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## Research Paper

# Early-Year Awakening to Languages: A Spotlight on Motivation

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## Abstract

Research on early-year motivation is needed in the wake of the ever-increasing trend to acquire English at ever-earlier ages. The current study addresses whether early exposure to a foreign language (FL) has a sustainable bearing on one's motivational disposition for learning that given language in a formal context as he or she advances in his or her course of education. In order to measure the variety and amount of exposure to FL in the formative years of 321 Tunisian primary school children and examine its effect on their motivational depository, a 2-scale self-report questionnaire was conceived ad hoc. Incumbent findings suggested that such exposure weighed significantly on the informants' motivational orientations. Evidence for such correlation may present an inroad for interested academics and practitioners to explore the possibilities of establishing FLE in a mainstream curricular effort, particularly through a child-friendly pedagogy such that of the awakening-to-languages (ATL) approach.

**Keywords:** Early-Year Education; Foreign Language; Motivation; Exposure; Teleological Effect

## 1. Background

### 1.1. Motivation for foreign language learning

Motivation for foreign language learning (FLL) has garnered substantial scholarly interest among applied linguists. Yet, such interest peaked in the 2000s, as evidenced by the plethora of motivation research resulting from the emergence of two main strands, one focusing on the situation-specific characteristics and another on the cognitive aspects of motivation. One model that subscribes to the situated strand is Dörnyei's (2000) operationalization of motivation as a dynamic process. Being fed by situation-specific motives (i.e., task, teacher, learner group, etc.) may outweigh one's attitudinal disposition toward an FL. In parallel, the cognitive strand has similarly caught considerable appeal among researchers in light of the theoretical advances documented in cognitive psychology. Among those off-shoots is the self-determination theory that made its way to the FLL area through works such as Noels, Clément, and Pelletier (2001). This study argues that one's intrinsic/extrinsic disposition is controlled by the prevailing reward system of a given learning context (e.g., monetary and material rewards in a formal school setting entail extrinsic motives).

As another strand of FLL motivation, researchers sought to foreground the role of individual agency. One of the propositions championed by such researchers is the theory that motivation is in truth the outgrowth of a self-regulatory process. In this vein, Ushioda (2003) suggests that self-regulation skills (i.e., internal monitoring, filtering, and processing mechanisms) would determine the course and extent of learners' motivational evolution. Contrary to those who can hardly regulate their motivational depository, learners with some control over their self-regulation skills can sustain such affective sum depository notwithstanding any demanding or distracting variables. In this regard, Dörnyei (2005) advances the idea of an L2 motivational self-system that manages the motivational apparatus, particularly through the individual's representation of what he or she might become, what he or she would like to become, and what he or she is afraid of becoming. Herewith, learners make sense of their learning by giving meaning and direction to their hopes (the FLL ideal self), maintaining their goals, and resisting threats through a set of preset responsibilities (the FLL ought-to self).



It follows from this overview that the conceptualization of motivation dwells on two parameters: causal (i.e., associated with learning-related factors) and teleological (directed toward short/long-term goals; Ryan & Dörnyei, 2013; Ushioda, 2001). The latter has yet been finely considered in mainstream motivational research in spite of its theoretical worth. In fact, only little effort stood out to document such teleological effect, particularly with early-year learners. This research oversight is, in fact, rooted in a tradition that elevates adults as the typical research subjects among the learner community. Youngsters are, otherwise, approached with a methodology characteristically used designed for and adjusted to adult particularities (see Pinter & Zandian, 2014). Shedding the spotlight on the teleological implications for the early-year learning community and its motivational comportment may not only redeem such oversight, but also provide valuable input for educationalists to tackle the issue of FLL motivation proactively.

### 1.2. Awakening to Foreign Languages

The awakening-to-languages (ATL) approach is anchored in the pedagogy of discovery and inquiry (Osborne, 1991). It holds a transformational rather than an achievement-focused view of introducing FL2 in the classroom. Hence, the focus is attached to the informed FLE as learners actively decide on their learning experience by asking questions, sifting, collecting, organizing, or reflecting on information (Candelier, Daryai-Hansen, & Schröder-Sura, 2012). Whereas the achievement aspect still matters, the transformational value emanating from such pedagogical endeavor bears outstandingly on personality development. Interestingly, one's intercultural competence (e.g., detecting similarities/differences related to languages, showing high responsiveness to various cultural contents) is one of those life-long skills one learns through early FLE (Ben Maad, 2016a; Byram, 2009; Candelier et al., 2012).

- The ATL's predilection for experiencing languages/cultures at the expense of the achievement side is couched on the tenet to experience rather than learn (about) languages (Turebayeva, Seitenova, Yessengulova, Togaibayeva, & Turebayeva, 2020). It hardly aligns with the mainstream proficiency-focused FLs teaching tradition. Despite the hegemony primacy of this tradition anchored in the needs and requirements of globalization, the ATL approach has been given adequate consideration by European scholars in particular (e.g., Candelier, 2003; Candelier et al., 2012; Candelier & Kervran, 2018). Such consideration is justified by Europe's language education politics justified such consideration to champion the values of openness in its multiethnic cities. This stance is palpable in the Council of Europe's (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* guide, which accentuates the need to "equip all Europeans for the challenges of the intensified international mobility [and] to promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity" (Candelier, 2003; Candelier et al., 2012, p. 346).
- ATL may equally stand as a revealing pedagogical alternative in early-year FLL education. As all seems to be revolving around the usual debate on teaching FLs at ever-earlier ages, little consistency has accrued from the bulk of related research (de Bot, 2014). Some scholars went far as to contend that early-age FLL may do more harm than good to the learners as in the 2014 IATEFL (Copland & Enever, 2015). The issue, it is believed here, may well be rooted in the very proficiency-based vision dominating mainstream research despite the plethora of methodological resources. The whole ride seems to be condemned to tease out the likely proficiency gains, thus offering provision for the language teaching apparatus in tandem with the swelling interest in FLs, especially English which has been aggressively promoted worldwide. Conversely, ATL reflects a pedagogically approachable vision in terms of objectives and practices. Based on principled FLE, this pedagogical alternative engages age-appropriate learning methods through sight, sound, taste, touch, smell, and doing (Dryden & Vos, 1997).

In the purview of the study reported presently, ATL highly resonates with the motivation concepts of self-regulation and the self-concept as far as early-year FLL is concerned. As with the dominance of the achievement-focused FLL tradition and similar to any other learning area, children would adopt a conservative people-pleasing pattern of learning. Seltzer (2008) thus maintains that they feel "obliged to forfeit a vital chunk of themselves to garner a more secure place in the family [and the class], they determined to subordinate or squash essential needs of the self." Accordingly, they may suppress any possible self-regulatory processes (e.g., goal-setting, self-evaluation, etc.) so as to adjust to the reward system established by their adult community. Contrariwise, an ATL-focused exposure to a given FL would probably invigorate the said self-regulatory processes. Not only do they hold on to a transformational—instead of

informational—interaction, but they may also avoid maladaptive motivational patterns of avoidance (Dweck, 1986), typically associated with other-regulated learning (Covington, 2000).

Focus on the self-regulation concept of goal-setting may prompt a form of motivation that is not only adaptive, but also sustainable and intrinsic in essence (Ben Maad, 2016b; Covington, 2000; Dweck, 1986; Pintrich, 2000; Tercanlioglu, 2004). As such, it would be hardly susceptible to interference from any kind of other-regulated pressure. Interestingly enough, de Bot (2014) maintained this proposition based on his review of preschool-aged FLL projects in the Netherlands. He eventually concluded that the temporary improvement in the informants' proficiency level was disproportionate with the decline in their motivation for FLL in the long run. Instead, intrinsic forms of motivation only flourish in an environment encouraging young learners to proactively set goals of what (not) to learn, which strengthens their sense of achievement in the discovery of and interaction with FLs/cultures. Hence, through ATL-focused programs—including informal FLE—youngsters would cultivate a motivational platform for their future instructed FLL experience. Motivated by this line of reasoning, the study reported below was set to examine whether (formal) exposure to FLs and/or cultures has a teleological effect on youngsters' motivation for FLL in their upcoming formal years of education.

## 2. The Study

### 2.1. Participants and Sampling

The data reported presently were obtained from a sample of 321 Tunisian 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders (Females  $N = 175$ ; Males  $N = 146$ ), aged between 10 and 11 years whose L1 was Tunisian Arabic. The participants came from both urban ( $N = 182$ ) and rural ( $N = 139$ ) areas spread over five public schools in which formal English classes would begin from Grade 5. They were indiscriminately allowed to participate in the study after the consent of their parents, who had mixed levels of schooling and came from different social classes. It is also worth mentioning that five fieldworkers contributed valuable assistance. They were, in fact, the direct teachers of the young participants who accepted to undergo some training on the best child-focused research practices and ethics with reference to Lobe, Livingstone, Olafsson, and Simões (2008). After some information sessions on the objectives of the study and psychometric test administration, they helped not only with refining the scales and rating the scale content, but also with overseeing the questionnaire administration in regular classes.

### 2.2. Research Design

In order to examine whether early-years FLE has a teleological bearing on one's motivational disposition in later instructed contexts, the study opted for the psychometric measurement. By this means, two constructs were the focal point: an FLE construct set to be the explanatory variable and a motivational construct presented as the response variable. The explanatory variable was purported to gauge the informants' experience with FLs in their earlier years (i.e., family environment, preschool, and public areas/events where FLs were used). The response variable of motivation was operationalized along three dimensions: (1) attitudes toward FLL, (2) willingness to use (WTU) FLs in (in)formal contexts, and (3) persistency to use FLs. These dimensions would constitute an assorted representation of motivation. Whereas the attitudinal aspect attends to views about FLL, the WTU dimension features the behavioral commitment to those views. Although WTU bears on the construct of willingness to communicate (Alemi, Tajeddin, & Mesbah, 2013; MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998), it opts for the descriptor use instead of communicate, as the latter is essentially associated with the idea of experiencing FLs (Dryden & Vos, 1997). The persistence dimension, particularly drawing on Dörnyei's (2000) concept of within-task motivation, gauges the endurance associated with task difficulty.

In addition to these response variables, an estimate of the informants' proficiency in EFL to check for possible correlations with their motivational disposition was reported.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, information about gender and age was also documented in order to verify whether the measured motivation differentials would be predisposed by individual differences.

<sup>1</sup>Proficiency was of peripheral importance to this study. Its value was constrained to the behavioral validation of motivation and interest in the language class. In fact, one's proficiency level was only judged by the teacher as most of the informants had not spent more than a semester learning English by the time of questionnaire administration.

### 2.3. Research Instruments

The FLE and motivation variables were measured according to two independent scales. Their formulation was faced with the absence of similar measures in the literature that would have allowed for chances of replication and external validation. Another challenge consisted in the delicacy to conduct research with young subjects, which explains the study's reliance on the recommendations of Lobe et al. (2008) regarding design, wording, response recording, and questionnaire administration. In order to collect more reliable and analytically useful results, all the items were applied to a self-report format based on a 3-point Likert scale along *agree*, *not sure*, and *disagree* response points. Interestingly though, the scaling design was meant to consider the intellectual exigencies of the young informants. Likewise, the item sequencing was organized according to the thematic units in the form of subscales each because a random shuffle of the items could challenge the young respondents' concentration.

The 16-item questionnaire constitutes four equal subscales (see Appendix). The first subscale accounts for how positive/negative attitudes of the immediate parental background would be toward using FLs (e.g., parents' reaction to child's language performance). The second subscale is meant to verify if these attitudes may morph into committed behavior by the participant's caretakers (e.g., reading bedtime stories). The third subscale measures the extent of EFL use via accessible media, from TV to smartphones. The fourth subscale provides a retrospective account of one's experience with events/locations (e.g., cinema, restaurants, hotels). It is also interesting to note that the motivation scale was meant to measure the participants' degree of motivation for FLL by means of 12 items spread over three subscales. The first subscale gauges the extent of motivation through the participants' perception of FLL. The second subscale measures the participants' behavioral aspect of motivation for EFL. They particularly examine how willing the respondents are to use EFL in and off class, either in a productive (e.g., using English words in family conversations) or in a receptive manner (watching English cartoons without subtitles in Arabic). The third subscale evaluates the participants' commitment to learning and/or using EFL, as demonstrated by their persistence in the face of difficulties (e.g., asking for teacher's help) and their responsiveness to uncomfortable situations (e.g., making mistakes).

Before their administration to the informants, the instruments were translated into Tunisian Arabic by two research assistants independently, retranslated by another two to be compared to the original version. After the back translation stage, the translated version was submitted to a sample of five students to report any unintelligibility issue so as to be ultimately fixed by the research assistants. The administration would begin with the statement of the objectives to the respondents and how to fill in the questionnaire. The informants were notified that no rewards would be offered in terms of grading. Upon collecting the response sheets from the respondents, the research assistants would assign identification codes for the requirements of the subsequent analysis.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, only the appropriately completed response sheets were considered for the analysis.

## 3. Results

The analytical procedure constitutes two phases: The first phase demonstrates the validation results for the two self-report questionnaires: the EFE scale and the motivation scale. The second phase displays results for the main hypothesis.

### 3.1. Validation of the FLE Scale

The item-reliability index presented in Table 1 suggests acceptable results. All the scale items yielded alpha scores above the widely accepted .70 cut-off, with the lowest ( $\alpha = .72$ ) being allocated to Item 7:

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<sup>1</sup>In order to obtain gender and proficiency data, the questionnaires were marked by the assistants with M for *male* and F for *female* and A for *good*, B for *average* and C for *weak* upon delivery. Obviously, associating each informant with one of the three labels does not stand for the aptitude level; it rather points to the level of engagement, interest and the willingness to learn a new language. All the data were converted to numerical values for subsequent analysis.

Table 1. *FLE Scale: Reliability and Concept Validity Results*

Subscale	Items	Item-Total <i>r</i>	$\alpha$ If Deleted	Component			
				1	2	3	4
Background Attitudes	1	.77	.97	.47	.07	-.29	.64
	2	.76	.97	.41	-.01	-.22	.83
	3	.90	.96	.38	.03	-.18	.83
	4	.89	.96	.40	.01	-.20	.88
Supporting Action	5	.81	.97	.90	.02	-.24	.45
	6	.76	.97	.87	.14	-.29	.42
	7	.72	.97	.89	.12	-.29	.40
	8	.75	.97	.87	.08	-.23	.45
Media	9	.90	.97	.28	.34	-.95	.22
	10	.87	.96	.22	.34	-.91	.15
	11	.73	.97	.34	.35	-.91	.31
	12	.89	.96	.27	.34	-.93	.22
Contact	13	.80	.97	.12	.90	-.33	-.02
	14	.82	.96	.07	.94	-.35	.01
	15	.79	.97	.13	.87	-.31	.06
	16	.81	.97	.06	.92	-.37	.00

After checking for their internal consistency, the 16 items in Table 1 were submitted to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to examine the concept validity of the scale, more precisely the four FLE types: background attitudes, supporting action, media, and contact. The related findings conveyed a 4-factor structure with a total variance of 68.57%. In fact, the loadings are squarely distributed over the purported subscales with four items each. The internal correlations within each loading were all above the widely acceptable .05 cut-off level considered in an exploratory research methodology (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014), all stretching from  $r = .64$  for Item 1 (Component 4) to  $r = -.95$  for Item 9 (Component 3). Also worth mentioning is that the first two subscales show some cross-loadings, yet lower than the minimum 0.5 value allowed. The highest of such loadings are  $r = .47$  (Item 1) on the background attitudes subscale and  $r = .45$  (Items 5 and 8) on the supporting action subscale. In sum, the suggested factor structure attests to the construct validity of the subscales.

### 3.2. Validation of the Motivation Scale

The reliability of the data in Table 2 refers to some inconsistency because not all the presented alpha scores rank above the acceptable .70 cut-off line, so much so that 6 out of the 12 items were discarded from subsequent analysis. This decision did not exempt items closer to the allowed cut-off point (e.g.,  $\alpha = .65$  for Item 6). It was deemed rather reasonable to consider exclusively high alpha scores to add more robustness given the questionnaire's novelty and the lack of external validation. Overall, a retest of the retained items yielded strong scale reliability of  $\alpha = .91$ :

Table 2. *Motivation Scale: Reliability and Concept Validity Results*

Subscale	Items	Item <i>r</i>	$\alpha$ If Deleted	Component		
				1	2	3
Attitudes	1	.73	.89	.69	.40	-.25
	2	.45	.91	—	—	—
	3	.73	.89	.79	.08	-.09
	4	.42	.91	—	—	—
WTU	5	.76	.89	-.17	.83	-.21
	6	.65	.90	—	—	—
	7	.76	.89	-.12	.81	.12
	8	.63	.90	—	—	—
Persistence	9	.78	.89	-.05	.02	.84
	10	.74	.89	-.29	.14	.81
	11	.34	.91	—	—	—
	12	.69	.89	—	—	—

As for concept validation, the EFA analysis of the data suggested a 3-factor solution with an overall variance estimate of 64.12 %. Three major loadings with high internal correlations were reported in Table 2. Their distribution

aligns with the item clusters purported to account for the three motivation subscales. Because Component 3 shows the highest within-scale loading (Item 9:  $r = .84$ ), Component 1 has the lowest within-scale loading. It should be noted here that Item 1 shows the loading of  $r = .69$ ; yet, it does cross-load with Component 2 ( $r = .40$ ). However, cross-loading does not exceed the acceptable .50 cut-off line to be purported henceforth as an integral constituent of Component 2. Overall, the suggested factor distribution attests to the construct validity of the motivation subscales.

### 3.3. Effect of FLE Variables on Children's Motivation

The second phase of the analysis addresses the hypothesized teleological implications of early-year FLE on motivation for instructed FLL. At first, it is reasonable to begin with a correlation analysis for the FLE variables deemed necessary for the subsequent interpretation of the inferential results. Three considerations followed from the correlations matrix in Table 3. Firstly, the age and gender factors showed minimum correlation with the other variables, except for the former being marginally linked to the media level. Secondly, the FLE variables showed satisfactory intercorrelations (from  $r = .34$  to  $r = .85$ ). Thirdly, the respondents' proficiency was consistently associated with the FLE constituents. All in all, the present data attest to a strong correlation between all the FLE variables and the respondents' entourage:

Table 3. Correlation Results for Motivation and FLE Variables

Subscale	Supportive Attitudes				Supportive Action				Media				Contact			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Gender	.04	.01	.05	.05	.09	.11	.14	.13	.01	.05	.01	.05	.12	.11	.09	.12
Age	.03	.03	.05	.05	.06	.16	.06	.05	.26	.25	.19	.24	.05	.06	.04	.05
Residence	.61	.36	.46	.45	.49	.51	.44	.46	.60	.62	.76	.46	.44	.39	.41	.35
Education	.69	.60	.68	.67	.85	.80	.75	.81	.66	.72	.62	.67	.56	.60	.58	.52
Preschool	.51	.42	.52	.51	.74	.71	.64	.66	.60	.63	.60	.52	.41	.42	.49	.42
Proficiency	.24	.26	.36	.35	.60	.56	.54	.53	.37	.47	.34	.36	.33	.33	.39	.34

In order to examine the FLE impact on the youngsters' motivational behavior, the findings from the two scales were submitted to multivariate analysis (see Table 4). In spite of their apparent significance, the gender and age results did not seem to bear considerably on the respondents' motivation for FLL, as transpired by the meager effect size of partial  $\eta^2 = .11$  and partial  $\eta^2 = .12$ , respectively. Contrariwise, the FLE results would reveal significant effect size differences. In line with Tabachnick and Fidell's (2001) judgment, the corresponding partial  $\eta^2$  values range from (i) acceptable regarding residence ( $F = 38.90$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .49$ ) and preschool ( $F = 50.49$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .66$ ) and (ii) significant as for education ( $F = 64.79$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .81$ ). Overall, the data reported in Table 4 substantiate the hypothesized weight of the FLE variables in terms of effect size as youngsters' motivation remained impervious to individual differences. Still, what is left to explore is the direction of that hypothesized effect:

Table 4. Multivariate Results for FLE Effect on Motivation

	Type III Sum of Squares	Mean Square	$F$	$Sig.$	$\eta^2$
Gender	8.38	.699	3.09	.000	.11
Age	9.63	.803	3.50	.000	.12
Residence	38.90	3.242	25.02	.000	.49
Education	64.79	5.399	110.03	.000	.81
Preschool	50.49	4.207	50.59	.000	.66

A multiple comparison test was conducted as a follow-up requirement so as to analyze the nature of the significant difference (i.e., the effect direction, whether positive or negative). The findings in Table 5 suggest a clearly positive effect pattern for the three FLE variables. Regardless of the amount and direction of variance (i.e., positive/negative for a given item vs. another), there exists no inconsistency within each subscale because the two items of each subscale would confirm the same pattern of difference. It is worth reminiscing in this respect that the choice of the items in each subscale was justified by their internal loadings suggested by the EFA results (see Table 2).

These findings reveal a clear advantage for the education scores compared with those related to residence and preschool. The pair-wise mean difference results associated with residence show consistency across the three motivation subscales which vary between mean difference  $MD = .39$  for Item 2 and  $MD = .71$  for Item 11. To be precise, the informants coming from rural areas, with already fewer chances for FLE, unveiled less motivation for FLL, most evidently in the persistence area. With reference to the education descriptor, the difference between its two levels is significant, most notably with WTU and persistence. That is to say, the informants who came from an educated family background scored higher than those were raised by uneducated parents ( $MD = 1.28$  (Item 7) for the WTU subscale and  $MD = 1.14$  (Item 9) for the persistence subscale). A similar pattern applies to the preschool descriptor where those having substantial preschool education revealed more persistence in dealing with language learning difficulties than the informants who had never received preschool education ( $MD = 1.03$  for Item 9).

Table 5. *Pair-Wise Comparison of FLE Results*

Subscale		Residence		Education		Preschool	
Attitudes	Item 2	Urban	2.24	Yes	2.57	Yes	2.37
		Rural	1.85	No	1.68	No	1.98
	Item 3	Urban	2.55	Yes	2.72	Yes	2.60
		Rural	2.01	No	1.91	No	2.15
WTU	Item 5	Urban	2.49	Yes	2.69	Yes	2.55
		Rural	1.87	No	1.52	No	1.93
	Item 7	Urban	2.26	Yes	2.58	Yes	2.56
		Rural	1.76	No	1.36	No	1.51
Persistence	Item 9	Urban	2.43	Yes	2.69	Yes	2.58
		Rural	1.78	No	1.55	No	1.61
	Item 11	Urban	2.27	Yes	2.62	Yes	2.41
		Rural	1.56	No	1.51	No	1.49

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Validity Implications

The study reported the findings that substantiated the reliability and concept validity of both the FLE and motivation scales for FLL scale specifically designed to verify the main hypothesis. It follows that the context-specific treatment of these instruments did not upset their consistency and applicability given the fragility of working with a young segment. Caution is yet needed here because such data from young respondents would remain an estimate of great sensitivity despite the conscientious effort associated with conducting the study (Lobe et al., 2008). Equally important is that behavioral responsiveness and objectivity of the assistant researchers may turn problematic because they were not only unfamiliar with researching but also had some bonding with their students.

In spite of the encouraging validity results, some concern was raised regarding the FLE scale, particularly about whether the background attitudes dimension feature would likely mix with the supporting action aspect. In this respect, item intercorrelations in Table 1 revealed considerable values reaching up  $r = .47$  for Item 1 at the level of Component 1. However, Item 1 still demonstrates a substantial correlation  $r = .64$  with Component 4. That is, the degree of variability associated with the intracorrelations within each subscale should be treated with caution. It is also worth pointing to the amount of indecision in the informants' responses despite the positive reliability data for both scales. In effect, the undecided responses were fairly lower for FLE scale (7.34 %) than those for the motivation for FLL scale (23.15 %). Such finding may be interesting for the researcher as it may unveil some input about such behavior (e.g., withholding negative feedback in an effort to please their teachers). Viewed contrariwise from a validity standpoint, it may suggest some interesting unintelligibility issue very likely rooted in the formulation of the questionnaire. Research-wise, it remains

approachable to build on these validity results in the present study, although further revisions are needed to grapple with such concerns.

#### 4.2. Main Findings

The sum of the collected findings suggested a significant effect for early-years FLE on the respondents' motivation for FLL. Table 3 pointed to a systematic and substantial correlation between early FLE and the areas of residence, preschool, and parents' educational background, and most conspicuously for the latter area. That gain may be the reason why the family experience was not limited in time compared with the preschool experience. The parental effect is such as they would habitually transfer their sociocultural experience, or their symbolic capital, in Bourdieu's words (1989), to their offspring. This category of parents is most likely subsumed under a social segment that values education. Regardless of the amount and quality of FLE experienced at preschool, that practice might remain time-constrained and, hence, less familiar in equivalent rural settings.

According to the results documented in Table 4 and, subsequently, verified in Table 5, the differentials in the informants' motivation for FLL are palpable along with the three measurement areas. The outline of this image yielded two learner types: (1) positively motivated former preschoolers from educated urban families (HM) and (2) poorly motivated rural youngsters with neither a preschool history nor an educated family background (PM). From a self-theory standpoint, the HM category would have likely developed an early vision of a positive FLL self in their formative years. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, p. 97), the ideal self constitutes an "imagery/vision component that activates appropriate emotions and is cued to a variety of appropriate cognitive plans, scripts and self-regulatory strategies." The present results are pretty consistent with this representation in the sense that the FLL ideal self grows over time (Ushioda, 2009; van Geert, 2011) as a package of components, most importantly the concept of vision. In light of the attitudes subscale's findings, the HM informants divulged their expectations about the FLL experience rather clearly. The FL self-image they sought to connect with accrued through the little details they intercepted in the long run while being exposed to FLs.

The respondents would gradually gain a sense of direction in their FLL experience, together with a solid FL ought-to self that would shield such experience against distractors (e.g., boredom and anxiety). Evidence of such self-concept figures in the WTU subscale data. As it were, the HM respondents ascertained their commitment to FLL by their proper means. Watching cartoons without subtitles, for instance, would not discourage them from connecting with that input in which they would inherently prompt some self-regulatory strategies to make up for the linguistic limitation. In fact, the closed-ended nature of the questionnaire (three Likert scales) could not elicit much about such. What is behind a positive response to the item "When I learn English words, I try to use them off class" may refer to the respondents' perceived duty to consolidate the newly acquired knowledge without any external obligation from teachers and/or parents.

The HM participants also demonstrated an intrinsically oriented view of FLL. While not dismissing the instrumental significance of FLL through their positive input vis-à-vis the item "It is important for my future to speak English," the persistence subscale data attested to such intrinsic orientation. Instances of positive receptiveness to task difficulty are abundant in goal-orientation literature, mainly in association with those who adopt a process-oriented learning perspective (Ben Maad, 2016b; Dweck, 1986; Pintrich, 2000; Tercanlioglu, 2004). In truth, this challenge-seeking and relaxed approach to task difficulty while considering mistakes as learning opportunities aligns with the high persistence scores of the HM participants. It follows, then, that this kind of orientation may account for the endurance of their motivational disposition despite the long break since their last preschool FLE experience. Equally, persistence unveils that their L2 ideal selves were growing solid, which would buffer them against the upcoming obstacles in their FLL course.

The findings reported here may offer direct implications for research on motivation for FLL. In light of the dominance of models which schematize motivation synchronically, the current study has empirically substantiated the teleological aspect of this phenomenon (Ushioda, 2001). Thus, besides considering motivation as a static configuration due to interaction with the context here and now, it is similarly approachable in Dörnyei's (2005, p. 106) terms to refer to "motivational routes for language learner, either fueled by the positive experiences of their learning reality or by their visions for the future." This, in truth, meshes with a dynamic view of motivation for FLL as a dynamic process that accrues in a nonlinear way through a matrix of factors ebbing and flowing in influence (Ushioda, 2001; van Geert, 2011;



Waninge, Dörnyei, & de Bot, 2014). This perspective is highly commensurate with the study of motivational dynamics of FLL young learners, an area scarcely documented in the literature. In this regard, the present results provided an uncommon account of motivation as a process profoundly anchored in the formative years of learners, so much so that exploring this research line may consolidate our theory about the motivational routes (Dörnyei, 2005, 2013) youngsters would follow.

It also follows that the current study may have forward-looking pedagogical implications regarding FLL classroom management. In view of that oft-asked question of whether an early start would lead to better language learning, this research work has given an empirically informed answer uncommon to the mainstream positivist views that “glorify content, product, correctness, competitiveness” (Brown, 1990, p. 388). Instead of keeping children for long hours doing grammar and comprehension-type activities to consolidate their literacy skills, an early-year FLL diet based on participatory activities (e.g., storytelling, photographs, drawings, songs, etc.) would indiscriminately open possibilities for everyone involved (Turebayeva et al., 2020). Similar to the context of this research work, an ATL-focused pedagogy—whether presented in extracurricular school programs or at preprimary institutions—would provide an organized and consistent FLE experience, principally in favor of LM youngsters whose chances for FLE are meager. Instead of prioritizing the instant literacy gains, the foundational peculiarity and the transformational value attached to the ATL approach banks on the premise of digging deep to build high. This account lends itself nicely to the seminal phase of one’s motivational disposition for FLL.

## 5. Conclusion

One downside of early-years FLL research is that it has not only been administered by a methodology principally designed to probe adult learners, but it also tends to generalize related results to all age segments. The study of motivation for FLL did not fall off the radar as it delivered only meager literature from a child-focused perspective (Pinter & Zandian, 2014). In an attempt to address this research gap, the present study was set to explore the trace of any teleological features of motivation among young FLL participants. It sought to address whether the amount and quality of early-year FLE would exert some long-term influence on youngsters’ motivational disposition in their upcoming FLL instructed experience. The results, based on a psychometric measurement designed *ad hoc*, substantiated such effect. The findings would highlight the need to (1) search new research avenues about and tools observing the peculiarity of working with young informants and (2) revisit the mainstream pedagogical practices attendant to early-year FLL.

It should be also noted that the obtained findings cannot be overstated because much effort is needed through replicating and/or revising the elicitation tools and procedures. In truth, one of the presumed concerns consists in the choice of the FL in focus. Had the study chosen to focus on French (i.e., the second language used in Tunisia after Tunisian Arabic), the results would have possibly been viewed otherwise. Additionally, some FLE features would need additional scrutiny, specifically when it comes to a preschool environment. Although they claim to conduct FLE-focused activities systematically, the extent and the manner in which such undertakings are considered is still as it follows that most of the respondents had a differentially considerable preprimary school experience. More interestingly, these results would have been more consequential had the study opted for a mixed-methods model to capture information hardly detected by the closed-ended nature of the FLE and Motivation for FLL scales. Instead, narrowing research focus onto both HM and LM groups, as in the present study, may uncover more incisively the dynamics of their motivational self-system and the self-regulatory processes. It would help us capture what actually happens when it comes to shaping, restructuring, and consolidating their motivational self-system.

## Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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## Appendix The Questionnaire

### I. FLE Scale

#### Background Attitudes

- 1) I never felt pressure from my parents about learning English.
- 2) My parents always encouraged me when I used English.
- 3) My parents never rebuked me when I made mistakes in English.
- 4) My parents often ask me about my English class.

### *Supporting Adult Actions*

- 1) I danced/sang in English with my parents/caregivers.
- 2) My parents/caregivers read us storybooks in English.
- 3) My parents often tune the radio in English.
- 4) I played English games at home.

### *Media*

- 1) I watched TV shows/cartoons in English.
- 2) English is the operational language for our TV set.
- 3) All video games at home are in English.
- 4) I played games on English websites.

### *Contact*

- 1) My parents asked foreign friends over.
- 2) I stayed in mixed hotels and played with foreign children.
- 3) I tried foreign foods in restaurants/at home.
- 4) I joined birthday/music parties using English songs.

## **II. Motivation for Foreign Languages Scale**

### *Respondents' Attitudes*

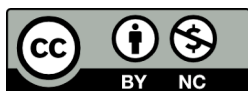
- 1) English is a fun school subject.
- 2) English is different from other school subjects.
- 3) It is important for my future to speak English.
- 4) English helps me make friends around the world.

### *Willingness to Use*

- 1) I always use English vocabulary with my family.
- 2) I try to use English words off class.
- 3) I watch cartoons in English without subtitles.
- 4) I participate in activities, though I do not understand the language.

### *Persistence*

- 1) I continue doing tasks, though they sometimes seem difficult.
- 2) I ask the teachers to repeat if I do not understand.
- 3) I enjoy doing tasks in class, even when I make mistakes.
- 4) Having bad grades is not a problem.



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