environment where this self can be further enhanced or reinforced.

While it would be difficult to call into question the importance of context in L2 motivation research, it is important to note that this study is not without limitations. The data used for analysis was collected for a purpose different from the aim of this current study, and thus throughout the development of the relevant instruments contrasting geographical contexts were not considered. The sample is also small when considering the number of schools; only two urban schools were measured, and only two schools were chosen from the capital city. Therefore, it is possible that the results are not representative of the whole country. Lastly, while geographical contexts were discussed, it is of utmost importance to note

that no rural areas were represented in the data, which is where Lamb (2012) found stark differences.

With such limitations, there is a plethora of future research opportunities in examining the effects of geographical context on L2 motivation within Hungary. First, rural learners should also be contrasted to broaden the target population of such research efforts. It should also be established whether other contextual factors, such as the school environment, or more nuanced placement, such as location within the city itself influenced the results. Additionally, more research is needed to discover why the ought to L2 self could not significantly predict motivated learning behaviour, and to discover whether the differences were due to a direct or indirect effect. Finally, further studies should aim at discovering the nuances of the context-based differences across geographical areas within the country. Furthermore, to broaden the perspective of such efforts, related studies should be conducted in other countries to examine similar contextual aspects of L2 motivation.

6. Conclusion

The current study aimed to examine the differences and similarities between distinct geographical areas of Hungary based on how the three components of the L2MSS predict motivated learning behaviour. The results show that the urban schools (county seats) and the metropolitan schools (capital city) are clearly distinct. In the case of the latter, only the ideal L2 self could significantly predict motivated learning behaviour, while in the county seats both the ideal L2 self and the learning experience were indeed predictors.

While this study was only able to examine the differences between urban and metropolitan contexts, the results suggest that geographical areas do differ in the way learners are motivated. In light of the studies mentioned in the above literature review, where rural learners were considered and, in each case, contextual factors affecting motivation were found, one could clearly see the need for research into rural learners within Hungary, to map the contextual differences affecting learners' motivation. This information would be key in ensuring that students across the country can receive the help they need considering their own motivational character, to ensure that learners have successful and pleasant language learning experiences across Hungary.

To conclude the above, the authors hope that readers of this study feel empowered to step outside their comfort zones when it comes to choosing the target population for their next research endeavour so that we can work together on filling the gaps in the field of motivation research. This is for the sake of those learners, who most often fall outside the zone of convenience – or convenient – sampling and are therefore not represented in the results of existing studies. As a final note, we must emphasise that while geographical differences were the focus of the present analysis, there are other contextual factors which could affect learners' L2 motivation, some of which were presented in the literature review

above, and discovering the effects of these factors should also be pursued in future research efforts. To sum up, though L2 motivation is a popular and highly researched field, there is still a lot of ground to be covered by those willing to take on the challenge.

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