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**Applying Action-Research to the analysis of motivation in FL learners:
A case study on the translation of motivated behaviour into
Italian teaching practice**

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The importance of motivation in learning a Foreign Language (FL) is well established, but less widely explored is whether understanding learners' motivation can meaningfully inform curriculum design. This study is informed by Action-Research, a model built on immediate and ongoing reflections on educational practice (Leitch & Day, 2000); it relies on the fundamental notion in language education that motivation and successful learning outcomes are closely interrelated, as extensive research has shown. However, what the present study aims to explore further is whether tracking motivation – through questionnaires including an initial needs analysis, learning diaries, interviews and Focus Groups – could inform curriculum development of an Italian FL course. Participants (n=9) were complete beginners in Italian, who provided feedback on their learning experiences, and their motivations, expectations and needs within the microcosm of this Italian class. Such data informed the development of the curriculum design for the whole duration of the Italian course and represented at the same time a precious resource for the teacher-researcher to understand the motivation of the learner-participants.

It is intended that the findings will contribute to the ongoing field of investigation on those learning LOTEs' (Languages Other Than English) and their motivation, with a specific focus on improved materials design. Furthermore, the present study aims to explore a learner-centred approach within an Italian learning process, aligning therefore with other current educational frameworks in the field, such as and Identity informed Curriculum Design and Negotiated Syllabus.

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Glossary and abbreviations used

AR: Action Research

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

CDST: Complex Dynamic Systems Theory

CLC: Cross-Linguistic Connections

ERT: Emergency Remote Teaching

FL: Foreign Language

L1: First Language

L1KAL: L1 Knowledge about a Language

L2: Second Language

L2MSS: the L2 Motivational Self-System

LOTES: Languages Other Than English

NA: Needs Analysis

PSA: Present Situation Analysis

SDT: Self-Determination Theory

TL: Target Language

TSA: Target Situation Analysis

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Study and Research Questions

From the very earliest theorisations, motivation has emerged as a crucial variable for understanding foreign language learning. Indeed, it is an immensely important factor, the study of which has allowed over time to establish significant connections with other fundamental concepts such as language identity (Dörnyei, 2000; Ushioda, 2009), and works towards understanding of whether it can be predictive of successful outcomes.

For this reason, there is a substantial number of empirical studies on motivation, aimed at investigating its causes and effects on learners. Over the years, models have been developed to describe motivation, starting from that proposed by Gardner (1985), to ones more tailored for FL learning, such as the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1995; Noels, 2000) or the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2000).

Although these described various aspects of motivation from different perspectives, recently a prevailing view has emerged whereby motivation is seen as subject to changes and fluctuations over time: it can decrease dramatically or instead grow, it can be determined by contextual or personal factors that are highly individual, as well as allowing for the identification of more generalised patterns (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). It therefore has a mutable nature, reflecting the needs, demands, and difficulties encountered by individuals, namely the learners.

It is not surprising that over time research has focused on studying motivation and English language learning, exploring ESL and EFL classes more extensively compared to other FL learning environments (Guo, Zhou & Gao, 2021). Nevertheless, given the status of global language acquired by English, and also how it reverberated in the structural disparity in academic publishing (Zheng, Guo, 2019), Languages other than English (LOTEs) have received less attention from researchers, albeit representing a completely different reality and set of contextual distinctions from learning the *lingua franca*, English (Howard & Oakes, 2024).

This study aims to build upon these considerations regarding motivation within the context of learning a LOTE, specifically focusing on Italian as FL in Scotland. The current scenario of language education in Scotland is a cause for concern, following the recent considerations by the University of Aberdeen in November 2023¹ to discontinue Modern Languages degree

¹ BBC News, 30th November 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-67570669>

courses, due to significantly low numbers of enrolled students registered the previous year. This decision has sparked concern from various stakeholders, including language departments, consulates, and students, all working diligently to address the issues of language education in Scotland, and ensure the continued availability of FL courses. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the Scottish landscape regarding LOTES appears as worth-investigating task, given the challenges that language education is facing at present.

Concerning Italian among LOTES, there is quite limited empirical evidence on Italian as a FL as the number of studies conducted in Italian learning environments appears scarce: up to 2020, the “studies on non-English Language Learning and Teaching Published in *System*” counted only 5 on a total of 208 articles about Italian (Guo et al., 2021: 3), demonstrating a much inferior attention to Italian compared to other European LOTES.

Furthermore, the chosen context in which this exploration of teaching and learning Italian takes place is the Scottish one, an area that the author of this study believes to be truly overlooked and, at the same time, a context of particular interest when considering the historical background of emigration that has contributed to a massive presence of Italians in Scotland in the past (Colpi, 1991; 2013). Although there are substantial numbers of Italo-Scots today, that is, Scots of Italian descent (Italo-Scottish Research Cluster, 2013), it is difficult to establish the role of the Italian language or consider it a heritage language or community language. Similarly, data – both from academic research and from statistics - on the study of Italian are lacking and do not provide a reliable picture of both the numerical and qualitative approach to this language on behalf of the Scottish learners.

Hence, the underlying idea for this study originates from an initial intention to comprehend the contextual nuances of learning Italian as a foreign language within this specific environment where the Italian language and culture have a potentially ambiguous role, for the purpose of informing its teaching.

Scotland is a context where Italian is not the dominant language spoken by the population; however, there is a need to place great emphasis on the various profiles of learners, which are varied and different based on age, needs, and educational objectives (Diadori, Palermo, Troncarelli, 2015). Given statements like the following “La variabilità dei profili degli apprendenti va considerata, per l’italiano L2, la base per azioni formative che gestiscano la variabilità dei bisogni di apprendimento”, in English reading as “*The variability of learner profiles should be considered as the basis for formative actions that address the variability of learning needs for Italian as a second language.*” (My translation; Vedovelli, 2010: 147), emphasising the urge for tailoring language education accordingly, it appeared evident that

a closer look at learners' profiles was the most suitable direction for investigating motivation and Italian learning.

This mirrors a broader phenomenon in the field of second language acquisition, which is the shift to adopting a learner-centred perspective to explore FL learning dynamics. The increased focus on the learner has necessarily led to changes in teaching practice, as well as a redefinition of the conventional roles of teachers and students. The teacher is no longer the sole agent in the process, merely imparting correct norms (Diadori et al., 2015), but rather assumes the role of a helper to the student; meanwhile, the student is no longer a passive subject but also actively engages in complex cognitive actions, such as making hypotheses and reflecting on the language being learned.

Clearly, this reverberated in the structure of the language classroom itself: from curriculum design to lesson content, there is recognition in the field of the value in moving towards a collaborative process, reflecting this “new” relationship and negotiation between teacher and student.

Hence, the study builds upon the concepts briefly outlined so far, aiming to explore the field of Italian learning and teaching outside of Italy, specifically in Scotland. In my role as a teacher-researcher, drawing from my previous experience as an Italian language teacher, the intention was to fulfil the role of a practitioner within the Italian classroom. This allowed for ongoing reflection on practice while closely observing the dynamics that could lead to setbacks affecting learners' motivation, or those leading to more successful outcomes.

These considerations prompted the formulation of four research questions that this study seeks to address:

- *Which are the factors influencing the levels of motivation of adult learners within this Italian language course designed to address their needs?*
- *What is the interaction between their motivation, and the learning process?*
- *What is the relationship between their motivation and identity?*
- *How can an understanding of these learners' motivation and identity inform the pedagogical development of an Italian curriculum?*

Therefore, it is hoped that this research can contribute to the investigations into the motivation for learning LOTEs within the current landscape of FL learning studies. Moreover, the Action Research-based approach is expected to generate educational insights applicable to the teaching of Italian as a foreign language outside of Italy. Lastly, findings from this study may help discover strategies to foster positive learner attitudes towards language learning, among other objectives.

1.2 The Italian community: a historical timeline of the Italian presence in Scotland

The context where this study takes place is that of the adult learning in Scotland. To be more precise, with adult learning we refer to adult FL learners. In fact, this term is used to distinguish them from younger language learners enrolled in Primary or Secondary schools, which of course possess different characteristics. These participants are interesting ones to investigate especially from the perspective of motivation: as “information-rich cases for in-depth study” (Patton, 1990), both their motivation and investment in the target language may be better identified compared to younger learner subjects.

Italian as a language that is taught or spoken in Scotland is quite an intricate picture to deconstruct. Although being very hard to get a real number for all the Italians currently residing in Scotland, the Italian Embassy reports that in 2013 there were over 220,000 Italians living in the United Kingdom, of whom 30,000 in Scotland (Ugolini, 2013). However, since this information dates back to over a decade ago, it is possible to think that these numbers have increased or decreased over the years. Moreover, to this count, we should also add the people of Italian heritage, that are the new generations of families or single individuals who moved to Scotland decades ago (ISRC, 2013).

Indeed, if we take into consideration some historical data, migratory flows towards Scotland started in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Here follows an extract from an article (Richardson, 1913: 51) written by Ralph Richardson in 1913 for the *Scottish Geographical Journal*:

"By the kindness of Signor Lagorara, Italian Consul-General for Scotland, my attention was drawn to an interesting article on 'The Italians of Glasgow,' which appeared in the Weekly Mail (special) of October 21, 1911. This article states that 'the first real invasion' of Scotland by Italians took place about forty years ago when there arrived in Glasgow from Tuscany a few sellers of statuettes, and about the same time there came over some Swiss-Italians, who, in consequence of a landslip in their native Canton, had to depart into the world to seek their fortune. Some of the latter found refuge in Italy, some went to London (among them being the now well-known Gatti and Monaco), while others came to Glasgow."

(Richardson, 1913: 51)

These Italians that had moved to the United Kingdom managed to settle quite well, together with their businesses. One of the first new features introduced in this country by Italian migrants was the *gelato*, which constituted a success in Scotland at the time. In the same article, Richardson adds that there were almost 300 ice-cream shops all over Glasgow, where about 900 out of the 2000 Italians present in 1911 were employed (Richardson, 1913).

However, the migratory wave slowed down after the Second World War. This is known as the period of “Return Migration”, a phenomenon that has affected the entire country until the late Seventies (Colpi, 1991). Apart from this time interval though, Scotland has continued to be a destination for migrants coming from all over continental Europe, Italy included.

1.2.1 Where is the Italian community located in Scotland?

After this brief historical premise, it is interesting to focus on the distribution of the Italian community in the Scottish territory. It is obvious that the major cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow still count the largest community, but nowadays there is a consistent presence also in other areas of Scotland, such as the Aberdeenshire and the Highlands. About this distribution, Colpi (1991: 139) says:

“Although there are several large Italian communities in Britain today, over half of all Italians live in small communities where they represent a tiny percentage of the total urban population. As a general rule, people of the ‘old’ phase of immigration are now dispersed widely within their towns and cities, normally in the residential suburbs, whereas ‘new’ immigrants are often still concentrated in central urban areas, where they settled in the 1950s and the 1960s”.

(Colpi, 1991:139)

As far as the distribution within the community itself is concerned, this respects even at present the origins of the first groups of migrants. In Glasgow, for instance, 54% of the whole number of Italians come from two regions of Italy, which are Lazio and Tuscany (Colpi, 1991). The curious fact is that even within this regional partition there are two small towns that prevail for provenance among the others, namely Picinisco, near Frosinone, and Barga, near Lucca. In other words, this means that if you encounter an Italian member of the

community, it is more likely to happen that this person has relatives and family in a small town like Barga (which does not even count 10,000 inhabitants) than in Rome.

According to recent national reports, “between January 2008 and June 2021 the number of Italians living in the UK has increased, from 101 thousand in 2008 to approximately 342 thousand by June 2020, a net increase of 241 thousand” (Clark, 2023; copyright of Statista). While demographical information and distribution – more accurate data are provided, showing for example that in 2020 Italy ranked fourth for NINo allocations among the EU nationals in Scotland (National Records of Scotland, 2021) – attempt to mirror the contemporary migratory trends to the UK, they cannot produce reliable pictures of the Italian presence in Scotland nowadays. Therefore, although it is impossible to quantify precisely the Italian presence in Scotland, it is undeniable that the Italian community is, given the historical motivations mentioned above, large and well-rooted. Furthermore, a large community implied a wider diffusion and popularity of cultural aspects linked to Italy, such as its language.

1.3 Integrating the teacher-researcher motivation into the research

During my years of experience in teaching Italian, I have consistently been driven by a commitment to understanding and enhancing the learner experience, particularly for beginners who approach the study of the language for the first time. Throughout this period, I have indeed developed a keen awareness of the critical role that motivation plays in foreign language acquisition, often determining the extent to which learners engage with and succeed in their studies.

This awareness has shaped a teaching philosophy that prioritises a learner-centred approach, where the needs, goals, and individual contexts of students are integral to the pedagogical planning and practice. Teaching, in this view, is not merely the transmission of linguistic knowledge but an opportunity to create an engaging and supportive learning environment that responds to and fosters students’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

In the foreign language teaching context in Scotland, I have observed the diverse motivational drivers that influence students' decisions to learn Italian, ranging from personal interests and cultural connection to academic requirements and professional objectives. However, these motivations are not static, as they evolve in response to various factors both within and beyond the classroom. This dynamic nature of student motivation became a

central focus of my research, prompting an exploration of how motivational shifts can inform and improve teaching practices.

The research employs an Action-Research methodology, allowing for a continuous feedback loop between classroom practice and research insights. This approach enables me to systematically analyse motivational trends among learners and to translate these findings into practical adjustments in teaching strategies, in an iterative cycle of reflection and action. Central to this process is a needs analysis framework that allows for the identification of specific learner needs and the tailoring of instruction to address those needs effectively.

By integrating a learner-centred approach with a focus on motivation, the research aims to contribute to the field of language education by providing evidence-based practices that other educators can adopt. The ultimate objective is to demonstrate how a deeper understanding of learner motivation can lead to more adaptive and effective teaching strategies, enhancing not only language proficiency but also the overall learning experience.

1.4 Overall Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, including the introduction and conclusion.

The second chapter consists of the Literature review, where models and the state of the art that form the theoretical framework of the study are presented. Chapter 3 then focuses on the methodology adopted to conduct the study, including the analytical methods used to process the data.

Chapter 4 consists of the presentation of the learners' profiles, constructed based on the data collected and illustrated one by one.

Chapter 5 addresses the research questions that underpin the study: this chapter provides a discussion of the results, starting directly from the research questions. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the practical implications derived from the study, illustrating examples drawn from the Italian course conducted. Finally, Chapter 7 focuses on the conclusions, offering some directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2. Research on Motivation: a short introduction and timeline of the frameworks

Over the last decades, considerable research has been conducted on Second Language Learning exploring different contexts and factors. To date, there are countless studies on learning foreign languages and the various aspects that can influence this process. From this rich research it has been recognized that motivation resides among the significant variables to take into consideration for a better understanding of second language learning.

Indeed, motivation is a key concept that does not concern only linguistics: researchers started to study this variable only from the late 50s of the twentieth century, and it was originally grounded in the field of psychology (Hull, 1943; Skinner, 1953 or Duffy, 1957). Since then, motivation has been conceptualised in several theoretical perspectives.

It is hard to give a unique definition of motivation, given the multiple facets that come into play when approaching it. Referred to as “such an amorphous and difficult subject” (Usher, 2012: 2), it has recently been described as a psychological construct defined as the impetus underlying behaviour or action (Della Chiesa, Scott & Hinton, 2012), due to its importance in activating and orienting individuals’ behaviours. When it comes to language learning, it is considered one of the most effective factors of variation: for instance, motivation can affect the rate of the learning process, as well as its outcomes (Boo, Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Noels et al., 2019). Studies made on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) resulted in the identification of several variables, both endogenous and exogenous, on which the learning outcome depends (Stančeková, Chvátlová, & Stranovská, 2017). Among the exogenous ones

are listed the age of the acquisition, the context, the contact with the L2, and the L1 and L2 usage for the learner's daily life. Endogenous variables on the other hand are what researchers identify as responsible for individual differences among the learners' outcomes. Motivation is part of this second group of variables, together with personality, language aptitude and learning styles and strategies.

Given the fundamental role that motivation plays and the multifaced nature that this has, it is not surprising that many researchers decided to focus on it. However, from a historical point of view, lately three different phases have been identified in motivation research and theory, each one adopting a specific approach to it. Although chronologically these stages are not well defined, in terms of perspectives we can divide them into three core ones: a social-psychological phase, a cognitive phase embracing educational psychology, and a latter phase, where the interest of the research has fallen into the learner himself, including the contextual features of the learning process (Boo, Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015).

Although the contributions of each stage were significant for a conceptualization of motivation, the latest phase is the one that counts the richest production of material on motivation (Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015; Bremner, Sakata & Cameron 2022). Indeed, there was a considerable shift of focus between early researchers and recent ones on this field: the perspective of the learner as a *person-in-context* (Ushioda, 2009) shed a light on some factors that had previously been ignored or not considered crucial in research. For instance, the application of dynamic systems research principles to the investigation and analysis of motivational behaviours (Larsen-Freeman, Cameron, 2008) is a consequence of a general rethinking of language learning as a developmental process encompassing variability (Lowie and Verspoor, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2018). Furthermore, a new, influential consideration of the context characterised later reconceptualisations of motivation and language learning. On this last aspect, Ushioda (2009) points out the dynamical evolving relationship that intervenes between the language learner and the context, thus they cannot be considered separate entities: FL learners are not just in a certain context, but they are also part of it and contribute to shape it. At the same time, the contextual elements surrounding the learners and their lives can significantly influence them and, consequently, the learning process itself. To quote Ushioda (2014) again, the best expression to describe what ties the learner to the context is that of a "symbiotic co-adaptive relationship" between the two (2014: 47).

Inevitably, by mentioning the context and its new evaluation among researchers, it is necessary to spend few words about the theoretical approach according to which studies on motivation have been reframed, that goes under the name of Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST).

The CDST is based on the assumptions that learners, context, teachers, and the whole process of language acquisition are complex and dynamic systems, in the sense that they are “much more intricate” and “even unpredictable” (Chang & Zhang, 2021: 2), variable and non-linear. That said, the key principles that apply to these particular systems are applicable to SLA and motivation as well. Motivation is therefore not seen as something fixed in time and space anymore, but as an unstable, nonlinear (Bak, 1996) and complex system (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

To sum up then, the recent perspective of the studies on motivation adopts the CDST principles. This has been deemed to be a productive approach to research motivation in the context of foreign language learning and SLA, since, as already mentioned, a good portion of the studies conducted in the last decade falls under this theory (Boo, Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015). Through studies investigating motivational fluctuations, it was therefore possible to collect and analyse data which contributed undoubtedly to a more concrete knowledge of this construct and how it functions. On the other hand, though, the acknowledgement of the dynamic nature of each single learner generates a potential issue in terms of predictions. In other words, by analysing the individual trajectories of motivation it is not granted that this may lead to a general model which is applicable to all the other trajectories or motivational behaviours (van Geert, 2011). In addition to this, recent years have seen an increase of qualitative approaches over quantitative methods in motivational research, on fewer participants and thus limiting the scope for generalization. However, there are various ways through which individual CDST-based studies can reach a generalization of the theory; for instance, the identification of some patterns, such as attractor states (Newman, 2009), in a precise timescale can lead to the configuration of archetypes of behavioural motivation.

A further key model underlying this present study is Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System (hereafter referred to as L2MSS). It comprises the so-called future Ideal selves, that can be intended as projections of the learners’ identities and the context in which they are shaped. This model contributes to the open debate on identity in language learning, posing the ideal selves envisioned by the individuals at the centre of their motivational behaviour. Indeed, the link between language learning, identity and motivation was well established through the work of scholars like Ushioda (2009), whose studies were taken as models for the present research. The perspective from which the learner is seen as a *person-in-context* posed the rationale to investigate areas that were omitted previously – like the dimension where the learning takes place, the learning environment, or the influence of the teacher - and thus putting emphasis on identity related aspects. The most recent frameworks show that the understanding of learners’ identities shifted towards a fluid, context-dependent, and

context-producing view (Norton & Toohey, 2011), and therefore motivation itself could not account for being the solely predictive factor for proficient learning. Notions like that of investment were the result of such new light in which the correlation between Language learning, motivation and identity was investigated by researchers.

After this short overview of the motivational frameworks that are relevant for the present study, each of these is going to be presented separately in literature.

2.1 Motivational frameworks in more detail

2.1.1 Self-Determination Theory

Self Determination Theory – hereafter referred to as SDT – is one of the developed approaches to human motivation; coined by Deci and Ryan (1985), this model found various applications in all the fields where individuals' proactivity can increase or diminish over the years. Investigating how motivation interacts with education and language learning was one of the main utilizations of SDT.

SDT looks at motivation through a multidimensional model: the earliest self-determination continuum shows indeed amotivation, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation as the three dimensions or types of motivational behaviours (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

- **Intrinsic Motivation.** With this terminology the kind of motivation indicated is that of “internally driven” factors, without external factors or forms of reward. When someone is intrinsically motivated, learning is carried out because of their own self enjoyment, because they gain pleasure and satisfaction from it or, simply, because they like doing it. Extensive research has found a strong link between intrinsic motivation and successful learning and outcomes (Shan, 2020), albeit this is not the sole variable to contribute to reaching a good proficiency in the target language. Intrinsic motivation is not stable and fixed in time, and was found to be highly influenced by factors such as the context (Ushioda, 2008) or the age of the individuals (Lau, 2009).
- **Extrinsic Motivation.** This one is driven by external sources, pressures or forms of rewards. A concrete example may be the sole pursue of learning a target language because of any sort of evaluation by others, or for the need to pass an exam. While this type of motivation is less connected to successful learners compared to the intrinsic one (Dörnyei, 2003), being determined by external factors is the most realistic scenario when categorizing motivation, especially for young learners and educational environments like formal school environments (Ryan and Deci, 2000). For example, even if it is still debated and difficult to establish whether children are more intrinsically or extrinsically motivated (Theodotou, 2014), it is unlikely that they feel intrinsically motivated when learning a FL at school. Early studies on motivation for groups of young learners found that they tend to exhibit decreased intrinsic motivation in school contexts (Harter, 1981); later studies would confirm that the activities proposed in classes are not intrinsically interesting for them (Ryan

& Deci, 2000). Therefore, criteria such as their parents' or teachers' expectations, as well as the duty towards prescribed tasks become the main impetus; the utilisation of rewards – thus external factors - as a learning mechanism is indeed widely acknowledged and incorporated into educational practices, particularly for young learners (Theodotou, 2014).

- Amotivation. As the name itself suggests, with it a lack of motivation can be addressed. It can be caused by several reasons, from perceived failure to be competent to not matching one's own needs or expectations (Deci, 1975). Amotivation results in the absence of engagement in any given task or activity, because amotivated individuals do not feel the drive to do so. Exhibiting an amotivated behaviour was found to be associated with “maladaptive classroom functioning and negative student outcomes” (Cheon & Reeve, 2015: 99). Indeed, when students are amotivated, they tend to express it in various ways, ranging from being passive during lessons, to purposely missing classes. Because of the plurality of amotivated statuses, later reconceptualisations of amotivation proposed it as a multidimensional construct itself, with four variants of amotivation: *low ability*, indicating a belief in insufficient skills to perform a specific task; *low effort*, indicating a lack of desire to exert energy for a task; *low value*, questioning the usefulness of the task and finding it not important enough; and, finally, *unappealing tasks*, indicating a view that the task is personally unattractive or undesirable (Legault, Green-Demers, & Pelletier, 2006; Cheon & Reeve, 2015).

From its early formulation, SDT gained much attention on behalf of scholars as not only for defining various types of motivation but also for associating different levels of regulation to each of these. The continuum indeed goes from the most self-regulated motivation – which is intrinsic – to the least one, which coincides with the extrinsic; amotivation is labelled as non-regulatory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation seem to be opposed to one another, with the first one becoming more and more correlated to successful learning and outcomes. Extrinsic motivation contrasts to it by being considered in literature as “a pale and impoverished form of motivation” (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 55); however, it still holds a powerful role whose understanding can function as an asset for educators, especially in cases where motivation is not endorsed intrinsically. SDT distinguishes then also between different types of extrinsic motivation, as comprehending the orientations within this was deemed to be useful to foster teaching techniques for an engaging approach towards individuals moved by external factors of any kind to learning a FL. In the SDT continuum thus, Ryan and Deci identify four subcategories of extrinsic motivation, ranging from the

lowest level of self-determination to the highest one: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). See Figure 1 for a more detailed description of the continuum.

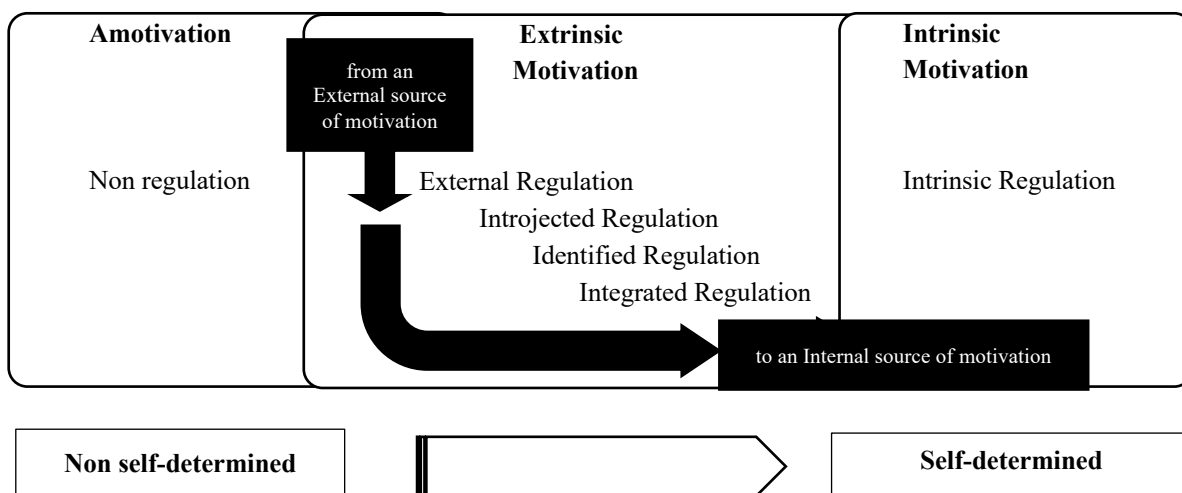


Figure 2.1, SDT learning continuum, adapted from Deci & Ryan (2000)

Given the close attention that SDT poses on “the idea that qualitative differences in motivation also matter” (Diefendorff & Seaton, 2015: 684), it has been deemed a suitable theory for the present study. SDT was indeed employed to interpret the motivation performed by the Italian learners and determine their regulatory behaviours.

2.1.2 SDT and L2 Motivational orientations

Deci and Ryan have laid the foundations for one of the most important frameworks of motivational theory with their SDT. Over the decades motivational scholars have applied SDT to fields among which education proved to be a suitable field for practice. When it comes to FL or L2 learning, Noels’ work is a popular example of SDT application.

Noels’ studies, such as Noels, Pelletier, Clément, & Vallerand (2000), represented a solid integration of Deci and Ryan’s distinction between the macro-categories of motivation into the L2 motivational approach. Noels et al. (2000) investigated motivational orientations in the L2 class and designed an instrument to measure such orientational behaviours, which is the Language Learning Orientations Scale, or LLOS – IEA, where IEA indicate the subscales respectively for Intrinsic motivation, Extrinsic motivation and Amotivation. The LLOS -IEA was the result of separate scales to assess each of the orientations; a questionnaire whose items were based on instruments used in previous studies (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983; Vallerand et al., 1989), adequately adapted to Noels’ needs for the participants.

Creating a reliable instrument to measure motivation (Dörnyei, 2003) was undoubtedly a solid contribution to L2 motivational research, but expanding the SDT framework produced even more significant additions to the ongoing implications of motivational studies in SLA. For example, Noels integrated Gardner's (1985) work adding two more layers in the orientations analysed in the L2 class: integrative motivation – the drive to be part, in this case, of the L2 community – and instrumental motivation, which is the desire to learn the L2 for precise goals or more pragmatic rewards (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Including and analysing integrative or instrumental purposes underlying the intrinsic motivation of individuals shifts the attention towards a more recent lens through which we look at the learners: that of identity and how this influences/is influenced by language learning.

Noels and associates' findings align with other studies seeing intrinsic motivation as predictor for successful learning; however, recently the concept of autonomy was also valued in assessing learners' motivation, showing that a more self-determined orientation is reached when students feel autonomous and competent (Noels, Vargas Lascano & Saumure, 2019). Learner autonomy refers to the ability of learners to take charge of their own learning, making decisions about their goals, methods, and evaluation of progress (Lamb & Reinders, 2008). This sense of control not only enhances motivation but also fosters greater engagement and responsibility, as learners become active participants in their learning journey (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Learner autonomy, teachers' strategies – resulting in a control/controlled dichotomy for the students -, the context and learning environment are all significant factors that Noels and other scholars included in their investigation of motivation and L2 over the last few years, embracing new theories and perspectives developed in the educational/motivational field.

2.1.3 The Complex Dynamic System Theory (CDST) and Motivation

Complex Dynamic System Theory – hereafter referred to as CDST – was first applied to language learning by Larsen-Freeman in 1994 and, since then, was extensively used in all areas of applied linguistics (Hiver, Al-Hoorie & Evans, 2022). For instance, Bower (2017) proposes a methodological framework to investigate motivation in SLA integrating CDST as foundational approach.

While on one hand CDST can be associated to determining the methodological approach, on the other hand it is important to mention how a construct such as motivation is seen from its perspective.

Rethinking motivation in light of CDST can be broken into the main postulates of the theory.

According to CDST, motivation is described as complex, dynamic system. It is thus reconceptualised as systemic phenomena grounded in a “context-dependent and dynamic view of development” (Hiver, Al-Hoorie & Evans, 2022: 916). It is also non-linear and subject to change, which reflects its dynamic nature as opposed to that of a static process. By addressing motivation as non-linear it is intended that a mere cause-effect approach is not ideal to study it; every component is therefore analysed as interacting with the others, bringing up any occurring relation (Kimura, 2023).

Since changes are implied in a complex dynamic system and are context-dependent, new patterns may emerge as a result of such changes: motivation is not only dynamic for its mutability over time but also because it constantly interacts with external factors. The environment and context-related factors intervene and influence motivation within a CDST frame.

CDST seems to encapsulate all the recent trends in reshaping motivation scholarship: the learner-centred perspective, its focus on the fluctuating nature of identity and the importance of the context within which the learner is immersed (Kimura, 2023). Evidence in support of this view is briefly illustrated as follows.

Most importantly, translating CDST into a concrete approach to investigate motivation allowed research to look thoroughly at different stages of language learning, building trajectories that reflect the iterative process of individual motivation. CDST is in fact a meta-theory, that is “a conceptual framework that guides the development of principles for investigating open, adaptable, and emergent systems” (Kimura, 2023: 2; Zheng et al., 2020). In the context of the present study, this is how CDST is intended.

Larsen-Freeman (2016) points out that rather than engaging with the theory, CDST based research operates at a more methodological and phenomenological level, setting substantial differences with other approaches. In the first place, by the underlying assumption for which CDST has a systemic view as starting point (Hiver, Al-Hoorie & Evans, 2022): in other words, that everything is connected and everything is subject to changes (Hiver, Al-Hoorie & Evans, 2022), so motivation had to undergo a necessary reframing under this perspective. To support even further CDST as an ideal approach to motivation, there is the importance placed on the learner: Larsen-Freeman (2019) highlighted how CDST was able to provide “a new way of thinking about individual differences” (2019: 68). The call for a learner-centred perspective as well as the notion of learner as *person-in-context* (Ushioda, 2009) reflect a desire in the field to prioritise the individual aspects of learners, encompassing their perceived and evolving identities, and understanding how these interact within their environment and the communities they want to belong to.

This shift of focus towards the learner as a person has permeated all perspectives of language learning and education, as “languages are both taught and learned by people—human beings with hopes and fears, strengths and limitations, goals and frustrations” (MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer, 2019: 262). Consequently, the various lenses to look at different aspects of language learning adapted to such deviation, with scholars considering the CDST framework, as it offers the opportunity to look individually into each case, allowing them to trace any variability in the developmental process (Chang, Zhang, 2021; Lowie and Verspoor, 2018). Another important aspect of developmental process are the initial conditions. A Complex dynamic system places much importance on these, because as a system begins to evolve, the initial conditions play a crucial role in shaping its future trajectory. The learner-centred perspective resonates also in this aspect of CDST: in fact, “this means that an L2 learner’s first language, age or maturity, proficiency in the L2, previous experience in learning additional languages, aptitude, motivation, and so on will affect the course of development” (Verspoor, & Lowie, 2021: 799).

While CDST provides valuable insights into understanding the dynamic nature of motivation, it was not adopted as a framework for this study. Instead, it is important to mention that many scholars have applied CDST in research on motivation, acknowledging its significance in framing how individual learner variables interact within complex systems.

2.1.4 Motivation and Identity: the L2 Motivational Self System

According to the recent reframing in literature, talking about language learning means referring to a developmental process that we could define as a systematic one, following the postulates of CDST; language learning is indeed considered “as a non-linear and complex dynamic process” (Cheng & Zhang, 2021: 2). Therefore, from this perspective, learning a language would be understood as an interaction of various components. The learner is undoubtedly the most complicated variable among all the levels that can be analysed when studying language learning: actually, all the other factors intervening in the learning process are dependent variables, motivation included.

In light of these considerations, scholars suggest that identity plays a crucial role in the language learning context, as it is constructed through social interactions and significantly influences learners' engagement and agency. Given its importance, it is essential to explore how learners' identity – or identities - intersect with their motivation, shaping their experiences and outcomes in language education.

For instance, Gee (2000) posits that identities are dynamic and fluid, shaped by interactions and experiences in various social and cultural contexts. In the realm of education and

language learning, this means that learners may adopt different identities depending on their learning environment, their peers, and their own perceptions of who they are as language users. As Gee suggests, individuals are not just passive recipients of knowledge; they become "a certain kind of person" (Gee, 2000: 99) through their engagement in social practices, which influences how they see themselves and their capabilities in language learning. Understanding identity in this context is not merely about recognising the labels that individuals may adopt; it is about acknowledging the multifaceted nature of identity that encompasses personal, social, and cultural dimensions. These identities can change over time and are influenced by various factors such as cultural backgrounds, previous language experiences, and social interactions.

Norton (2013) expands on this notion by highlighting how language learners navigate their identities in relation to the communities they wish to belong to and how this impacts their engagement in learning. Indeed, her concept of *investment* – which will be presented in later sections - reflects the idea that learners' identities and their desire to participate in a community can greatly affect their motivation and engagement.

Therefore, identity-related issues in language education have been a substantial research focus (Norton, 2013). In fact, working on identity and how the learners perceive themselves is a way to understand how they see themselves within the context they belong to, within the social community, or who they want to become in the future, their "possible future-selves" (Ushioda, 2011). Indeed, it would be fairer to speak about different and distinct identities, rather than individual learners.

It is thus imperative to mention a fundamental model combining identity and motivation, that is the L2 Motivational Self System (hereafter referred to as L2MSS). Designed by Dörnyei, it is a model that involves three dimensions – namely the ideal L2 self, the Ought-to L2 self and the learner experience (Dörnyei, 2009) – and that offers us an example of how motivation and identity may interact. It is reported that the L2MSS is currently the dominant theoretical framework in the field (Al-Hoorie, 2018), with its popularity due to its being adaptable to the most recent theories. It in fact integrates well with various psychological and sociocultural theories, due to its dynamic and multidimensional structure, which will be shortly presented.

The findings of a large empirical study on L2 students in Hungary (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006) suggested the conceptualization of two constructs within the model, known as the *ideal L2 self* and the *Ought-to L2self*. The first one is the representation of a self that would like to achieve the attributes for being a proficient user of the L2 that the learner studies. As the name itself suggests, this is an ideal vision of the self, based on the L2 and inner desires of the individual. The *Ought-to L2self* on the other hand

is represented by what the learner believes they have to achieve for a better fit in the language community, or in order to meet the expectations of other members of the community. In other words, the *Ought-to L2* is activated by a kind of motivation coming from external factors and pressures, more than from “inner” needs. The theorisation of the latter self that Dörnyei identified, seems to correspond to an earlier construct within the motivation models, which is integrative motivation. It should be borne in mind that with the concept of integrative motivation – that Noels, among others, included in her expansion of the SDT - it is understood that there is the desire to integrate within the group of L2 speakers on behalf of the learner (Gardner, 1985, 2010). Their motivational behaviours are based on the will to identify themselves with the community until becoming a valid member of it. Integrativeness was already one of the main components of the Socio-Educational Model designed by Gardner and Lambert in 1959, a model that has been modified and adapted over the past decades.

The categorization developed by Dörnyei is indeed a way to explain how future selves can channel and activate motivation in L2 learning; however, in addition to the two selves, there is also the L2 Learning Experience, which was much less studied and detailed compared to the other two components (Dörnyei, 2019). As Dörnyei and Ryan’s (2015: 88) explain, the reason is likely that the third component

“focuses on the learner’s present experience, covering a range of situated, ‘ex-ecutive’ motives related to the immediate learning environment (e.g., the impact of the L2 teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, and the experience of success)”. (Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015: 88)

At present, we have already mentioned that these other factors have been recognized as crucial ones and definitely contribute to channel motivation as well as the two self-guides. The L2 Learning Experience and the environment of the L2 classroom can be a starting point to contribute to the activation of motivational attitudes and, at the same time, to the definition of the identity. For the present study, what Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) stated above constitutes an important premise for analysing these immediate motivational components determined by the learning environment in which the students find themselves. More specifically, it will be illustrated how these factors have influenced changes in the motivation of the participants of the study.

2.1.5 SDT and L2MSS

The two models discussed are widely regarded as leading frameworks for investigating and researching motivation. Despite originating from distinct stages of motivational theory development - SDT being rooted in the cognitive stage and the L2MSS emerging in the socio-dynamic phase (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) - both offer unique perspectives on understanding motivation. These frameworks not only reflect their respective theoretical stages but also provide complementary insights into how motivation is conceptualised and applied in language learning.

Indeed, as illustrated in the dedicated sections, SDT and L2MSS provide insights into different dimensions of motivation:

- SDT focuses on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, highlighting the critical role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000). It is especially useful in analysing learners' internalised motivations, such as the enjoyment derived from learning or feelings of obligation in various educational settings. SDT helps to understand the psychological mechanisms that drive individuals to engage with learning based on their sense of autonomy, mastery of skills, and connection with others.
- L2MSS (Dörnyei, 2009) encapsulates the identity-related and forward-looking aspects of motivation, particularly the future selves envisioned by the learners. For instance, the Ideal L2 Self, which embodies learners' visions of themselves as proficient speakers of a second or foreign language, thus offering valuable insight into how learners' future aspirations and self-perception influence their motivation to learn and engage with the target language.

The two frameworks therefore offer distinct insight that at the same time have the scope to be interrelated (Takahashi & Im, 2020), as borne out by a study which compared these two models and empirically demonstrated that their motivational constructs are indeed related and can be applied together (Parrish & Vernon, 2022). While SDT's internalised types of motivation predicted intended learning effort, which led to improved L2 proficiency, the study noted that the Ideal L2 Self of L2MSS had a weaker influence on learning effort compared to the L2 Learning Experience, challenging the dominance of future self-guides within L2MSS. Despite this, both theories proved effective in explaining different motivational pathways.

By combining SDT's focus on psychological needs satisfaction and L2MSS's future self-images, researchers can access a holistic view of motivation. There is therefore reason to believe that SDT and L2MSS are complementary frameworks for understanding language learning motivation: SDT provides a robust explanation for the internal processes that sustain motivation, whereas L2MSS captures the long-term visions and self-concepts that drive learners. This combination allows researchers to study motivation both from the internal drive (SDT) and future goals and experiences (L2MSS), ensuring a more comprehensive approach to understanding motivation in language learning contexts.

2.2 FL Learning and Investment

2.2.1 A “gap” in motivation studies: the notion of Investment

Investment is a sociological construct developed by Norton (2013), but also Cummins (2006), that tries to explain the language learning commitment of the individual. Norton's research found that high levels of motivation did not necessarily translate into good language learning. To give an example, imagine a student who is highly motivated to learn the target language, but that at the same time performs little engagement in a certain set of language practices; they may be less interested in activities in the classroom which involve speaking loud in front of others or entertaining social interactions in the foreign language. In addition, Norton stresses that there was a common feature in the findings on a study involving immigrant women studying English in Canada, represented by the unequal relations of power between language learners and target language speakers (Norton, 1995).

This observation underscores the importance of contextual factors in FL acquisition, as learners often navigate social dynamics that can inhibit or facilitate their engagement. The recognition of power imbalances - such as those based on ethnicity, class, or social status - highlights that the investment in language learning is not merely a personal journey but is also shaped by broader societal structures. This and other reasons were the foundations for the development of the construct of investment: it offers a way to understand learners' variable desires to engage in social interactions and community practices (Norton, 1995; 1997; 2013).

Norton's definition of investment is below reported as it summarises the existing “gap” in motivation research at the time, a gap that she addressed by coining this concept:

“Because the right to speak intersects in important ways with a language learner's identity, I have used the term investment to signal the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their

sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it. Central questions in my own work are not ‘Is the learner motivated to learn the target language?’ and ‘What kind of personality does the learner have?’ Instead, my questions are framed as follows: ‘What is the learner’s investment in the target language? How is the learner’s relationship to the target language socially and historically constructed?’ The construct of investment conceives of the language learner as having a complex history and multiple desires. An investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own social identity, which changes across time and space.” (Norton, 1997: 411)

Investment must be therefore seen within a sociological framework, rather than a psychological construct; the latter is more likely to regard motivation instead. This distinction is critical, as it shifts the focus from internal factors, such as personal drive, to external influences, including social context and identity. The notion presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not just exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly “organising and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (Norton, 1997: 410). This process of negotiation is key to understanding how learners position themselves within their target language communities, as they strive to construct identities that resonate with their aspirations and experiences. Norton’s concept of investment acknowledges that language learners possess complex, multiple identities that shift across time and space, and these identities are reproduced through social interaction (Darvin & Norton, 2016).

By highlighting the socially and historically constructed relationship between learners and the target language, the notion of investment provides a critical lens for researchers to examine power relations in various learning contexts and how these conditions shape learners' commitment to language acquisition. Learners invest in a language to acquire a broader range of symbolic and material resources, which in turn enhances the value of their cultural capital and social power (Norton, 2013). Importantly, the degree to which learners can invest in a target language and claim legitimacy as speakers is contingent on how power is negotiated in different contexts, with variable outcomes.

Investment can be therefore expressed as the link that ties together motivation, identity, and language learning. By considering investment as a central tenet in language education, educators can better appreciate the complexities of learner engagement and design curricula that empower students to navigate their social worlds more effectively. Thus, fostering an

environment that acknowledges these sociological dynamics can enhance both learners' sense of agency, motivation, and their overall language acquisition journey.

2.3 Motivation and Languages Other than English (LOTEs)

2.3.1 FL language learning: English as global language and LOTEs

Most of the research investigating language learning and motivation has predominantly had English as the target language; as mentioned before in this chapter, within the last twenty years there was a surge in motivational studies, and data show that the vast majority of them – Ushioda (2017) reports 72.67% as percentage – were about learning English as a TL in monolingual countries like Japan or in regions of China. More recent enquiries still record English learning as the predominant focus in research, albeit evidencing a rise in studies on other FLs learning and teaching contexts up to 2020 (Guo, Zhuo, Gao, 2021).

The status that the English language gained as a *lingua franca* serves as an explanation for its popularity among worldwide learners: it has been widely accepted that learning English is not conceived as learning a second or foreign language anymore, but rather a skill and a required criteria in most educational and professional contexts (Ushioda, 2017). Lu & Shen's (2022) findings indicate that English is seen as essential by learners, whereas proficiency in a FL which was not English is only considered advantageous and often viewed as an additional endeavour in their language learning pursuits by such learners.

While this is not the place to carefully recount the historical reasons that enabled English to gain such a predominant role, it is worth mentioning that results like those in Lu & Shen are attributable to the presence of English in school education in many contexts since its earliest stages (Rose, Syrbe, Montakantiwong, Funada, 2020). This extends to recent shifting in viewing it as a language for global education by researchers in education (Shrishthy, 2023; Yacob, Yunus & John, 2023) and confirming its dominance within worldwide education sometimes at the expense of learners of other languages (Schornack & Karlsson, 2021). Indeed, all dynamics related to ESL and EFL, or, more generally, EL (English Learners), have been extensively explored, informing - and continuing to inform, given the constantly evolving nature of the linguistic landscape - various policy makers or actors in the language learning pedagogical process. The same cannot certainly be said for all the other languages studied worldwide, where the focus on English, also evidenced by the prevalence and preference of English as the medium and object of knowledge production (Hyland, 2015; Zheng & Guo, 2019) has definitely impacted. As a result, Languages Other Than English have not received the same level of attention or investigation in the research field, remaining a much less explored area.

2.3.2 Research on LOTEs and motivation: the impact of global English

However, as mentioned earlier, interest in learning other languages, albeit to a lesser extent and without posing a challenge to the status of English, has experienced growth in the last decades. Graddol (2006) had predicted a scenario in which, along with the “end of English as a foreign language” (Ushioda, 2017: 469), the world would have observed an increase of motivation in learning languages other than English (hereafter referred to as LOTEs); Graddol was thus envisioning a possibility where LOTEs may have benefitted from English shifting to Global English from its former being “just” a foreign language. Yet, recent research provided little evidence to Graddol’s projections on motivation, at times also showing negative impacts of Global English on motivation to learning LOTEs.

In Taylor & Marsden (2014) for instance, its effects are visible in secondary school students in England; participants - 13/14-year-old pupils choosing whether to include FL learning in their curricula at school from the following year – were found to have different attitudes towards the “uptake” of such FL depending on their awareness on the relevance and usefulness of learning modern languages (Taylor & Marsden, 2014). While the reason for this – being more or less aware of the benefits of learning LOTEs and being exposed to such information from a young age – was not precisely investigated in the study itself, the authors identify Global English as one of the main underlying factors, especially for English speaking countries, thus aligning with a view shared with most of the scholars in the field of LOTEs motivation (Busse & Walter, 2013).

Data on FL trends in education offer more insight in the overall teaching and learning of LOTEs: according to these, the countries with the lowest average of multilingualism in Europe – here intended as the capacity of speaking more than one language, as per the definition given by the European Commission (2007) -, are two English-speaking countries, namely Ireland and the United Kingdom (Cenoz, 2009). Compared to other neighbouring countries, where most part of the population is proficient in at least another language aside from their mother tongue, or to other Anglophone countries, like the US, where Spanish is gaining more and more importance as a FL, the UK and its linguistic situation “appears as stagnant” (Busse & Walter, 2013: 436). It is indeed unlikely that British students pursue or continue learning FLs at secondary levels (Mejer et al., 2010), and the situation is not that different for higher education (Taylor & Marsden, 2014). The unfavourable depiction of the UK in terms of multilingual capacity – together with other English-speaking contexts, such as Australia (Carr & Pauwels, 2009) – has drawn the attention of researchers in an attempt

to find a strategy to promote FL learning, by understanding the contextual, societal biases for which LOTEs suffer from less popularity compared to other countries.

As anticipated, Global English was identified as a common factor influencing motivation for LOTEs by several scholars (e.g. Lanvers, 2013). Despite some exceptions – for example another Lanvers’ study on FL students’ perceptions of Global English (2017), whose results suggested “no strong links between motivation and beliefs about Global English” (2017: 240) – empirical research validated the notion of Global English demotivating possible LOTE learners (Lanvers, 2017), in conjunction with the idea of English as the most dangerous of the “killer languages”, i.e. those languages threatening the linguistic diversity worldwide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2003).

Albeit globally inferior in predominance, the study of LOTEs is obviously what differentiates (or unites?) Anglophone speakers who engage in FL learning, being that they are already native users of the recognised lingua-franca. As mentioned earlier, it has been argued that those sharing English as their L1 demonstrate less desire towards FL proficiency; Lanvers (2017) adds that “International comparisons show that UK citizens have poorer motivation to learn languages than other EU citizens (Bartram, 2010; Eurostats, 2012), are less concerned than other Europeans that all should speak another language, and believe more than other Europeans that the EU should operate in one official language only (Eurostats, 2012, pp. 110–111).” (2017: 2). The visible differences between UK and Ireland citizens and EU ones in terms of language attitudes and the obvious diverse needs behind any FL engagement set an important consideration: that motivation in LOTEs learning cannot be assimilated/integrated into the conventional language learning and motivation literature, largely – and predominantly - exploring English as TL.

What are therefore the elements interacting in the LOTEs learning motivational continuum? How can the motivation be fostered to enhance the overall LOTEs learning scenario? In which way can LOTEs be promoted in English-L1 countries? These and other similar queries were the research questions of studies tackling education for languages other than English. Busse and Walter’s (2013) analysis of the motivational trajectories of German learners in UK universities suggested some useful pedagogical implications for improving the overall experience of students. It was found for example that despite participants registering a high level of motivation at the beginning of the study, this lowered considerably after enough time to undergo teaching was allowed. Among the causes, there was the perceived little exposure to the TL during the lessons, leading to a decrease in confidence in listening and speaking skills thus, consequently, intrinsic motivation. Students were dissatisfied with the practice of teaching German by using English, not enabling them to have enough exposure

to the TL (Busse & Walter, 2013: 455). This feeling of not using sufficiently German over English, together with the perceived difficulty of languages and the belief of inadequate abilities to learn them – shared by most of British students (Taylor & Marsden, 2014) – clearly set the conditions for less enjoyment and less progress in the TL. Progress and sense of attainment are strongly linked to motivation as literature shows; students in the present study also registered a generic feeling of dissatisfaction towards the teaching techniques adopted and especially towards the exercises or tasks in class.

On the basis of the results gained, authors suggested some pedagogical implications to apply the research on LOTEs in the UK to university teaching. The above-mentioned view of “English as killer language” finds its own application here, given the students’ reflection on their minor exposure to German when in class, due to the teachers delivering the course content or instructions in English. Furthermore, it is believed that the TL can be devalued by English if there is a separation between the use of such TL and the delivery of the content, done in another language (Coleman, 2005). Therefore, and larger integration of TL “actual” use within the curriculum – thus allowing learners to have sufficient interactions/exposure in such language – may be a possible implication to maintain the motivation throughout the FL courses (Taylor & Marsden, 2014).

LOTEs constitute a group that by its same definition is numerously bigger - being more languages involved - and heterogeneous compared to its counterpart, English as a learned language. The one between English and LOTEs is an important imbalance, generating a “reductionist picture, as it ignores a significant proportion of the existing forms of language attainment worldwide” (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017: 456). The gap in terms of adequate application of motivational theory for LOTEs – given the focus on English as the FL studied on behalf of scholars in the field over the years – was addressed firstly by acknowledging a shift in the elected models describing motivation.

Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017), for instance, call for the unsuitability of Gardner’s sense of “integrativeness” as the first differentiating factor between the two languages. Global English cannot really be biased by integrative motivation – described as the belonging to the TL community – due to the extension of such community to a “global” scale; thinking of it from the perspective of projected selves, and thus in light of the L2MSS, seems a more appropriate dimension for the unique case of Global English. With LOTEs though, FL speaking communities and the desire to be part of such communities do exist, leading to integrative motivation as a valuable predictor of the learners’ attitudes. This distinction was made on the basis of a “societal” facet; by looking at the learner as an individual, the L2-self theory witnessed the introduction of newly framed selves, like the Rooted-L2 self and the

Ideal Multilingual self (2017: 459). Especially the latter yields a notable meaning for research on L2 and L3 learning, where Global English is most likely learnt in conjunction with LOTEs within the same subject, aiming at becoming multilingual.

When it comes to learners goals or needs, Global English and LOTE learning appear to be diversified as well. While for the first one it is widely accepted that one does not have “any special justification” (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017: 462), the reasons for studying a LOTE are multiple and, at times, closely context-specific. It is therefore impossible to generalise or to group motivations to undertake language classes, reflecting therefore the huge variety of idiosyncratic circumstances for attaining proficiency in them.

Heritage language learning (MacIntyre et al., 2017), indirect cultural contact (Eom & Braithwaite, 2023), immigration (Norton Peirce, 1995), leisure or consumption (Kubota, 2011) have all been noted among the reasons underlying FL learning in literature and obtained empirical validation. On one side, English as FL has been extensively investigated and its status of Global English universally recognised. On the other, LOTE learning is gaining more and more attention, urging the call for a deeper understanding of the factors regulating it, which are different from Global English ones.

2.4 The role(s) of Teachers

Among scholars, it was mentioned above how Ushioda (2011) reflects on the nature of a foreign language and invites us to not think of it simply as a set of skills to acquire, but as an incredible tool to expand our identity. Learning a new language enables us to broaden our knowledge from many perspectives and allows us to access to new communities and realities. It is an accepted view that more than setting proficiency goals it would be ideal to enhance the FL social interactions and start reframing the language as a mean to develop and express your identity, also within the context of a classroom.

For this purpose, the role of the FL or the L2 teacher becomes an additional asset to address the channelling of motivation. Noels’ (1999) findings on teachers’ communicative styles and their influence in L2 motivation confirm this fundamental relationship. The students that perceive the teacher having a strong sense of control and there to be a lack of feedback, were found to lack motivation as well. Indeed, the adoption of a certain communicative style can result in a properly demotivating attitude for the students.

Research unveiled the effects for which learning a language is connected to a development and reshaping of the identity - or identities – (Norton, 2000; Lemke, 2002; Taylor, 2013)

thus the learners themselves are not to be considered “*just a learner*”. In other words, key stakeholders within the language education process – learners, or teachers – underwent a new reconceptualization, sometimes multiple ones, necessarily adapting to societal changes. If we focus on the learners, conceived as “persons with multiple and changing identities” (Anwaruddin, 2011: 14), the approach that FL and L2 Teachers adopt, acquires an even more meaningful importance. Teachers are not only responsible and able to guide the learners towards the attainment of language proficiency goals, but they can moderate significantly also their motivation, as seen above reporting some of Noels’s findings – one of the numerous studies investigating teachers’ influence on motivation.

Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) for example suggested a number of commandments for enhancing students’ motivation; Dörnyei (2014) later grouped such motivation-oriented teaching strategies in four different categories, each of them acting on diverse components of the learning microcosm. The first category comprises of all the behaviours and adjustments related to the classroom setting (i.e., how to make it a pleasant and stimulating space or cultivating a positive teacher-student relationship). The second category deals more with all the language-related aspects that can be motivated in the learners, such as defining outcomes and realistic goals in the target language. The third category focuses on strategies to maintain the students’ motivation and promoting techniques to achieve this aim. The fourth and last of the categories proposed by Dörnyei involves the promotion of self-evaluation and importance of feedback, thus all the strategies that enables the students’ satisfaction and sense of achievement.

The focus on how impactful a well-structured – and directed - teaching action on the students’ motivation can be, leads to reflection on the central role that teachers have in all this. Or, considering recent debates (Kubanyiova, 2018), it would be better to talk of multiple “roles”, in an attempt to reflect the plurality and multifaceted nature of the teachers’ work.

Following the reconceptualisation of the role of language teacher in education (Kubanyiova, 2018), the call for an adequate, up-to-date, language teachers’ education became food for thought for several scholars, trying to define such a canonical and traditional role – that of pedagogist – in its new meaning. For instance, Kubanyiova and Crookes (2016) refer to the language teacher as a “moral agent”: in evaluating the influence and effect that FL teachers have on the learners, the identity of FL teachers has undergone some sort of shift. They went from being seen as “passive technicians” to “reflective practitioners” (Kubanyiova & Crookes, 2016). Téllez and Varghese (2013) instead, address the need for advocacy among the teachers’ educational requirements: the urge of language teachers as capable of “adopting a critical perspective in the face of political and social forces and discourses that often work

against the interests of marginalized communities of bilingual children and their families” (Kubanyiova, 2018: 51).

In this journey towards redefining teachers’ roles, tasks and identities, Gong, Lai & Gao (2022) recently investigated some aspects of teacher identity to determine which could be relevant in their teaching practice. More specifically, the study – conducted with 16 Chinese language teachers working in International Schools in Hong Kong – seeks to “illustrate the participants’ different professional and sociocultural identities in relation to teaching intercultural communicative competence, and how these identities interact with their intercultural teaching cognition and practices” (Gong, Lai & Gao, 2022: 145). Results confirmed the link between teachers’ identities and teachers’ own development and implementation/effort towards adopting teaching strategies. It was also demonstrated that different identities lead to different levels of effort: for example, a strong association between a perceived Chinese language teacher identity with the transmission of Chinese cultural knowledge, rather than teaching the students how to develop intercultural skills (Gong, Lai & Gao, 2022).

The latter is a recent contribution to the field of language education and motivation where the role of teachers is questioned. Dörnyei and Guilloteaux (2008) had already envisioned this need for further investigations on the effectiveness of teaching strategies among future implications for research. They referred to the teachability of such strategies and also to the focus on the adequate training that teachers – may – receive on the basis of their and other scholars’ findings.

While the role(s) of teachers represents an open debate and a space incorporating new perspectives for professional developments within multilanguage community nowadays (Kubanyiova & Crookes, 2016), classroom practice has been the playground for experimenting various teaching techniques aligning with the reconceptualization of learners/language/teachers.

An interesting – albeit one of many – example is *Dogme Language Teaching* (Thornbury, 2000). This approach is based on the exaltation of the conversational interaction between the teacher and the learners among the other methodologies of delivering a lesson. The concrete application of this methodology had as contextual element that of the English Language Teaching (ELT). Although the efficacy of this strategies in terms of outcomes has not been proved, undoubtedly it must be recognised that *Dogme* puts on its centre the learners, without involving a control-based teaching style. It is more like a mutual exchange between the FL teacher and the student, an attempt to rebuild that environment “where learning was jointly constructed out of the talk that evolved in that simplest and most prototypical of situations”

(Thornbury, 2000). Thus, *Dogme*'s principles have the merit of placing much importance on the engagement of the learner and his/her own identity.

At this point, it is essential to distinguish between sociocultural identity, professional identity and personal identity in the context of teachers. According to Ishihara & Menard-Warwick (2018), sociocultural identity reflects how teachers perceive themselves within the social structures, cultural norms, and the expectations imposed by their communities and societies. This includes broader, external influences on their professional selves and identity, often linked to power dynamics or the social structures surrounding them. Teacher professional identity is instead described as how teachers perceive themselves within their roles, evolving through interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader educational environment. On the other hand, personal identity refers more to an "internal" sense of self, which is constructed from an individual's life experiences, beliefs, values, and personal history. According to this framework by Ishihara & Menard-Warwick, each of these identities are not static, not only within each category, but each dimension interacts with the others, highlighting how teachers' beliefs and practices are influenced by their understanding of their roles within the educational landscape. Norton (1997) had already observed how identity is not static but rather fluid and constantly renegotiated, following Duff & Uchida's (1997) definition of sociocultural identities especially in environments where power relations are significant.

Following the three main teacher's typologies of identity theorized by Ishihara & Menard-Warwick (2018) – namely Teacher professional identity, Teacher sociocultural identity and Teacher personal identity – the engagement actively also involves the educator's side. Teacher's professional identity intervenes in a *Dogme* approach trying to put up teaching strategies that favour relationship-building between the two sides and in the classroom environment, avoiding demotivating outcomes due to a teacher-controlled learning (Noels, Clément, and Pelletier, 1999).

The ongoing discussion on the present-day position and task of the teacher can be summarised as in the following excerpt, which I believe to be an excellent wording: "Language teacher identity is a pivotal construct that reflects teachers' views 'of "how to be", "how to act" and "how to understand" the work and their place in the society' (Sachs, 2005: 15), as well as being 'a pedagogical resource' (Morgan, 2004: 174) for teaching practices." (Gong, Lai & Gao, 2022: 135). Teaching is indeed something that goes beyond just the role of teaching language. It encompasses how teachers perceive themselves in their profession and their understanding of their role in society. In addition, teacher identity is viewed as a valuable tool for guiding teaching practices, influencing how they approach teaching, interact with students, and design learning experiences in the classroom. This

multifaceted role of the teacher serves as a fundamental aspect for the current study as it encapsulates the teaching philosophy of the teacher-researcher conducting this research. About Foreign Language teaching practice there will be further discussion in the next chapters of the present study, namely in chapter 3, 5 and 6.

2.5 The context: a closer look

2.5.1 More than one context to explore

As anticipated in the introduction of the thesis, one of the aims of this study was exploring the contextual factors impacting on Italian learners' motivation. In the following paragraph an overview on all the "contexts" where Italian learning is positioned within the realm of this research is offered. Starting with defining the Italian presence in Scotland - whose historical and demographical perspective was already covered in the Introduction chapter, chapter 1 - and how Italian is represented in education, also some insights into another level of learning context – namely, the learning environment of the classroom – are presented.

Within the perspective reframing learners as *person-in-context* (Ushioda, 2020), already illustrated in this chapter, it is widely acknowledged that the learning environment exerts significant influence on motivation in FL learning. For instance, to recall other theorisations of the contextual factors within the motivational framework, in the L2MSS developed by Dörnyei the learning environment is one of the facets of its multidimensional model, more precisely placed among the L2 Learning Experience features.

Especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional language learning environment experienced a pivotal shift, transitioning exclusively to online platforms. Therefore, considering the significant impact this had on the present study itself, a concise overview of literature pertaining to online learning environments is provided as the final element of contextual exploration of this chapter.

2.5.2 Foreign Language Learning in Scotland: Italian in Education

Research on Italian as FL learned outside of Italy has highlighted how among the most common profiles of learners there are "esponenti della terza o quarta generazione di emigrazione in paesi caratterizzati da un basso grado di mantenimento dell'italiano, i quali, pur non possedendo alcuna competenza linguistica nella lingua d'origine, decidono di studiare l'italiano per recuperare e definire la propria identità linguistica e culturale", in English "*representatives of the third or fourth generation of emigration in countries characterized by a low degree of Italian maintenance, who, despite not possessing any linguistic competence in the original language, decide to study Italian to recover and define their linguistic and cultural identity*" (My English translation; Diadori, Palermo, Troncarelli, 2015: 78). In support of these statements, there are reports and data collected from

environments and institutions where Italian FL teaching is imparted, such as Italian Cultural Institutes, universities, or private language courses around the world. In fact, these indicate a strong presence of learners of Italian origin among the attendees, since their family background is indicated by them as the main reason for undertaking the study of Italian (De Mauro et al., 2002). It is appropriate to refer to this phenomenon as heritage language learning, thus indicating these learners as heritage language learners. The latter term is generally “used to describe a person studying a language who has proficiency in or a cultural connection to that language” (Kelleher, 2010: 1).

When considering Scotland, there is insufficient data to date for establishing if the above statement represents an actual depiction of the Scottish learners deciding to study Italian, especially related to adult learning.

The Italian language is regularly taught in Secondary schools in Scotland. Indeed, it is one of the modern languages to learn besides French, Spanish, German, Mandarin, Urdu and Gaelic. However, it is to be pointed out that according to the National Centre for Language (SCILT) annual reports, the number of Secondary students’ entries at Higher for Italian remains quite low, compared to French and Spanish. At the same time though, the figures show a little growth year after year, from 2012 to 2019, with a dip in 2014. A similar scenario was observed for the Advanced Higher entries, where “entries in Italian have remained fairly steady, with a low in 2016 (22 entries) and a high in 2018 (36 entries). Entries dropped to 27 in 2019.” (SCILT, 2019: 10). For the “8-year trend of uptake in language entries below Higher (2012-2019)” instead, SCILT statistics reported that Italian had a variable uptake, as “for 2019 (296) are 56% below those for 2012 (671), 40% below those in 2014 (496), and also significantly below 2018

(-35%).” (SCILT, 2019: 13)². Additionally, key findings from the SHAPE 2022 report³ for Scotland show that there was a growth in secondary students undertaking Italian as school subject, as “between 2021 and 2022 Italian entries saw the largest increase of any SHAPE subject at this level, increasing by 128%” (SCILT, 2022). However, these also indicate that numbers remain quite small compared to the other languages.

While for Secondary teaching there are some data on the study of the Italian language, for the adults continuing education it is impossible to establish to what extent the learning of such language is widespread. However, from a study dated 2007 by the National Institute of

² All data accessible in “Research: Statistics on Languages in Scotland” on the SCILT website: <https://scilt.org.uk/Research/StatisticsonlanguagesinScotland/tabid/2914/Default.aspx>

³ “Studying SHAPE: 2022 is the first in an annual series of reports from The British Academy providing a snapshot of the number of students undertaking the most common secondary and further education qualifications in the UK, in humanities and social science subjects”. SCILT: <https://scilt.org.uk/Research/StatisticsonlanguagesinScotland/tabid/2914/Default.aspx>

Continuing Education (NIACE), it resulted that in the United Kingdom only 4% of a total of 5000 participants had learnt at least one foreign language besides their first language (Dutton & Meyer, 2007). From the same study it also emerged that the figures had increased a little compared to the previous study conducted: in other words, the people in the UK involved in learning a foreign language were more. The cited survey published by NIACE is interesting also because it illustrates the profiles of the individuals who were most likely to learn another language other than English: younger adults, in employment or full-time students. In addition, Italian appears among the languages preferred for learning, together with French, Spanish and German. Otherwise, older learners, and with this term NIACE refers to those who are older than 45, were occupying the portion of those least likely to engage in a foreign language learning process.

2.5.3 Language diversity and Scottish education

Returning to the Scottish context, a realistic overview of FL learning and teaching is currently difficult to obtain. SCILT, though, has investigated the linguistic trends and their reports are an additional and useful tool to understand the multilingual society that exists in this country. Indeed, the arrival of migrants from all over the world through the years resulted in a new, diverse and changing linguistic context (Phipps & Fassetta, 2015). Several initiatives have been made to embrace this language diversity and recognize the importance of acquiring and enhance language skills throughout the society. One of the attempts was the publication of the *Curriculum of Excellence* in 2004, that has framed schooling in Scotland since then. However, although promoting an effective approach to modern languages both in Secondary and Primary Schools, the *Curriculum of Excellence* is believed to lack language management and a stronger policy (Phipps & Fassetta, 2015). To reinforce this belief expressed by Phipps and Fassetta, they reported some data from an analysis by Eurydice (2012), where it is visible that schools in other European countries dedicate much time to the teaching of foreign languages as part of their programmes. In Scotland there is not a fixed number of hours for language acquisition, but it really depends on the individual institutions. That said, the authors of the article agree on the need of a more solid approach by the school system, in order to guarantee students' minimum proficiency in the foreign languages studied.

2.5.4 The Transnationalizing Modern Languages project (TML)

Another noteworthy initiative to be mentioned is the Transnationalizing Modern Languages project (TML). The TML dates to 2014 and tried to respond to the alarming data showing a decline of the recruitment for modern language teachers both in schools and at university level (Burdett, 2018). The TML project has therefore brought together a team of researchers and teachers to promote the strong link between language education and foreign cultures. After identifying some issues to be addressed in the current language education system, the TML team has worked with schools in the UK promoting an interdisciplinary approach to modern languages; furthermore, they tried to reframe the study of modern languages within the curriculum. To quote directly from the TML project statement on their webpage, the aim of the research is to: valorise the role of languages beyond the language classroom; highlight the diversity already present in local communities; and reward learners' ability to move between languages and cultures⁴.

Another interesting aspect to point out about the TML team's work, is the focus on the Italian culture. In particular, they researched the impact of the Italian culture across the globe by reconstructing a map of the mobility of Italians over the years.

It must be argued that the above cited are just few of the plenty interventions on behalf of researchers who aspire to the adoption of a strong language education policy in the UK. For instance, it has also been attempted to raise awareness on the importance of language learning and the benefits of living in a multilingual society (Lanvers, Hultgren, Gayton, 2019). The findings on this study conducted on students all over the UK, including Scotland, suggest that this can be a successful way to foster FL learning amid the British students.

2.5.5 Online language learning: an overview on recent perspectives

In the last decade we have witnessed a high volume of teaching for which online delivery methodologies were implemented. A natural process indeed, that goes step by step with the introduction of technologies allowing the shift to a digitalised era of teaching and learning. Especially in the last few years, the COVID-19 pandemic made this a necessary move, speeding up online learning and the world adjusting to new forms of education and communication.

⁴ Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Reframing language education for a global future
<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/transnationalizing-modern-languages/>

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching was a valid alternative to the classic fully face-to-face learning environment. Conventionally categorised into different typologies, for example blended – or hybrid – learning, where in-person classes are combined with online delivered ones, and entirely online learning (Bailey and Lee, 2020: 180), forms of online teaching were found to impact positively on several aspects of learning (Wang, Hsu, Bonem, Moss, Nelson, & Levesque-Bristol, 2019). Undoubtedly among the most common advantages of distance learning we can indicate the major flexibility for the students to follow the lessons from anywhere, being this the primary benefit of any activity from remote. Money and time cuts and, therefore, affordability are also important factors coming along with online courses (Faramarzi, Sajad & Elekaei, Atefeh & Koosha, Mansour, 2015). However, research both before and after the spread of COVID-19 reported also negative effects linked to online education (Üstün & Deregözü, 2021).

2.5.6 Challenges of an Online Learning environment for teachers

The unprecedented situation that the whole world had to face from early 2020 posed new challenges to educators in terms of lesson delivery, in a moment where teachers had to rely on different levels of experience in online teaching, ranging from some experience to no experience at all with such methodology. Bailey and Lee (2020) analysed how these diversified levels of familiarity with e-learning impacted on the overall forced move to online education in South Korean universities; the number of teachers classified as NE (No Experience) as in March 2020 were the majority of the three groups, even in a country like South Korea, which “is well known for being a technological powerhouse” (Bailey & Lee, 2020: 179). Every country had to deal with different educational institutions in different societies and cultural contexts for a shift that had to happen in a relatively short time. Educators and staff in distinct learning contexts – primary and secondary schools, universities, and courses of any kind in private institutions – were given no time for their own reframing of teaching practice (Littlejohn, Gourlay, Kennedy, Logan, Neumann, Oliver, Potter, and Rode, 2021), regardless of their previous experience with e-learning. To reflect the urgency and the special reasons why online learning was adopted worldwide in 2020, a new definition was formulated as for the dissimilar circumstances in which forms of distance learning were adopted before. Indeed, the terminology Emergency Remote Teaching (or ERT) was proposed by Hodges (2020) to address this specific case that we can “divorce from online-learning” (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond, 2020).

ERT lacks one of the main features of online learning, which is the planning and design for it to be online, along with all the dedicated time to prepare such practice. Implicit in the

definition of ERT are the special circumstances in which this occurs: those of an emergency, a “temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances” (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond, 2020: Emergency Remote Teaching section, para. 1). In similar scenarios, given the exceptional shift required, educators are not expected to re-create the same environment that face-to-face teaching posits, but, quoting Hodges again, rather to “provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis” (2020: Emergency Remote Teaching section, para. 1). However, seeing the COVID-19 crisis in these terms, did not lighten the burden of teachers dealing with a completely new setting where their practice is carried out, some of them lacking preparation with tools and instruments that were not the usual ones and with an approach, that of remote learning, at times perceived as lower quality learning compared to face-to-face (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond, 2020).

2.5.7 Online classrooms and challenges for students

On the other hand, adjusting to that new reality was not an easy task for students either. There is quite a large amount of research on e-learning, investigating both teachers’ and learners’ response to such approach; after the COVID-19 pandemic the number of studies increased substantially; having this exceptional circumstance offered countless opportunities for researchers to look into virtual educational environments more closely. However, results are diverse and need to be contextualised within the “virtual classroom” where data were collected.

It is needless to say that the key aspect differentiating face-to-face learning from the online one is spatial. While the first one takes place in the space of a classroom with adequate equipment for the delivery of the teaching and interaction happens without being mediated by devices, the online setting performs these and many other features influencing the overall experience. On one hand there is the comfort of sitting in your own room, saving time and money to travel to attend your lesson and even that of getting properly dressed; on the other hand, though, there may be technical issues or not having access to resources allowing the lesson to proceed correctly.

For instance, Sharma et al. (2020) was among the numerous studies analysing students’ satisfaction on remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic; results showed that Wifi as an Internet learning modality was one of the factors predicting students’ satisfaction (Kruse, Lutskovskaia and Stepanova, 2022). Ergin, Asutay & Doğan (2022) seems to confirm this, with its “Internet and computer related problems” ranking first among the causes for which distance learning was perceived as difficult while enquiring distance education in FL

learning during the pandemic. In the same study, “problems related with the teacher” is the least problematic aspect of language classes from remote (Ergin, Asutay & Doğan, 2022). When asked about the issues originating from the students themselves though, the participants all identified in “Lack of motivation” the main obstacle for the delivery of the language courses (Ergin, Asutay & Doğan, 2022).

2.5.8 Motivation in the online language class

Taking motivation as a lens for observing the effects/effectivity of distance learning during COVID-19, research confirmed that it was a significant variable. Bozavli (2021) conducted an investigation on 242 students’ experiences with FL courses in Turkey, and data collected suggest that the low motivation experienced added to the overall negative impact of online learning. In fact, the majority of them (67.7%) asserted to have motivation problems and that distance learning contributed to reduce their motivation; the study validated the view for which learning a language via remote education is somewhat inferior or not as effective as traditional in-presence learning, with findings confirming that they prefer face-to-face teaching. Participants “study less than usual time, have motivation problems, and do not like online teaching; they believe that their learning capacity is reduced because lessons are inefficient” (Bozavli, 2021: 11).

A lack of motivation among students was voiced also in Bannink and Van Dam (2021); here, this was closely related to the missing interactive reality of a classroom, as both students and teachers participating in the data collection observed. The absence of space for “normal” social interaction between both the teacher and the students and within the individual learners is undoubtedly a prerogative of online environments, so it is no wonder that expressions like “isolation” or “feeling isolated” were recurrent in Bannink and Van Dam’s data, collected in a Dutch university immediately after the shift to online learning. However, one of the teachers participating in the study successfully managed to re-dimension the feelings linked to the missing social interactivity between peers, considered part of the lesson at all effects (Bannink & Van Dam, 2021). The teacher in question thought about giving the class the possibility to informally chat at the end of the lesson by leaving the Zoom – the platform used for delivering courses – meeting before the students; this was called “Teacher-free zone” and, reading comments by the scholars, it was considered “extremely helpful” (2021: 13) to re-gain some of the social dimension of a real classroom.

While the COVID-19 has definitely offered scope for revisiting and exploring different – and new – educational dynamics and setting, online learning had been already analysed in research prior to that event, both in its synchronous or asynchronous participation and in

hybrid – or blended – form. Research had indeed documented how the implementation of technology and online learning resources contributed to increasing motivation (Morat, Shaari, & Abidin, 2016), or the benefits of online language learning especially for students with a certain level of technological proficiency, or “digital natives” (Sohn, 2018). Of course, more flexibility and the possibility to attend classes from anywhere were listed among the advantages of distance learning; equally, concerns over students’ engagement in virtual classes and limitations had already been identified as potential disadvantages (Gillett-Swan, 2017).

Lanvers’ (2017) investigation on motivation and Global English compared different study modes, among which distance students were part of this study prior to the advent of COVID-19. Motivation was here conceptualised under the SDT model, and the L2-Selves model proposed by Dörnyei; both theories have been covered and detailed previously within this chapter. Interestingly, not significant differences in terms of Ideal L2-self were found between in-campus students and distance ones: both cohorts shared the same goal of being fluent speakers, recognising the importance and benefits of FL learning. What differentiated distance learners from university-based ones – in terms of motivation – were the low levels of self-efficacy registered in the first group, despite their larger previous experience with the FL. In other words, while distance students were found to account for more prior contacts with both FL speakers and culture (Lanvers, 2017), and thus have been subject to more exposure to the FL compared to others studying at the university, their capabilities along with motivation were perceived as lower. This, citing Lanvers, “might raise some concerns for pedagogues, as it could negatively affect these students’ learner strategies and/or learning outcomes” (2017: 239).

However, the reasons behind the distance learners’ registered low self-efficacy surely offer groundings for further research, especially on the nature of the inverse proportion between their previous FL exposure – and familiarity – and the scarce perceptions of their FL capabilities.

Lanvers’ findings align with the agreed view for which online courses require a high level of autonomy (Lin, Zhang, Zheng, 2017) and that adopting and enhancing self-regulating strategies has a significant impact on the learning outcomes (Barnard et al., 2008). To mention one, a study on motivation in online language learning in online schools (Lin, Zhang, Zheng, 2017) demonstrated a solid link between students’ self-regulation (i.e., setting goals, monitoring the progress, applying learning strategies skills) and outcomes, unlike motivational variables (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation was measured). The latter was not found to be a predictive variable for online-learning outcomes, thus differentiating the case

of virtual learning studied in Lin, Zhang, Zheng, 2017 from most SDT-based research in face-to-face FL courses.

2.5.9 How can online learning inform language learning motivation research?

As stated before, COVID-19 marked the shift to ERT on a global scale, thus the possibility to study multiple, different online-learning realities multiplied, resulting in an enriched – albeit continuing to evolve – catalogue of data for researchers. Results are diverse and conflicting at times and suggest an important aspect to consider: the need to contextualise different cultures and how these blend and respond to online environments, the needs and previous experiences of both the deliverers and the receivers of distance learning (Xu & Rees, 2016). In addition to – or within - the “cultural” level, there is a more insightful analysis to examine; we are referring to the learner as an individual with his/her own needs and expectations, that are challenged by an unusual environment where the “usual” components are new dynamics for which they may not know the “how-to”. Bannink and Van Dam (2021) carefully describes the steps of the adjustments of the first weeks of ERT in universities in the Netherlands, by quoting transcriptions of Zoom meetings where the struggle of teachers trying to re-create the reality of the in-class lectures reflects the pressure and different emotions of students, even in turning on the camera or the microphone, finding the courage to speak, probably feeling too exposed. Distance learning as a phenomenon of global scale indeed came with a whole set of recently developed dimensions to add to the learners’ already complex profile, like the emotional one.

Examining and revising this enriched dataset after the numerous studies conducted can contribute to a better understanding of online learning and to the implementation of strategies and methodologies to make it a suitable place for learning, especially given the turns education should take when in-presence, conventional, teaching is disrupted.

Conclusion

In the previous pages, the various theories developed on motivation were illustrated and briefly outlined, followed by an extension of the discussion to other concepts related to motivation in foreign language learning, such as language learners' identity or the notion of investment. Among the presented theories, SDT and the L2MSS serve as the foundation for constructing the theoretical framework underlying this research, which aims to analyse motivation in an Italian class of adult learners in Scotland. Other important dynamics, such as the learning context or the role of the teacher, were listed along with relevant studies already conducted in the literature.

As mentioned earlier, while CDST is a significant macro-theory in understanding the dynamic nature of motivation, it was not adopted as part of this study's core framework. However, its perspective on the evolving nature of motivation is acknowledged in the literature review to help contextualise motivation's complexity. This understanding aligns with the broader research field, though CDST is not directly applied in the methodological approach, which will be illustrated in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology chapter

Overview of the content

The following chapter discusses the methodological approach that has been adopted in this study investigating motivation and language learning in the context of an Italian course in Scotland. The first three sub-sections are dedicated to a brief introduction of the main pedagogical principles that have informed the methodology and the research design, namely Action Research, Curriculum Development and Needs Analysis. Relevant literature for each of them is presented, alongside key models that have been deemed informative for the research's purposes.

The second section shifts from the description of relevant literature and focuses on the research design itself: all the stages of the project realisation are here illustrated, starting with the questions underlying the research.

The last section offers instead an overview on the analytical methods adopted for the study, along with relevant literature and similar case studies employing the same tools for the analysis. Therefore, strategies for analysing qualitative and quantitative data, such as Thematic Analysis, Constant Comparison Analysis and Descriptive Analysis, are here discussed and revised to align with the current study.

Finally, the adopted data collection tools in full are all presented in Appendix.

3.1.1 Action Research

Exploring the foundational principles of Action Research reveals a strong and immediate connection between practice and life experiences. This intrinsic relationship is central to the very definition of Action Research: a distinctive methodology where research is embedded within action, forming a continuously evolving practice. Numerous definitions have been offered for Action Research in education. Among these, Gay, Mills & Airasian (2006) intended it as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, principals, school counsellors, or other stakeholders in the teaching-learning environment, to gather information about the ways in which their particular schools operate, the teachers teach, and the students learn. May (1993: 114) instead, simply states that Action Research is the study and enhancement of one's own practice.

Scholars converge on a key characteristic of Action Research: the active engagement of participants across all facets of the research process. This methodology hinges on a form of participant empowerment, which was also viewed by some as an inherently democratic practice (Elliott, 1991). Furthermore, McNiff & Whitehead (2010) emphasise how unlike traditional research, which often examines others' experiences, Action Research fosters collaborative self-inquiry, thereby bridging the gap between practitioner and researcher by integrating their roles.

Over the years, several different fields of applications for Action Research have been identified, such as community development, organisational change, administration and, finally, teaching (Tripp, 2005). For the present study, this methodological approach has been applied in terms of teaching and education and, for this reason, we will be focusing only on the applications to these specific areas. This aligns with McNiff and Whitehead's (2010) assertion that Action Research is inherently connected to learning and deeply rooted in educational practices, as it addresses issues in a manner that fosters professional growth and enhances learning outcomes. Consequently, I am in agreement with the perspective that Action Research is one of the most valuable approaches for investigating education and related fields (Elliott, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). When it comes to teaching, undertaking an Action Research process may be crucial for the understanding and further resolution of possible issues identified by the teachers. Indeed, the initiation of our contemplation on the aforementioned methodology should stem from an examination of the subjects in question - namely, the teachers. In Action Research, the teacher transcends into the role of a researcher, uniquely equipped with the ability to promptly implement the acquired outcomes within the ongoing teaching process. Hence the role of the teacher and

that of the researcher coexist within the same person in this unique yet very efficient approach. Moreover, since this type of research is carried out directly by practitioners, it is often called practitioner research, practitioner-led research, or practitioner-based research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010).

3.1.2 An iterative process

As anticipated above, Action Research involves iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, a framework first introduced by Lewin (1946). This cyclical process ensures a constant refinement of practices, addressing real-world challenges while contributing to professional growth (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Burns, 2010).

According to the literature, Action Research can be divided into four fundamental stages (Lewin, 1946; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), which are:

- Planning
- Acting
- Observing
- Reflecting

Although these primary subsets are quite explicatory, it is worth pointing out that additional and more complicated processes may come into play while carrying out an action-research based study. In the first place, we could refer to what goes under the term “reflecting” in the mentioned list of phases. It could seem that with this last stage the Action Research is finalised, while actually, once again, the nature of the present methodology entails, as anticipated earlier in this section, a cyclical system, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

If we have a look at Kemmis and McTaggart’s model (1988), whose main stages are summarised above, we can observe that the whole process is set in motion by the identification of a real-world issue, which is then formulated as a research question. After this preliminary phase, an action plan is then outlined. This should be divided into phases that are properly monitored throughout the Action Research duration time, at the end of which a solution to the initial problem/question should be found. The final reflection on the results should not be considered “final” in the sense of a conclusive stage: from this reflection results are evaluated and may probably generate further issues for additional action research projects to put into practice. In other words, Action Research is an iterative cycle, where “what is achieved in each cycle provides the starting point for further improvement

in the next” (Tripp, 2005: 12). Indeed, the spiral trend that can arise from any Action Research is one of the features characterising this methodological approach.

The cyclical nature of Action Research makes it uniquely suited to addressing classroom issues such as motivation. The iterative process starts with identifying a specific problem, reflecting critically, implementing an action to address the problem, and evaluating its impact. For instance, in this study, the motivational behaviours and challenges of students learning Italian in an Italian beginner’s course in Scotland were identified as a starting point. Reflection on these behaviours and challenges, supported by questionnaires assessing learners' attitudes and the learning diaries, led to the adoption of a negotiated syllabus as an intervention. The comments and data from the learners were then evaluated and used to refine the approach further, illustrating the cyclical reflection-action-evaluation model characteristic of Action Research (Burns, 2010; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

By engaging in Action Research, teachers indeed conduct systematic inquiries into their teaching practices, involving the collection and analysis of data to improve both teaching and learning. For example, studies such as Little (1999) and Breen & Littlejohn (2000), albeit not being strictly considered Action Research studies, evidence that tools like negotiated syllabi – which is also adopted in the present study - foster learner autonomy and engagement through structured teacher-learner collaboration. This collaborative nature enabled by an Action Research cyclical process of planning, acting, observation and reflection on my behalf as teacher-researcher was applied in this study, where feedback from learners informed the ongoing refinement of my teaching strategies to better meet their needs and understand the effects that this could have on their motivation. A diagram explaining how the iterative and cyclical nature of Action Research was realised in my study is proposed in a later section (3.1.4).

3.1.3 Differentiating Action Research from Practitioner Research and Participatory Research

Action Research falls under those procedures that can be described as Action Inquiry, which includes any process following a cycle where practice is improved by taking action and inquiring into it (Tripp, 2005). The Action Inquiry cycle is at the basis of several improvement and development processes, such as problem solving itself: it begins with the identification of a problem, then the planning and implementation of a solution and then the monitorisation and evaluation of the results. While Action Research is a form of Action

Inquiry, valid research techniques are applied to an Action Research-based study, thus differentiating it from a solely Action Inquiry cycle.

Similarities between Action Research and Practitioner Research have often been highlighted, with the two sometimes being conflated (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). However, while Action Research is frequently categorised as a form of Practitioner Research, important distinctions exist between them, despite both being carried out by practitioners. Indeed, although closely related, Action Research and Practitioner Research differ in their focus and execution: Practitioner Research generally involves teachers reflecting on their practices and gathering insights, often as an isolated endeavour. In contrast, Action Research is inherently collaborative, iterative, and transformative (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Therefore, unlike Practitioner Research, which often utilised observation or documenting experiences, Action Research integrates systematic, reflective cycles aimed at transforming practices. This distinction highlights its applicability in iterative improvement processes within educational contexts (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001).

Another distinctive feature to mention is its being considered participatory research. With the term participatory, it is clear that Action Research is collaborative in all ways and sees as the protagonists the researchers themselves together with all the people operating in the context that is being observed (De Luchi, 2012). When it comes to educational action research, experiences such as the ones by Lewin (1946) and Elliott (1991) demonstrate how fundamental this co-operation with practitioners and teachers can become. Sometimes, as mentioned above, the researchers are the teachers themselves: this co-existence of two separate roles within the same person arises from the awareness that being part of the context in a deeper level could significantly contribute to a better understanding of that same context and what happens within it. That being said, a teacher could be capable of this in-depth understanding and subsequently operate by proposing changes or solutions to the Action Research carried out in the context of a class. This is partly implicit in the teachers' work itself: the continuous activity of developing personal theories in practice could easily be identified with the processes involved in Action Research. Moreover, the growing interest for *teachers-as-researchers* is evident from the increase of teaching-as-inquiry based studies, reflecting a focus on teachers' thinking and self-reflection over their own practice and delivery (May, 1993; Marzano, Parsley, Gagnon, & Norford, 2020).

In addition to that, the involvement of educators' perceptions and views in the development of learning curricula has been growing steadily and thus provides another strong evidence towards the parallelism teachers-as-researchers. However, this and the applications of Action Research to curriculum design will be further explored in a dedicated sub-section.

Even if teachers are identified as the most suitable candidates to carry out Action Research, it is not fair to say that these are the only ones: as pointed out earlier in this section, Action Research can be indeed conducted by any type of practitioners. May argues that a practitioner of any professional field can engage in such methodology and research their very own practice, whether they be lawyers, doctors or teachers of any subject (May, 1993: 117). Needless to say, though, teachers of foreign language courses offer a perfect context for carrying out Action Research studies. It is also for this reason that the present study decided to adopt an Action Research method as main approach: given the nature of the underlying research questions – which aims at investigating motivation and identity within foreign language courses and any pedagogical implications of such findings – the teacher-as-researcher perspective implicit in Action Research has been deemed the most appropriate one.

Furthermore, the Action Research – in literature also referred to as AR - approach is to be considered a classroom-based approach at all effects (Celentin & Daloso, 2018), and this reflects once again its focus on the aspect of the community that it creates. Celentin & Daloso (2018) stress that “one of the most characteristic elements of AR is the ‘community aspect’(...); In the AR the school community, understood both as teaching staff and more widely educational staff involved in the class under investigation and intervention, is necessarily brought to know itself, its resources and difficulties” (Celentin & Daloso, 2018: 234). Perhaps, this aspect highlighting once more the participative nature of Action Research – in all areas of application – reflects how this can result as an invaluable tool to research educational contexts such as foreign language learning.

3.1.4 Why Action Research?

The previous paragraphs served as an introduction to the core principles of Action Research in literature. In my study, I adopted an Action Research approach, which closely aligns with my aim to improve teaching practices and enhance learner outcomes based on an investigation of their motivation while learning Italian as a foreign language. While this study can be categorised as practitioner research, given that it is driven by my own reflections as a teacher, I believe that the iterative and collaborative nature of the process means it fits more precisely within the framework of Action Research. The use of a collaborative negotiated syllabus reflects the core principles of Action Research, such as continuous cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting as per Kemmis & McTaggart (1988). This iterative process allowed both ongoing professional growth and to address specific challenges in the classroom in a systematic way, refining my teaching strategies based on

data and any feedback gathered from the learners. Therefore, the dynamic, cyclical model of Action Research provides a stronger fit for my research, as it emphasises the integration of reflection and action in response to real-time issues, as opposed to a more static, isolated reflection often associated with Practitioner Research. Through this process, I am in fact not only examining my practice but actively engaging in a collaborative process aimed at, hopefully, tangible, transformative change in the learning environment and reality of Italian as a LOTE in Scotland.

Here below, a diagram representing one Action-Research cycle in my study is illustrated.

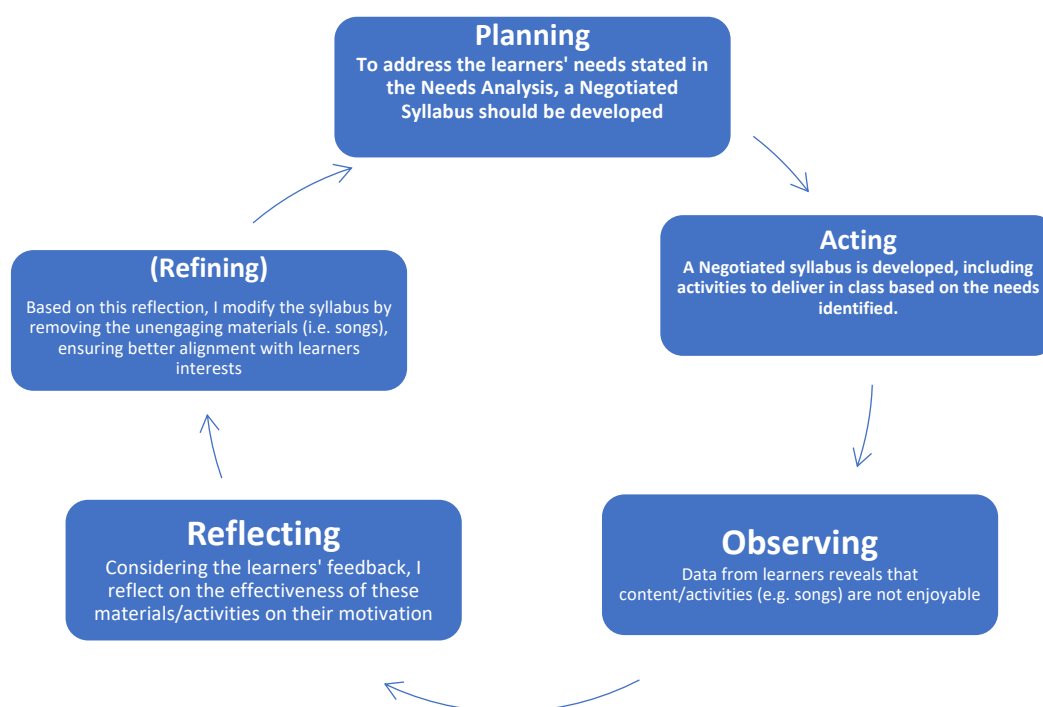


Diagram 3.1: example of AR cycle in this study

This iterative process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting continues throughout the delivery of the course, with further refinements made based on ongoing data gathered in questionnaires, feedback, comments and observations, thereby improving both teaching and learning outcomes, along with informing the research on the motivational dynamics developed in the context of the beginner’s class. Therefore, finally, the focus on the collaboration with learners reflected in the cycles of my Action Research echoes Stenhouse’s notion of collaborative and reflective practice (1975). The cyclical nature of my research mirrors Stenhouse ideas on the continuous development of both curriculum and professional practice, which will be discussed in the following sections.

3.2 Action Research and the development of Identity-focused curriculum designs

In the previous sections, Action Research has been introduced and discussed, with a clear justification for its adoption in this study. It was also pointed out that teachers frequently utilise Action Research to reflect upon and assess their practices, which consequently impacts teaching across its various phases and components. An essential task within the cyclical process of planning, observing, acting, and evaluating (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) is curriculum development, a vital element that teacher-researchers must engage with in order to refine and improve their educational approach.

3.2.1 Implementing notions of learners' identity into Curriculum Design

As illustrated in the literature review, if we think about learning a foreign language, this entails a whole new set of challenges and perspectives that should be taken into consideration. Perhaps it is the most recent reconceptualisation of second language acquisition itself that has shifted the view on the process: from being merely a set of skills to acquire, to the idea that the learner's own perception of the world may be considerably influenced by undertaking the language learning process as observed, for example, in Norton's studies on investment (2000) or in Clemente & Higgins' student teachers' view on how English shaped their identities (2008). Indeed, the intricate relationship between language learning and identity has been debated for the last decades by researchers and linguists all around the globe. In this regard, Norton pictures quite a powerful image of how language is conceived by researchers and teachers in the field, which is not as a static linguistic system, but rather as a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities "*negotiated*" (2011: 432). Regardless of the theoretical frameworks developed - which have been thoroughly addressed in the literature review - there is a consensus on the robust connection between these two dimensions, embracing the image of a language learning process capable of shaping the identity, such as the possible future-selves that the learner projects (Ushioda, 2011). With the latter term, it is intended to refer to the various visions of the self that channel the learning process. Dörnyei (2009) designed a three-dimensional model to explain the conceptualization of such future-selves, with a specific focus on motivation. This model, as illustrated in the previous chapter, is known as the L2 Motivational Self System. The findings on a large empirical study on secondary school L2 students in Hungary (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006) suggested the conceptualization of two of the constructs of the model, known as the ideal L2 self and the Ought-to L2self. The first

one is the representation of a self that would like to achieve the attributes for being a proficient user of the L2 that the learner studies. As the name itself suggests, this is an ideal vision of the self, based on the L2 and inner desires of the individual. The Ought-to L2 self on the other hand is represented by what the learners believe they must achieve for a better fit in the language community, or in order to meet the expectations of other members of the community. In other words, the Ought-to L2 is activated by a kind of motivation coming from external factors and pressures, more than from “inner” needs.

This short premise serves to justify all the identity-informed adjustments that have been deemed necessary in order to adapt FL teaching to today’s dynamic society, and the individuals within.

For FL teaching, it is evident that a set of procedures, methods and factors should be taken into detailed consideration. One of the instruments playing an active role in the teaching process of foreign languages is undoubtedly the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001). The CEFR was conceptualised as a tool for the development of language syllabuses, so mostly as a reference for curriculum designers and teachers (Little, 2006). As stated in the document itself, beside the function of guidance, the CEFR also acts as language policy. In setting objectives in language teaching, one of the purposes is the maintenance of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, with the first one being namely the proficiency to use multiple languages and seamlessly switch between them during communication and interaction, (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001: 6) within the European society. Pluriculturalism on the other hand is an approach to culture, highlighting the intricate and diverse nature of identities and lived experiences within an individual's repertoire (Schmor & Carter, 2022). It can therefore be assumed that language learning is a vehicle for building cooperation and interaction within a society, and across societies and cultures. In the same document, the new configuration of the learner is indeed unveiled (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001: 55):

“The learner does not simply acquire two distinct, unrelated ways of acting and communicating. The language learner becomes plurilingual and develops interculturality. The linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language are modified by knowledge of the other and contribute to intercultural awareness, skills and know-how. They enable the individual to develop an enriched, more complex personality and an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences.” (CEFR, 2002: 55)

What is evident also from this quotation is indeed the centrality of the learner in the language acquisition process. Much research in recent years has focused on the students’ perspective

and from that it can be inferred that the role that the learner has acquired is a striking one at all effects.

If we focus on language teaching, despite the considerable number of researchers that addressed this issue, it is generally accepted that there is no one right answer to how languages should be taught or learnt (Macalister, 2009: 200): the approach and teaching methods should adapt to the context and the environment where the learning is undertaken and, while proficiency levels in a foreign language are often deemed significant criteria for categorizing learners, diverse motivations, needs, and reasons for language acquisition may exist among them. Therefore, a key factor is undoubtedly represented by the delicate phase of curriculum design.

3.2.2 The Curriculum design process

The term "curriculum design" refers to the entire process involved in the development of the instructional design tool for a course. The curriculum constitutes the mapping of the course in terms of objectives and content, considering factors such as the environment where the teaching takes place, the needs of the learners, and principles based on previous research and theory to guide the methods and techniques adopted in delivering the course (Macalister & Nation, 2019).

Essentially, teachers should engage in a process of self-inquiry, posing questions, seeking answers, and initiating lesson planning before and during any language course. However, in practical terms, this task becomes considerably challenging for teachers, underscoring that curriculum design should be viewed as an ongoing and evolving process.

Several decades have passed since Lawrence Stenhouse published the principles and methodologies for curriculum design which were not only task-based ones, but that also valued some of the afore-mentioned variables within the teaching-learning procedure like environment and needs (Stenhouse, 1975). Nowadays, the planning of a curriculum still relies on these other variables, and there are some stages that a curriculum must strictly cover in order to be reviewed as a robust one.

According to some studies, a first bipartition that can be done is dividing this process into two separate levels: Diadori, Palermo and Troncarelli explain that these levels are planning, or *macroprogettazione* in the Italian original, and design, or *microprogettazione* (Diadori, Palermo, Troncarelli, 2015: 251), respectively, a primary structuring of the teaching activity and a detailed insight of each segment of this programme. Within these different phases additional steps are placed, such as the elaboration of a syllabus, a term which refers to the actual contents to be taught and their sequencing during the course (Lavinio, 2000). Building

a strong syllabus in turn requires time and the involvement of further considerations, some of which are discussed later in this document.

A more recent model for curriculum design has been proposed by Macalister & Nation (2019). Here each part of the systemic procedure for the elaboration of a curriculum is presented and described in detail, rather than a bipartite approach as per Diadori et al.'s model.

Macalister & Nation's components can be summarised as follows:

- **Environment Analysis**, which consists in exploring the factors potentially influencing the course's goals and any decision related to it.
- **Needs Analysis**, gathering information on learner's needs in terms of what they seek to learn, the reasons and expectations.
- **Principles**, thus methods and techniques from existing theory or research that can be adopted as approach to guide the teaching. These were conventionally divided into the three sub-groups named *Content and Sequencing*, *Format and Presentation* and *Monitoring and Assessment*. Each set of principles is dealing with different aspects of the program, respectively from what "goes into the course (...) to make sure that learners are gaining something useful from the course" (2019: 47), to which type of activities are proposed and presented in class and "what to test, when to test and how to test it" (2019: 127).
- **Evaluation**, which is conducted on the course itself to determine its success or identify areas for improvement (2019: 143).

Each of the components listed in Macalister & Nation's model is structured in a manner that prioritizes the potential success of the curriculum. Taking principles as an example, the authors suggest arranging them based on their importance in terms of *what and how much* the learner gains, reiterating once again how the focus has shifted towards a learner-centred perspective. Furthermore, the ranking proposed is done with the purpose of avoiding a "poor return", to put it in the authors' words: teachers may include interesting language activities and content, but on the other hand learners may not find any of these useful enough, for example, causing this "poor return" for the time invested in designing and planning the course.

The formulation of the present model to elucidate the curriculum development process is deemed to align harmoniously with the principles of action research - especially for the nature of the negotiated syllabus, which will be detailed later in this chapter - the chosen methodology for the current study. At the same time, Macalister & Nation's model incorporates theories emphasizing the learner's centrality in the learning process, thereby

resonating with the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Hence, it has been chosen as the primary reference for the steps adopted in designing the curriculum for the Italian beginners' course conducted in this research.

Once more, in a single class the multiple realities – i.e., the individuals' existing multicultural and multilingual repertoires - that a teacher may come into contact with reflect the huge variety of multicultural society nowadays; thus, whoever is approaching a new course, with new students, should spend much time in the whole curriculum design process. Despite the presence of numerous models (Graves, 2000; Murdoch, 1989), the starting point is the teacher themselves, who becomes in this way the designer of the curriculum. We have already revised some of the instruments that can be employed to design an effective curriculum for the learners, such as the Needs Analysis (Macalister, 2009: 24-36) - which will be adequately discussed in a subsequent section below - or an investigation on all the factors that characterize the specific situation in which the course takes place (part of the Environment Analysis). On the other hand, however, unsuccessful curricula may be the result of not so careful planning or the lack of some interrogation on the aims or the needs of the learners. An illustrative example reported by Macalister (2009: 4) is that of a group of Vietnamese learners deserting a communicatively-based course, due to the fact that they expected a grammar-based teaching course. As anticipated earlier, evaluation holds an important role in determining whether the curriculum was successful or not, to identify strengths but also, most importantly, potential weaknesses. Evaluating through diverse tools and addressing different types of evaluation (Kiely and Rea-Dickens, 2005) - i.e. the teacher's practice or the students' participation or investment - by posing the relevant questions may lead to the conclusion that the course did not align with students' needs or expectations. This can translate into a sense of disappointment when commenting on the course or into learners dropping the class, as per the case of the Vietnamese learners expecting to learn a completely different approach to the language.

Examples like the one just illustrated represent one of the ways in which a curriculum is deemed unsuccessful. The different type of evaluation carried out is crucial to determine potential failures; however, it is important to consider that failure can also serve as a valuable learning opportunity. For instance, by 'failing forward' one could "focus on failures related to personalizing participants' learning experiences and create positive learning experiences for a diverse group of participants" (Yang & Harbor, 2023: 91).

3.2.3 Negotiated Syllabus as a tool for Action-Research

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the building of a curriculum for language teaching is not unilateral. Indeed, the relationship between the learners and the teachers is highly significant, as it constantly influences the planning and every teacher's decision on the course. An interesting outcome of this conspicuous exchange between the two parts is the so-called *Negotiated Syllabus*.

While the terms "curriculum" and "syllabus" are often used interchangeably, they denote two distinct concepts, albeit part of the same educational planning process. The model presented in Macalister & Nation (2019), which has already been taken as the main reference in this chapter, indeed distinguishes between curriculum and syllabus, placing the latter among the components of the former. While the curriculum refers to a broader and more complex operational framework – as previously described – the syllabus predominantly represents a list of the content covered in a course. In literature, various types of syllabi have been categorized, ranging, for instance, from a task-based syllabus – where the content is structured around different tasks - to a topical syllabus, which is instead organized around a set of specific topics. In other words, “in decision making for a syllabus what should be in it basically determines the type of syllabus that will be used in the teaching process” (Öztürk, 2013: 35). Thus, during the curriculum design phase, educators must make a decision on which type of syllabus to adopt.

Concerning the negotiated syllabus, the term itself inherently implies collaboration between teachers and students and, at the same time, an opportunity to adjust the course to ongoing or sudden circumstances that can occur. Therefore, the emphasis is not so much on the type of content in the course but rather on how the syllabus is produced; due to this focus on the process, they also earned the name of “process syllabuses” (Breen, 1987).

Being definitely a learner-centred modality, negotiated syllabuses have proven to be a much effective approach in terms of language teaching strategies, mostly because of the effect on the learners' motivation and commitment (Macalister, 2009: 173). The learners feel independent in playing a role in their own learning journey, and the negotiated syllabus helps them to become more effective, autonomous decision makers (Skehan, 1998: 262).

Furthermore, for teachers as well, a negotiated syllabus can yield positive effects. Through the negotiation process, they are granted the opportunity to better understand the needs of their students and directly influence the preparation of suitable materials to be included in the curriculum. This also frees them from the need to adhere to a specific book or program, opting instead for a methodology more aligned with the type of learners present in the classroom (Öztürk, 2013). Not to mention the numerous effects on the teacher-student

relationship, facilitated by collaborating on syllabus development hence leading to a partial - perceived - attenuation of the teacher's authority within the classroom context.

However, drawbacks have also been inferred from the implementation of such syllabuses. In fact, one potential risk is that learners may perceive learning as solely their responsibility. It is crucial to acknowledge that students may lack expertise in teaching skills and autonomous learning, making a fully negotiated syllabus less advisable at times (Macalister & Nation, 2019). Moreover, from the teacher's perspective, implementing a negotiated syllabus demands significant teaching skills. A possible method to mitigate instances of failure with this type of syllabus is to carefully structure and comprehend the nature of the negotiation that will take place; for example, by adopting a syllabus with only some elements negotiated (Clarke, 1989) rather than a fully negotiated one. Additionally, determining when and how such a syllabus can be introduced - whether at the very beginning or gradually, providing training to learners on how to approach this methodology and reap its benefits - is essential.

However, what is undisputed is the collaborative nature of a negotiated syllabus. Besides, there is the iterative and developmental aspect of a tool that allows teachers to change and adapt their teaching techniques according to the students' needs. In previous sections of the present chapter, the action-research approach was mentioned as the chosen methodological framework for this study. It is posited that the nature of a negotiated syllabus within the curriculum design aligns seamlessly with the action-research procedure, not only in its consideration of the learner but also in its inherent developmental process. Action-research represents a dynamic approach, fostering continual improvement and the immediate implementation of specific enhancements in educational practice. Similarly, a negotiated syllabus facilitates and mirrors the introduction of such improvements, serving as an ideal instrument for implementing enhanced practices at each stage of the action-research process. Thus, the role of the negotiated syllabus as a tool in structuring the curriculum design for the current action-research based study will be detailed in the following sections of this thesis; an in-depth recount of the effects and the results of the negotiation will be provided in the "Reflections and Implications for practice" chapter, which is chapter 7, along with the reflections arisen from the adoption of a collaborative syllabus.

3.3 Needs Analysis

As indicated earlier, Needs Analysis is one of the components of the curriculum design process. It is defined as a tool to gather information on the learners' needs, motivations and expectations on which basis teachers can derive practical implications and make informed choices for delivering the course in all its aspects. It therefore plays a crucial role in the whole development of the curriculum.

In light of a learner-centred perspective, this component part represents a thorough focus on the student as an individual with certain aspirations, expectations and needs. Furthermore, in the curriculum design process, this phase constitutes a valuable opportunity to allow learners to express their opinions and viewpoints, contributing to reducing the distance and subordinate position that students may feel in relation to the teacher. Nevertheless, Needs Analysis provides the teacher with precious information on learners in advance to the course beginning. More broadly, we can state that Needs Analysis – hereafter referred to as NA - is an essential tool for a successful curriculum development: understanding the learner's needs and views has become a vital step (Long, 2005), especially in light of the recent student-centred frameworks.

Long uses an interesting metaphor to reinforce the importance of NA in any curriculum planning process: “Just as no medical intervention would be prescribed before a thorough diagnosis of what ails the patient, so no language teaching program should be designed without a thorough needs analysis” (Long, 2005: 1). This highlights the focus that NA has, which is clearly pointed at the learners and the variety of their needs. With the term “Needs”, curriculum researchers refer to a broader group of variables, going from the actual expectations that the learners have before starting any course, to learners' goals and identity-related perceptions on the language that they are approaching. The focus on the community and acknowledging the diversity that lays behind any group of learners is what should lead any teacher – or organization – to the development of language curriculums or programs that are more specialized, more specific and, most importantly, oriented to meet the learners' needs. However, despite envisioning such an ideal scenario, it is undeniable that this is not always the case. This may be attributed to various logistical constraints or, perhaps, a lack of awareness or interest in the significance of curriculum design practices centred around learners' needs.

Historically speaking, the cause-effect relationship between successful curriculums and the necessity of Needs Analysis as a major component of the procedure, often went hand in hand

with the conceptualization of English for Specific Purposes – ESP (Hidri, 2016). With the latter term, it is intended an approach to teaching English that relies solely on the learner's reasons to engage in such learning (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans, 1997). This paved the way for the integration of an assessment to record the views on behalf of the key stakeholders of any course, who are the students. The earliest approach to Needs Analysis was what goes under the name of Target Situation Analysis or TSA (West, 1997). TSA aims to understand the objectives, the language targets towards which the learner acquire a certain attitude. To give a more precise definition, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that TSA investigates necessities, lacks and wants.

The other popular approach to Needs Analysis – in literature referred also as Needs Assessment, albeit the term Analysis is preferred in the current study – is known as Present Situation Analysis, PSA. The main difference between these two approaches lays on the diverse phases they look at. Indeed, while TSA focuses more on the exploring of the final stage of the course and what is expected after it, PSA is interested in enquiring about the initial stage. It is inevitable to deduct the connection with the similar concept of Initial Conditions and the notion of Investment (Norton, 2013) - as defined in detail in the literature review - both delineated to respond to a better implementation of research in Motivational dynamics. Especially the construct of Investment, since its first conceptualization by Norton (2000, 2013), has been deemed to be a valuable asset to study motivation and language learning: the focus is on the learners and on whether they are invested in the language practices of a course. Even more precisely, “investment regards the learner as a social being with a complex identity that changes across time and space and is reproduced in social interaction” (Darvin & Norton, 2015: 37). Once again, the strong link that ties all these factors intervening in Foreign/Second language learning is evident. So, PSA is a clear attempt to investigate the initial conditions of any class of students, by seeking relevant information about their expectations but also about their previous learning experience. More specifically, with PSA the view comprises of the present abilities of the learner plus some background information on how the learner acquired such abilities. It could be therefore inferred that the two approaches PSA and TSA are complementary (Robinson, 1991).

Much research has focused on a conceptualization of Needs Analysis and effective approaches over the years. As mentioned before, the primary field of application of NA was ESP, but over the years this broadened until being considered a vital phase also for Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), thereby not being confined solely to the learning of English. West (1998) proposed additional, more detailed approaches, such as “pedagogic Needs Analysis”. West uses this definition as an umbrella term to cover three different analyses: deficiency analysis, strategy analysis, and means analysis. Briefly defined, these

three processes aim to get an even wider picture of the learner's condition throughout the whole duration of the course, considering also teaching techniques and strategies – strategy analysis – and finally the learning environment – means analysis.

By giving examples of several approaches – albeit there are obviously others that have been theorized – it is intended to show how NA has always had a single, specific task: that of meeting, somehow, the learners' needs in any form. The inclusion of NA in the procedure of curriculum design is without doubt a vital step towards the creation of a programme, a syllabus, which has the potential to be successful.

3.4 Research design

3.4.1 Researcher positionality

As a teacher-researcher conducting practitioner research on motivation in studying a foreign language, I hold a unique dual role that provided me with in-depth insights into the learner-participants' experiences. Indeed, my position as both a facilitator of learning and a researcher allows me to closely observe the dynamics of motivation within the classroom, creating an environment where research and teaching inform each other.

While I acknowledge that this positionality may leave me open to criticisms of potential bias, I consider my dual teacher-researcher role as a strength, that enhances my in-depth understanding of the learners' context and their experiences. This aligns with the idea of researcher positionality, which Bukamal, for example, (2022) describes as critical in understanding the insider-outsider dynamics that shape the researcher's influence and potential biases. In fact, being immersed in their learning journey allowed me to develop interventions that are more attuned to their needs and to be aware of some motivational challenges. Similarly, Kamlongera (2023) highlights the value of reflexivity in co-creating knowledge, stressing how insider positionality fosters a deeper engagement with participants' lived experiences. Furthermore, in light of the chosen theoretical frameworks for motivation, respectively SDT and the L2MSS, the role of teacher-researcher provided me with the opportunity to investigate from within some dimensions of the models, such as the Learner Experience. Lin (2015), for example, highlights how researcher positionality facilitates deeper, more nuanced access to these dimensions, enabling the integration of theoretical inquiry with the real-world classroom context. This approach, which combines theory and practice, has been vital in gaining a full understanding of the learners' motivational experiences and reflecting on how these might be influenced by my position as a teacher-researcher.

When it comes to my own identity, shaped by my cultural background and my previous professional experience, this inevitably influenced how I engaged with both the learners and the research process. For instance, as someone who has experienced learning a foreign language myself, I could empathise with the struggles that the learners may face in staying motivated. I believe that this shared experience can foster a deeper connection with the learners-participants, allowing me to gain more insightful data. However, this also means that I bring my own assumptions and biases to the research process: in fact, my understanding of motivation may be “coloured” or influenced by both my educational

background or the methods I have myself found effective in my own practice, which may not always align with the perspectives or needs of the learners involved in the study. Additionally, the dual role as both teacher and researcher adds complexity to the way in which I interpret data. As a teacher, I am constantly reflecting on the students' needs, adapting my practice to motivate them, and designing interventions that can immediately impact their learning experience. As a researcher, however, I must step back and consider these interventions through a more analytical lens, reflecting on whether they are genuinely effective or influenced by my role as a teacher. This tension between personal involvement in the classroom and my objective, critical stance as a researcher requires me to remain vigilant about potential biases or blind spots in my research process.

This awareness encourages me to continuously reflect on how my personal, professional, and academic identities shape my approach to both teaching and research.

Ultimately, my dual role fosters a seamless integration of theory and practice, allowing for real-time application of findings to improve both my teaching and the learners' motivation.

3.4.2 Summary of the research design

The present research study lays its foundations on the underlying research questions:

- *Which are the factors influencing the levels of motivation of adult learners within this Italian language course designed to address their needs?*
- *What is the interaction between their motivation, and the learning process?*
- *What is the relationship between their motivation and identity?*
- *How can an understanding of these learners' motivation and identity inform the pedagogical development of an Italian curriculum?*

This in-depth qualitative study aimed to investigate motivation and foreign language learning by aligning with current research frameworks in the field. It therefore relies on the quite recent shift towards framing motivation within dynamic systems theories, a new reconceptualization that, according to researchers, inaugurated a sociodynamic and third phase of motivation research in language learning (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). As outlined in the literature review chapter, lately motivation is increasingly being examined in light of its inherently variable nature, reframing it not as a static constraint but as a dynamic and mutable force. While CDST is not a foundational part of this study's methodological framework, it is still essential in revisiting motivation as a dynamic system and has been discussed accordingly in the literature review. In fact, rethinking motivational dynamics within the framework of CDST, occupied most second language learning researchers that attempted to

investigate language classrooms and courses (Papi & Hiver, 2020): this shift has solidified the connection between learners and the contextual environment in which foreign language learning occurs, while concurrently recognizing the synchronic and diachronic variations in motivational levels (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Consequently, it can be asserted that contemporary studies in motivation and language learning have entered a third and most recent phase, emphasizing predominantly the dynamic nature of motivation. Hence, the present research intends to lay its foundations within this latest theorisation.

Despite the relative novelty of the CDST application to the field of linguistics, numerous studies have adopted this approach proposed by Dörnyei and others. However, most of them have explored the acquisition of English as a foreign language: according to Boo et al. (2015), the quantity of studies researching motivation in learning English exceeds by far those related to learning any other languages (Boo, Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015). Therefore, there is yet much to investigate in terms of the relationship between LOTEs (Languages Other than English) and motivation (Ushioda, Dörnyei, 2017). Furthermore, second language learning researchers tend to agree on a globalization of English: it has reached a dominant status globally, and it is seen by many today as a basic educational skill alongside reading, writing, and mathematics (Ushioda, Dörnyei, 2017: 451). To confirm this uprising success of English, the results from several studies show exactly how this has acquired the status of *lingua franca* in the present century. As an instance, Dörnyei, Csizér, and Németh (2006) illustrates how over 13000 learners in Hungary would prefer English in favour of even other languages which were official languages in the past, such as German. The aforementioned study confirmed also something less immediate than the success of English over the years, which is a shift in motivational attitudes towards the target language. Debate is therefore open as to the application of the same motivational studies to learning LOTEs as targets, and there is a whole new area to investigate when we talk about motivation and studying such *other* languages. Thus, the present study aims to contribute to the field of motivation in learning foreign languages, reframing the relevant theoretical aspects from the perspective of a target language other than English, namely, Italian.

As for the approach, the frameworks outlined before informed the whole methodological approach; in particular, an Action Research-based approach has been deemed appropriate for the context of the Italian language class. In fact, AR's unique methodology entails a cyclical process of evaluation and adjustments that proved to be very efficient in tracking the motivational attitudes in several empirical studies, such as Celentin & Daliso (2018). Hence, for an action research study in a classroom context, the researcher would acquire an additional, secondary role, which is that of the Italian teacher. The motivation of the students of the Italian class is assessed and examined at different stages of a beginners' level course

and the constant evaluation (and intervention) of the teacher, who simultaneously plays the role of the researcher.

3.4.3 Research tools adopted in detail

Several research tools have been adopted in different phases of this study.

First of all, there were two distinct phases of data collection, and different tools were employed for each phase.

a) Preliminary stage of data collection. During this phase I designed a survey and circulated it to learners of Italian in Scotland through an online survey provider. Participation was voluntary, anonymous and open to any learner residing in Scotland who had studied or was studying Italian. The main scope of this preliminary stage was for the teacher-researcher to gather preliminary data on attitudes and experiences towards the learning of Italian in Scotland, the findings of which were to inform subsequent phases of data collection. It was therefore merely informative for the planning of the Italian course and participants recruitment. The survey – which was named *Italian Learning Survey* – and its process of development are described in detail in a later section (3.4.3).

b) Data collection during the Italian language class for beginners. This phase consisted of an Italian language course delivered by me as the teacher-researcher, during which the motivation of the learner-participants – who were nine beginners in Italian recruited after expressing interest in the research - was assessed by adopting a range of tools throughout the duration of the course. The tools were:

Questionnaires. Consisting of both close-ended questions – in the form of Likert Scale - and open-ended questions. More details on the design of the questionnaires is provided in later sections (3.4.4; 3.4.6) in the present Methodology chapter.

Learning Diary. The Learning Diary consists of all the comments that learner-participants freely wrote about the course or their experience with language learning. The format was open, as was its production; reflecting on their own experience was indeed part of their *optional* participation in the research. The teacher-researcher simply encouraged participants to keep a kind of learning journal, and thus not all participants contributed in the same way. The Learning Diary is considered a practical and reflective tool in foreign language learning, adopted by scholars such as Norton (2013) and Litzler and Bakieva (2017) among many. Therefore, the teacher-researcher accepted as forms of Learning Diary any comments received from

the learner-participants via email, being any interaction online given the circumstances in which the course was delivered.

Focus Groups. Online Focus Groups were held at the end of the course; these were audio-recorded and divided into separate sessions to ensure flexibility for the learner-participants to join. Focus groups are a valid method for qualitative research as they “encourage group interaction, revealing insights that may remain hidden in individual interviews” (Ho, 2006: 05.2). In order to facilitate a “non-threatening environment where participants exchange viewpoints” and foster “spontaneous self-disclosure” (Krueger & Casey, 2000: 4), the teacher-researcher was merely a moderator, only defining topics and prompts in advance of each session. The prompts given are presented in the Appendix. The recording from the Focus Groups were then transcribed and the transcription used as data for the analysis.

3.4.4 Preliminary steps for designing a questionnaire: The *Italian learning Survey*

Before getting to the main phase of data collection, some preliminary steps were necessary, to inform the development of appropriate materials for the curriculum design of the course, together with the questionnaires to be submitted to the students to assess their motivation and attitudes. In order to collect sufficient information, the most suitable tool was an online survey. The purpose of this early stage of the study, and the survey itself, was to get an overall view of language learning motivation to inform the subsequent data collection. In fact, research in second language acquisition has always made considerable use of tools like questionnaires to gather information; these are indeed reliable instruments that allow a substantial amount of data to be collected in a relatively short space of time, through non-evaluative questions or statements (Dörnyei & Tatsuya, 2009). Therefore, the responses collected in this preliminary survey would serve primarily to develop and refine the questions for the actual research based on an in-depth qualitative approach carried out during an Italian course. However, creating a questionnaire requires a preceding phase of careful design: a well-constructed questionnaire is often what makes the difference between collecting reliable and unreliable responses, and thus not valid data (Gillham, 2008). Hence, for the present study it was necessary to spend time on the planning of the structure of the survey: it was decided that it would consist of mostly close-ended questions and of all the types identified in literature for research purposes, which are factual questions, behavioural questions and, finally, attitudinal questions (Dörnyei & Tatsuya, 2009). With factual questions, the aim is to understand who the respondents are – so they are asked about any demographic information or their statuses. Behavioural questions are instead used to find out respondents' actions and lifestyles, so in Second Language studies such questions could be, for instance, enquiries covering the application of learning strategies. Finally, with attitudinal questions respondents are asked about their opinions or beliefs, thus these are meant to discover *what people think* (Dörnyei & Tatsuya, 2009: 5). Aside from the typology of the items, the survey addressed generic enquiries on the Italian language, the culture and the respondents' experience of learning. For this reason, and to ensure a methodically arranged layout and a simple language (Sudman & Bradburn, 1983) it was titled in a very easy and concise wording: *Italian Learning Survey*. It is indeed crucial for the success of the questionnaire that the various sections and the items or statements are formulated in a plain language to facilitate the respondents' perception of the task; in fact, since they are on their own while completing it, any misunderstanding can result in invalid responses. However,

the extreme simplicity of the questions has also been identified as a possible limitation to the use of questionnaires, and thus criticised as a tool that would not allow a proper in-depth investigation (Dörnyei & Tatsuya, 2009). For instance, sometimes the amount of time dedicated to each item is too little to allow the respondents to provide detailed responses. Saunders et. al. (2001) in this regard analyses all the issues related to questionnaires, proposing an alternative approach in which open-ended questionnaires are followed by interviews or other methods to collect more holistic data. The *Italian Learning Survey* was therefore designed in an attempt to find a balance between a straightforward yet effective style and enquiring statements, aiming at collecting general views on the experience that such respondents had with the Italian language and culture in a relatively short time. This last parameter, length, is very important; according to Dörnyei (2009: 13), questionnaires should be less than four pages long and take a maximum of 30 minutes to complete, or they may prove counterproductive for several reasons like participant fatigue or lack of time to fill in all the sections.

In terms of content, there are some previous studies have been kept under consideration, such as Noels, Pelletier, Clement & Vallerand (2008) and the Language Learning Orientations Scale-Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Amotivation Subscales (LLOS-IEA). The mentioned scales have played a key role in the building of the questionnaire sections that were motivation-related by formulating simple but effective statements that would capture the motivational behaviours of the participants. Furthermore, Identity theory (Norton, 2013) and the notion of Investment (Cummins, 2006; Norton, 2013) have been fundamental models to inform the development of the whole survey, especially the open-ended questions in its last part.

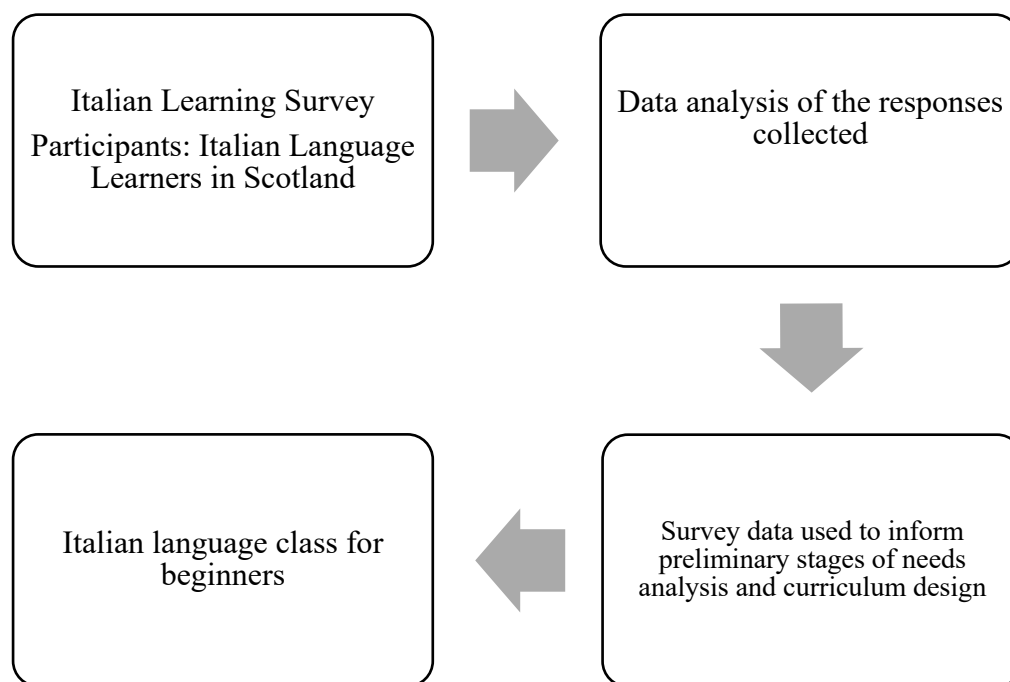


Figure 3.1, Overview of preliminary phase of data collection

Finally, the participants of the Italian Learning Survey were simply people that had studied or were studying Italian in Scotland at the time this was conducted, from August to October 2020. The only criteria were for them to be over 18 years old and having studied Italian in Scotland, both in online and face-to-face courses: in fact, the learning modality or the environment were not specified among the criteria for completing the survey, in order to investigate which was the preferred modality for the participants. For example, 2 participants mentioned that they had studied in a popular learning app – namely Duolingo - therefore not properly attending lessons but rather choosing Mobile Assisted Language Learning or MALL (Chinnery, 2006). Furthermore, the participants had different levels of Italian proficiency, ranging from A1 (Beginner) to C2 (Highly proficient), as determined by the CEFR indicators (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001). No restrictions had been placed on their respective levels.

However, the number of respondents was quite low: in fact, the survey registered a total of 28 responses. The importance of the survey, albeit its being categorised as a preliminary stage of the study, remains unquestioned, as it served to lay the foundations for an understanding of the learners' views on Italian learning and the teaching they had

experienced, despite the limited number of responses collected. Furthermore, the analysis of this preliminary survey data was an occasion to familiarise with the future analytical methods – such as thematic analysis - especially those used the most in language education. Indeed, for the open-ended questions in the survey – whose responses were imported into NVivo, computer software for handling and organising qualitative data - Thematic Analysis has been considered as a valuable method for analysing such data. Hence, the six-step process developed by Braun and Clarke (2013) was followed for then proceeding with coding the strings of text and the generation of the themes. However, a detailed description of the analysis methods will be outlined in the dedicated section, which is section 3.5.1. For the time being, it is sufficient to acknowledge the utility of the survey also for gaining experience prior to the data collection in terms of analysis methods.

The survey was then circulated mainly through social media platforms (i.e., Facebook and Twitter). Since it was an online one – developed by using Online Surveys⁵, once finalised it was sufficient to send the link to the participants, who could therefore submit their answers directly on the chosen survey website. After circulating the survey, the subsequent data analysis of both its qualitative and quantitative data has provided the necessary information for the subsequent stages of classroom-based research. This was the decisive step to undergo the preparation for the start of the Italian course for beginners – whose participants were recruited after the Italian Learning Survey, being a different and separate phase of the research -, which constitutes the actual data collection for the present study.

⁵ <https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/>

3.4.5 The Italian course for Beginners: data collection and core phase of the AR

Following the participants' recruitment via publication of a post on Facebook and Twitter, the whole process of enrolling class participants was finalised through an exchange of emails. All the documentation has been viewed, signed, and returned to the researcher by the participants who fit the target for the study: adults living in Scotland, willing to learn the Italian language as complete beginners.

3.4.6 Needs Analysis or *Questionnaire Zero*

Being an online learning environment though, it has been deemed necessary to schedule a *lesson zero* via Zoom to meet the learner-participants. This preliminary lesson would work both as an introductory lesson to illustrate the research within the course and, more importantly, it would serve as the occasion to complete the Needs Analysis. The function – together with the importance – of conducting Needs Analyses has already been remarked within this chapter, thus the same reasons outlined before apply to this Italian course within the overall research design. Indeed, in addition to being a valuable and essential component of the curriculum design process, it serves as an excellent first interaction with the students' *necessities, wants* and *lacks*, to cite terminology in literature as seen in Macalister & Nation (2019). On one hand, it provides a starting point for drafting the course syllabus, and on the other, it serves as an initial source of information to delineate the learner's initial conditions as per a CDST framework for motivation. For the present research study, it was therefore deemed that Needs Analysis represented a suitable instrument for the following reasons:

- It is an indispensable step in the course curriculum design, aimed at outlining its contents and understanding the needs and expectations of the participants in the lessons.
- It provides an initial framework of individual learners that can be interpreted to identify initial conditions and potential indicators of their motivation. Being this study informed by the concepts of investment and identity and seeking to unveil interactions between these and FL learning, students' expectations in the NA can contribute to delineating *possible selves* (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).
- Analogous to what was stated earlier for the negotiated syllabus, NA is a consistent choice aligned with the methodological approach of action research. Indeed, NA questionnaire responses promptly inform the curriculum design development, which,

in turn, are expressed in the teaching practice, embodying the ongoing exchange between reflection, evaluation, and practice that underpins action research.

For a further alignment with the methodological plan of the project, the NA was entitled *Questionnaire Zero – Gathering your views*; it was distributed to each of the participants during Lesson Zero and they were given fifteen minutes to complete and return it to the teacher/researcher via email. Assessing the students' needs during this very first meeting with the class and the teacher was essential: in this way, it was possible to implement the responses to the creation of the syllabus for the course. The NA represented an instrument through which the learners could feel immediately valued, and that they were taking an active part in their very own learning journey: indeed, they were informed on the tool itself about the purposes for carrying out Needs Analyses: “*The following questionnaire is very important to gain essential information about your needs and interests as a learner. The answers that you provide will be used to inform the development of the syllabus of the Italian course that you are about to start.*”.

It was therefore possible to frame the various learners' views on the Italian language, on the skills that they believe helpful in language acquisition, and on the expectations they may have about the course itself. At this point, all the informative material for the refinement of the syllabus was ready to be analysed and integrated in the curriculum planning procedure. Furthermore, the uniqueness of an action research-based approach resides in the continuous action that can be taken to improve practice: in other words, the initial syllabus' design was carefully revised and adjusted along with the results collected during the course through not only the questionnaires, but also Focus Groups and interviews, as additional sources for more detailed responses. This reflects the cyclical nature of any AR project, with the continuous exchange and informative link between reflection, self-evaluation and practice improvement (Zuber-Skerritt, 1982).

3.4.7 Flow of the data-collection

As reiterated earlier in this chapter, the extensive variety of studies assessing motivation and language learning (e.g., Ushioda, 1996; Lamb, Csizér, Henry & Ryan, 2019) informed the identification of the main methods to carry out the data collection during this Italian course. In fact, aligning with the relevant literature, questionnaires have been deemed to be the most effective way to register the motivational fluctuations of the learners over the weeks. The participation in the study and the relative modalities of participation were shared with the students and their consent was given prior to the beginning of the course. This needs to be pointed out as there were two main modalities of participation that participants could choose:

- 1) A *core* participation, which consists of the submission of questionnaires during different stages of the course. These were informed and designed by several phases of the research, including the Italian Learning Survey results and the responses of the Needs Analysis. The questionnaires are the primary tool through which data was collected; these enquired into the students' overall experience of the course in terms of which activities they found helpful or which aspects of the lessons they found out difficult/easier compared to their expectations. The set of open-ended questions would be the same every time that the questionnaire is sent to the learners, so that an accurate tracking of any motivational shift could be attained at the end of the data collection.
- 2) An *optional* participation, which involves indeed two further ways for the students to participate in the study. Firstly, interviews or Focus Groups – that would be much less frequent and, dependent on the availability of the students themselves. Secondly, the possibility of keeping a learning diary; this optional tool and its utility have already been assessed in various studies (Norton, 2013). Therefore, also for the present study the students were invited to reflect on their language learning experiences and make annotations of these reflections. The learning diary option is a valuable contribution to the enrichment of qualitative data; however, as for interviews and Focus Groups, the latter option relies on the willingness that the participants have to embark on an additional task.

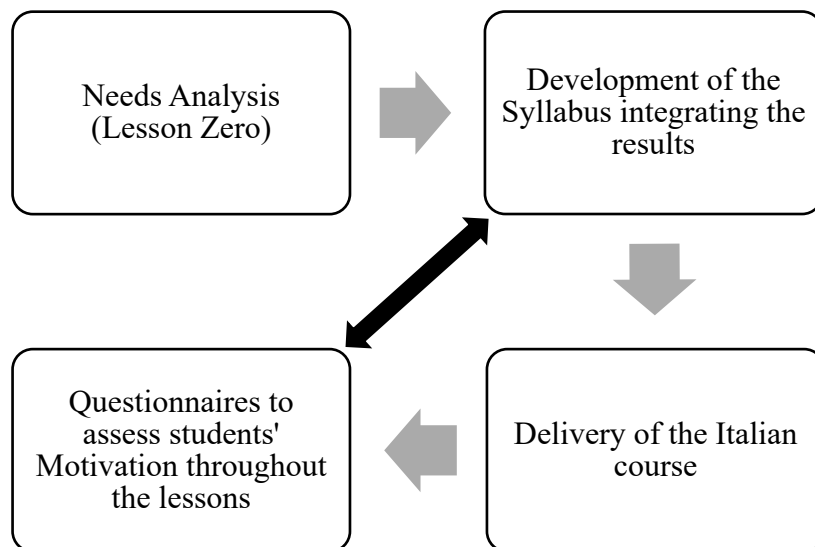


Figure 3.2, Overall stages of the main phase of data collection

This methodological approach was decided upon after a careful evaluation of the research questions and a detailed review of the relevant literature on motivation and FL language learning. There is obviously a multitude of other factors that the present study wants to keep under consideration, as valuable assets for a better comprehension of all the aspects intervening in the motivational processes within any language learning journey. It is thus believed that the methods outlined – and the frameworks identified before - represent a valid means for answering the research questions and highlight the links between not only motivation and language learning, but also identity and contextual features.

The course had a length of three months, for a total of twelve lessons during which the students were given the opportunity of reaching the proficiency criteria traced in the CEFR for the level A1. The data collected were subsequently analysed and interpreted following similar approaches to such raw material; these will be illustrated in later paragraphs within this chapter.

3.4.8 Conducting this research during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The beginning of data collection coincided with an event that required the worldwide adoption of measures and restrictions impacting the research design, namely, the COVID-19 pandemic. The educational implication of the pandemic has been a global shift from traditional classroom settings to online environments and, consequently, also the plans for the present study have changed from the initially envisioned approach. Indeed, according to the pre-COVID-19 design for the study, the Italian course was to have been a classroom-based one: the teacher - researcher aimed to explore variables such as the relationship between the teacher and students within the classroom setting, for example. It is also important to note that the curriculum structure was not designed with online delivery in mind. The role of the context - the classroom - where learners engage in their learning experiences and interact with both other peers and the teacher, had proved to be an intriguing aspect for investigation. Moreover, before the pandemic this setting used to serve as the primary microcosm, as emphasized in numerous sources.

With COVID-19, the very first adjustment to current situation was represented by the *Italian Learning Survey* itself: instead of an online survey, the teacher/researcher had planned an observation period of an existing adult Italian language course led by a different practitioner. This was intended to gain insights for questionnaire development and to inform the structuring of their own course, constituting the actual data collection phase. Given the circumstances and the impossibility of carrying out observation in virtual classes in late 2020, the option of an online survey deemed to be a suitable – albeit different – solution.

However, the most significant challenge undoubtedly arose from the necessity of conducting the course online. For the teacher-researcher, this posed a considerable undertaking at a time when preparation and experience in online teaching were still limited. Besides the potential technical issues, lesson planning and material preparation demanded more time than in face-to-face sessions. One reason lies in mitigating the absence of social interaction found in a physical classroom setting: to sustain student engagement, the proposed activities and materials were highly interactive, necessitating extensive preparation time on behalf of the teacher.

As extensively elucidated in the literature review, the phenomenon of online learning during COVID-19 has posed formidable challenges for both educators and students. Frustration stemming from technical issues or connection problems, the perception of the virtual classroom as a less stimulating environment, or the difficulty - and at times impossibility -

of completing assigned exercises are just a few of the factors that undermine the appreciation of an online course. While in terms of curriculum and research design this translated into a heightened effort in producing engaging and interactive materials for the current course, results and effects will be discussed in later chapters.

3.5 Data Analysis: possible tools and approaches to Action-Research

An Action-research study conducted in education provides a scenario of multiple methods through which data have been collected. As such, the present study has gathered different data: primarily qualitative ones with a minor element of quantitative data, by using tools that would range from questionnaires to Focus Groups. This variety of materials has deemed necessary a preliminary understanding of the methodology to approach this data.

There were three main tools through which information was gained from the participants:

- a questionnaire consisting of both open-ended and close-ended questions
- Focus Group interviews
- Learning diary entries

Since the questionnaire would come with two typologies of data, quantitative and qualitative, these are treated accordingly. For the quantitative ones, descriptive analysis is the chosen method of analysis.

As the main goal of descriptive quantitative studies is not a deep understanding of a precise phenomenon – which is more the aim and hoped effect of qualitative analytical data – but that of a general view on the subjects investigated in the research questions, it has been deemed useful to analyse such data by simply describing and communicating the findings. After all, when descriptive research is conducted or presented, complexity is not better or more robust than simplicity (Loeb, Dynarski, McFarland, Morris, Reardon & Reber, 2017: 6). A dedicated subsection will follow further in the chapter.

3.5.1 Qualitative data analysis: Introducing analytical methods

When approaching qualitative material, a preliminary phase of data reduction is dedicated to carefully reviewing and organising the data collected. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest operating data reduction prior to any further step into proper analysis; this involves the process through which raw data are meaningfully reduced and made more manageable for the following stages of the analysis. Qualitative data sets tend indeed to be very rich and detailed, so an adequate data reduction process is needed to simplify, organise and select relevant information to the study.

Given the various sources used, in order to employ multiple perspectives for the interpretations, a single approach to the data would not be ideal. When it comes to qualitative studies, many analyses are possible (Cohen, Louis, Lawrence Manion & Keith Morrison, 2007); furthermore, analysing singularly the data set could be limiting the richness of the information that one could derive from it, especially when sources like Focus Groups are involved (Sim, 1998). For this reason, although Thematic Analysis is the approach taken for the present study, elements from other analytical processes are integrated, like Constant comparison Analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1987) and Discourse Analysis. Dedicated subsections will discuss the mentioned methods separately later in this chapter.

3.5.2 Thematic Analysis

Carrying out a thematic analysis mostly consists in identifying themes or patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within the data coming from the multiple sources used by the researcher. Thematic Analysis has gained popularity over the years as an appropriate method suitable for understanding behaviours, attitudes or thoughts across qualitative data sets. Braun and Clarke – to whom this subsection will refer quite often – identify Thematic Analysis as the first analytical method that each researcher should learn (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, despite being recognised as a commonly adopted approach, there is still some confusion when detailing the nature of Thematic Analysis (Kiger & Varpio, 2020): this is mostly due to its similarity with Grounded Theory or Content Analysis. While Thematic Analysis' main outcome is the seeking of common patterns or meanings, defined as Themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the difference with the other two mentioned processes lies on the level of transformation of the raw data through each of these approaches. The generation of Themes is not carried out just for organizational purposes or data labelling, but operates significant transformation of the raw data and, as such, cannot be intended as a purely descriptive analysis (Sandelowsky & Barroso, 2003). Generating initial codes is indeed part of the

process, as we will observe later when detailing the steps of Thematic Analysis, but further elaboration is needed to research meanings and connect elements in the data, which is done through the construction of Themes. Therefore, while on one hand both Thematic and Content Analysis share the generation of codes as crucial stages of the analytical process, the first one proceeds into a further categorization for defining patterned responses. Thus, there is a substantial difference also in the presentation of the results between the two analyses: Themes are presented along with the research questions and any relation that has emerged from the findings (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Content Analysis' results are instead often presented as conceptual maps or models, being treated as manifest content rather than latent content as Themes are (Boyatzis, 1998). It can be argued that Thematic Analysis is a form of Content Analysis, yet more suitable to the interpretation of latent content; however, both analytical methods have proven to be valuable tool for the understanding of qualitative material.

When it comes to drawing differences from Grounded Theory, these can be found by looking at the interpretive phase of Grounded Theory and Thematic Analysis itself. Firstly though, it is worth pointing out that Grounded Theory is a methodological approach to qualitative data and, as such, it comprises of a whole set of procedural approaches to study a phenomenon for the developing of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thematic analysis, on the other hand, is merely an analytical method, and thus does not provide the development of a theory, but that of Themes to reframe and re-interpret meanings present in the data set. Furthermore, these interpretations are not as deep as Grounded Theory requires: indeed, Thematic Analysis does not extend that far in interpreting Themes as to develop Theory (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

However, while neither Grounded Theory nor Content Analysis will be discussed in detail in the present study, it was deemed necessary to specify what differentiate these methods from Thematic Analysis, given the often ill-defined boundaries of the latter.

Moving forward from defining Thematic Analysis in research compared to other analytical strategies, it is now important to explore additional reasons for which the method in question is the most suitable tool for our study.

3.5.3 Carrying out Thematic Analysis in education

Thematic Analysis is widely used for analysing qualitative data; since its conceptualization with Braun and Clarke (2006) especially in psychology, researchers have applied it to many other fields, including education. Given the nature of the data collected for this study on motivational behaviours and teaching practice, and its action-research based approach, it was important to give a close look to similar studies and how their analyses were carried out.

Thematic Analysis is particularly suited for education research and for teacher-researchers undertaking such investigation in classroom settings (Xu & Zammit, 2020). The process of coding and themes development is considered a valuable one for demonstrating how classroom practice was unpacked in recent studies like Xu and Zammit (2020); here the pedagogic practice in a Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) class and how it influences students' engagement and identities were investigated. Not only this research addressed similar topics, but also the methodology that was adopted and the data collection tools are shared with the present study. Indeed, data were collected through observation and research journals, Focus Groups and interviews. Thematic Analysis, as described by the same Xu and Zammit (2020), aligns perfectly with these types of data collecting sources (Joffe, 2012).

For carrying out such analysis, it is common to refer to the six steps of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006): it is obviously a six-step process designed for searching shared meanings and patterned responses, whose phases are well defined in literature. Xu and Zammit (2020) carefully describe each of the steps offering a “detailed, pragmatic example of a hybrid approach to interpreting multiple data collected from the classroom” (2020: 4). The six steps for Thematic Analysis are as follows (Braun & Clarke, 2006 and 2012; Kiger & Varpio, 2020):

- 1) *Becoming familiar with the data set*
- 2) *Generating initial codes*
- 3) *Searching for Themes*
- 4) *Reviewing Themes*
- 5) *Defining and naming Themes*
- 6) *Producing the reports*

A brief summary of each step is here provided, together with some considerations over the implications that could derive from the present study.

Becoming familiar with the data set: the preliminary phase of data reduction mentioned earlier in this section is part of the first step outlined for Thematic Analysis. Indeed, this initial engagement with the data consists in a proper familiarisation with the material collected, including any process of transcription from verbal data like the Focus Groups' recordings. In this study, this was carried out by organising all the material collected: questionnaire entries, learning diary entries and Focus Group's data – once transcribed – were transferred in the software NVivo. This very first step into proper analysis is also important for noting some emerging Themes that are less latent than others.

Generating initial codes: almost all analytical approaches to qualitative data share the process of coding the mass of data; Thematic Analysis is not exempted from such procedure and indeed the second step entails code-generation. As the name itself suggests, raw data are here organised into codes, not Themes: extracts are coded into smaller units of meaning that are related to the phenomenon analysed (Boyatzis, 1998). Researchers therefore label the entire dataset in codes, not necessarily a single one per extract (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and only after they can move to the following step of Thematic Analysis. Indeed, the coding process was carried out in NVivo, where extracts were coded via the generation of nodes.

Searching for Themes: once initial codes are generated, researchers can start with identifying Themes that emerge from the material collected and the extracts. It is essential here to remind the distinction between codes and Themes: “if your entire analysis is seen as a house, the individual codes are the bricks and tile, and themes are the walls and the roof. The process of theme identification – how those walls and roof are built – is fundamentally an active and interpretive process” (Kiger & Varpio, 2020: 5). Themes are therefore derived from the codes and how these relate to one another and to the research questions. In order to do that, either a deductive or an inductive method can be applied. When Themes are identified deductively, it means that a pre-existing theory or framework was used to drive the deduction of such Themes. On the other hand, inductive approaches to Theme generation are mostly data-driven, and in this case, Themes emerge from a closer and more expansive analysis of the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2012). However, it is important for researchers to determine which approach is to be used as this could significantly contribute to a better understanding and interpretation of the findings.

During the searching for Themes stage though, what emerges from the pre-identified codes and a close look to these, the relevant extracts and the research questions is still a list of candidate Themes. Therefore, Thematic Maps are useful tools to organise the Themes and researchers use them to have an organic view to observe any cross-connections (Kiger &

Varpio, 2020). The present study aligns more with an inductive approach, as Themes emerged from data, even if drawing theories from the adopted framework.

Reviewing Themes: Step 4 consists in the re-reading and the revision of both codes and Themes identified. Braun and Clarke (2006) posit it as a two-level analysis: on one level, researchers look at the data (extracts) to support each Theme or code to check whether these were derived coherently. On the second level the focus is instead on the Themes themselves in relation to the entire data set; the thematic map built in the previous phase here acquires even more value as a tool to verify if the Themes adequately represent the data set. During this process of revision, researchers may apply changes or disregard elements that were found to be not relevant or not representative enough. When carrying out the review of the Themes identified for the Italian Beginner's class, for example careful attention was posed to the creation of sub-themes; however, all the Themes were deemed to be well-representative of the data set.

Defining and naming Themes: the name of this step sums up pretty well the process that researchers carry out at this stage. It is indeed dedicated to assigning an adequate name to each Theme, alongside with a proper description with whom Themes will be presented in the final reports. As Kiger & Varpio put it (2020: 7), the main goal of defining and naming Themes is “creating a coherent narrative of how and why the coded data within each theme provide unique insights, contribute to the overall understanding of larger questions, and interact with other themes”. For the present study however, Themes were named since their generation.

Producing the reports: the final step of Thematic analysis is dedicated to the writing up. Already during the iterative previous phases both the thematic maps and the notes or memos by the researchers have set a beginning to the writing. However, the report should not just describe the analysis and the Themes, but the discussion should broaden to find and justify those Themes and how these address the research questions (King, 2004). Chapters 4 and 5 of this work – namely the Results and Discussion chapters – represent this last step, as Themes are there presented and interpreted.

The outlined steps just mentioned are a standard approach to this analytical method that provide the researcher with a clear procedural guidance, but still allowing space for flexibility. In fact, one of the reasons why Thematic Analysis is such a popular choice among researchers is because of its versatility: Thematic Analysis can be adapted to any field and to different data sets, regardless their dimensions. The previous example of Thematic

Analysis' application to the field of education has also demonstrated how efficient it is for classroom-based research, thus becoming a model for the present study.

3.5.4 Complementary analytical method 1: Constant Comparison Analysis

Earlier in this chapter, it was mentioned that for this study it would be appropriate to apply more than a single method for the analysis of the data. Thus, while we can identify Thematic Analysis as the main analytical approach, also elements from other approaches were incorporated. For instance, Constant Comparison Analysis immediately proved to be an adequate asset to our methodological procedure. To report a definition from SAGE, Constant Comparison Analysis is a helpful approach to identifying similarities and differences between cases in a dataset (SAGE, 2015); for this reason, it is often used along with Thematic Analysis with the purpose of comparing and contrasting what emerges from the various elements of the dataset.

However, what really determined the choice of Constant Comparison Analysis here, is its large use as a tool for analysing Focus Group data (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, 2009). As anticipated earlier in this section, Focus Group transcriptions are part of the material collected for the present study: in fact, three Focus Group sessions were held with the participants-learners. Focus Groups are indeed a way of collecting qualitative data, involving the engagement of a small number of people in an informal group discussion which focuses on a particular topic (Wilkinson, 2004: 177). However, while literature abounds regarding Focus Groups how-to, the information on how to analyse the material collected is still little and imprecise (Wilkinson, 2004); Leech & Onwuegbuzie (2008) have therefore outlined frameworks where the most suitable analytical strategies for Focus Groups' results are indicated. Constant Comparison Analysis is included among the best suited for approaching such datasets.

Thematic and Constant Comparison Analysis share the same steps from a procedural perspective: in fact, the first stage is occupied by chunking the transcriptions into smaller units and coding them (an operation named "open coding"). After that, during the phases called respectively "axial coding" and "selective coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), researchers develop relevant Themes from the codes. The additional feature that Constant Comparison Analysis provides is indeed the comparison between the Themes emerged from different groups. Nevertheless, this method is particularly useful when there are multiple groups' data to compare: in this way, combined with a proper Thematic Analysis, the

contrast between Themes emerged from one group and those emerged from the other(s), can be a valid ally for reviewing the Themes themselves (see section dedicated to the six steps above).

It can be concluded that the Constant Comparison aligns perfectly with this study:

- There are indeed sufficient groups for the comparison (three separate sessions with maximum three participants each);
- Contrasting the different entries enabled identification of similarities and those could be significant assets to the overall results. Given the nature of the research – an in-depth qualitative study – limiting the analytical approach to merely select themes could result in a less immediate link to patterned motivational behaviours. Similarities or substantial differences that emerge by contrasting cases (groups) may shed light for more insightful interpretations after data analysis. For example, since Focus Groups are led by the participants themselves, with the researcher acting as a moderator that gives a few prompts for discussion, finding recurrent Themes in more sessions could be quite revealing. It means that the same Themes at issue “have emerged” naturally, as the participants are those driving the flow of the conversation. Aside from the meaning and interpretations of such findings, detecting similarities and examining commonality could be a validation to the relevancy of the Themes generated (SAGE, 2015), and thus a conspicuous contribution to a good Thematic Analysis. It was demonstrated that while conducting qualitative analysis there are several moments for comparison (Boeije, 2002), and this study intends to organise such comparisons between the different groups’ transcripts by employing Constant Comparison Analysis (Boeije, 2002; Bytheway, 2018).

3.5.5 Complementary analytical method 2: Discourse Analysis

Since the data collected from both Focus Groups and the Learning Diary are quite rich qualitative datasets, it has been deemed interesting to consider also the linguistic and sociolinguistic features of such entries. Especially for Learning Diaries – which were, however, part of the optional participation to the research, hence just a small number of participants did the task – understanding the linguistic choices of the writers to communicate the feelings and thoughts related to their language journeys could be an insightful add to our investigation. Learning Diaries are tools for reflection, to assess what one has learned or is learning on a course. For the present study, the idea of the Learning Diary – used quite often in education-based research, see Norton (2013) – was adopted to give the students the chance to express themselves more freely on Italian, on the lessons or on their progress. By not

imposing limits in terms of length or frequency, the material collected can be perceived as authentic and as a communication tool between the student and the teacher/researcher.

For this reason, it was deemed interesting to conduct a type of content-focused analysis, specifically on how students use their own language when expressing themselves about learning Italian. Discourse analysis, therefore, emerged as a relevant tool for this purpose.

Referred to as “studying and analysing the uses of language” (Hodges, Kuper & Reeves, 2008: 570) in either a written or oral text, Discourse Analysis covers quite a broad range of analytical applications. It is therefore important to select the relevant approach among the diverse Discourse Analyses available. For instance, Potter (1997) emphasizes the specificity of certain analytical approaches falling within the realm of Discourse Analysis by addressing Discursive Psychology, an analytical method dedicated exclusively to the examination of “*naturally occurring talk*”:

“Naturally occurring talk is spoken language produced entirely independently of the actions of the researcher (...). It is natural in the sense that it is not ‘got up’ by the researcher using an interview schedule, a questionnaire, an experimental protocol or some such social research technology” (Potter, 1997).

Among the data sources of our study, Learning Diaries and comments can be considered instances of naturally occurring talk in this context. Consequently, they can be analysed using the Discourse Analysis lens in conjunction with the emerging themes. Indeed, for some participants it could be observed how the language used in writing such reflections denoted an increasing metalinguistic awareness: as the lessons progressed, they would use more and more grammar-related terminology, not only to talk about Italian but also for their L1s. Or, for another learner-participant the choice of repeating certain adjectives to express themselves over an aspect of their grammar knowledge. These instances will be presented in each learner-participant’s profile when occurring, in chapter 4.

Finally, examining such texts through Discourse Analysis may enable us to scrutinise the data with a focus on the structural and organizational aspects of language, including the review of the lexical choices the speakers made, for instance.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Having conducted a study involving human participants, it was compulsory to make some ethical considerations and adhering to ethical guidelines established by the Ethics committee for Non-Clinical Research involving Human Subjects of the University of Glasgow.

The ethical considerations for this research project encompassed various aspects aimed at ensuring the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the research process. These were addressed as follows.

3.6.1 Consent

Participation in this study was completely voluntary; participants were provided with an information sheet and had to sign a consent form before the beginning of the course. They were informed about the purpose of the study and about how the data were going to be used after the end of the course. Furthermore, participants had the choice to give additional consent for their data to be used for future linguistic analysis, and/or research and teaching by members of Glasgow University. Participants were also made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation.

3.6.2 Confidentiality

The students received the questionnaires during the class and then they had until the following lesson to answer them and return them to me via email. They sent the questionnaires only to me and after I received them, these were stored on a secure storage facility. As per the Focus Group sessions, interviews and the diary, the same procedure for ensuring confidentiality was adopted. Only my supervisors and I had access to the material collected. Full confidentiality of the data content was maintained within the supervisory team. In any presentation of the data the participants remained anonymised, through the adoption of pseudonyms not allowing readers to identify them. In addition to that, data were kept confidential also among the participants, i.e. nobody had access to another's questionnaires or recordings. The only exception was obviously made for the Focus Groups, being it a collaborative process of discussion and interaction among a group of participants.

Full confidentiality was maintained within the supervisory team also for the Italian Learning Survey prior to the data collection. The teacher-researcher sent the link to the survey through email and only my supervisors and I had access to the data.

3.6.3 Safety for the Researcher and the Participants

There were no safety issues envisioned for both parties, as all data was collected during the Italian classes, which were held online via Zoom. Same applied to Focus Group and interviews, which were conducted via password-protected Zoom meetings and audio-recorded.

3.6.4 Security

The data was stored on password protected network drives and passport encrypted devices and access was allowed only to my supervisors and me. The participants will always remain anonymous and their data, which comprises of written content and recordings of interviews, were kept secure between my supervisors and me.

3.6.5 The teacher-researcher and students dependant relationship

Even if the study did not involve any minors nor vulnerable subjects, the participants assumed the role as my students during the course, so there was obviously a teacher-student relationship within the Action-Research approach. Detailed information about the nature of this project was provided to participants before their agreement to take part, so it was clear to them the nature of their participation in this programme of learning and research simultaneously. Given the fact that this was a not a “high-stakes” learning situation, i.e., there was no process of assessment as part of this learning, participants should have felt at ease to engage with the learning process, as well as the aspects of data collection, without worrying that it might impact on assessment in any way. As explained above, they were made aware that they had the right to withdraw from the project at any time, without explanation or consequence, and some indeed took on this opportunity not completing the research.

3.6.6 Discussion of sensitive topics

Albeit remote, there were some possibilities that the study could involve discussion of sensitive topics such as sexuality and gender issues, as these may have come up being identity and language learning part of the theoretical framework that the research was investigating on. However, contrary to the Italian Learning Survey, where participants were also asked to provide sensitive and personal information (such as indicating their gender and

age), for the actual phase of data collection eventually this type of information was deemed to be not relevant for the research purposes. Furthermore, in case they had shown any kind of concern or mental psychological distress during the interviews or Focus Groups, I would have interrupted the session and seek to provide assistance with the issue.

The above detailed areas that were identified as potential ethical issues for the present research and how these were observed while carrying out the study are to be extended to the presentation of findings, in chapter 4 and 5. Indeed, I intended to present results accurately and responsibly, by respecting the dignity and confidentiality of the learner-participants.

Conclusion of the methodology chapter

3.7 Summary of the methodological approach and analytical steps

In this chapter, the chosen methodological approach for investigating the motivation of Italian adult learners in a beginner course in Scotland has been carefully illustrated. Beginning with necessary premises about the methodological approach, which is Action Research, references were made to the curriculum design of the course and the tools for data collection - namely questionnaires.

Data were collected from a class of initially 9 learner-participants, who later reduced to 6 actual participants, who attended weekly Italian lessons (for a total of 12 sessions) from February to May 2021. Learner-participants were offered a core participation modality, consisting of questionnaires, and an optional modality of participation, which involved writing a Learning Diary or taking part into a Focus Group. To analyse the collected data, Thematic Analysis was primarily utilized: the data were coded, resulting in Themes with Subthemes emerging. Constant Comparison Analysis was then applied to identify patterns or common themes, specifically for the material collected during the conduct of Focus Groups. Finally, to capture linguistic aspects and choices made by learner-participants, discourse analysis was also employed as a method to extract information from their written and oral productions.

The listed analytical approaches were applied on two levels: a case-by-case one and a more holistic one, where the Focus Group datasets were analysed.

First, it was looked individually to the dataset of each learner-participant, comprising of questionnaires, learning diaries, comments, and Focus Group transcripts, aiming to construct a comprehensive learner *profile* for each individual. The main purpose was to develop their motivational trajectories alongside the progress of the course and the learning of the individual learner-participants, that the *profiles* would mirror in the form of a narrative.

On the other hand, the Focus Groups, being group discussions, underwent an additional level of analysis, where also the themes emerged from each group were compared, employing the suggested step of the “comparison of interviews from different groups” (Boeije, 2002: 398). Yitzhaki (2010) demonstrated the effectiveness of Focus Groups in delving deeper into participant attitudes towards language, and it is a well-established tool in qualitative research (Horsnby, 2022). However, as perpetuated by Horsnby (2022), for analysing Focus Group’s

material, “effective analysis consists of more than simply plucking themes out of the participants’ narratives; it involves more a process of interrogating the data, contextualising the comments, establishing preliminary explanations, and subjecting these to further interrogation and refinement (Barbour, 2007: 26)”. While this study does not involve in such a deep level of analysis – for example, pragmatics elements like pauses or the recordings themselves of the discussion were not analysed – it was deemed suitable to look at the Focus Groups’ datasets from two levels: both for the individual cases of the learner-participants and then as group discussions.

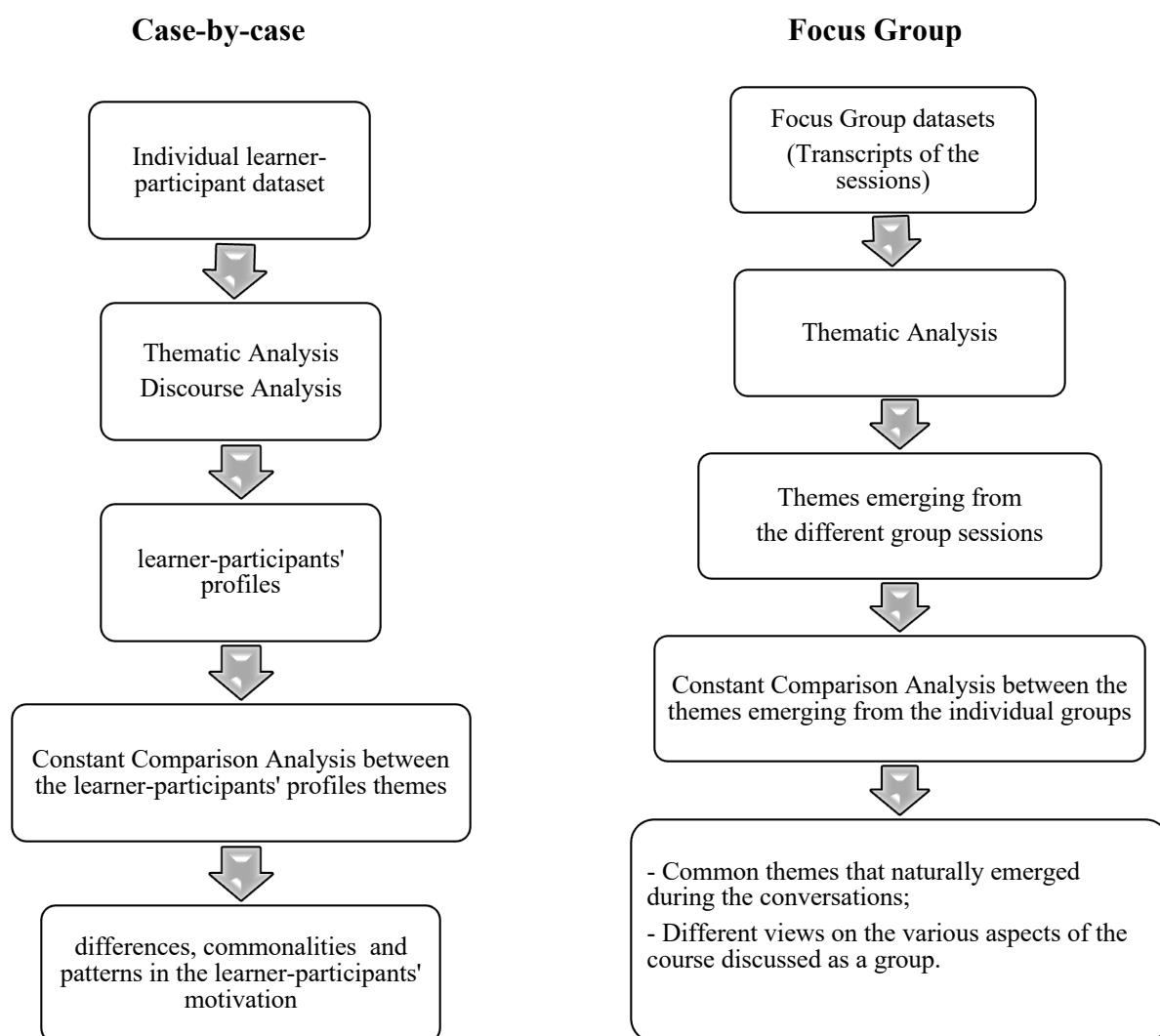


Figure 3.3, Outline of the analyses: the case-by-case approach and the Focus Group’s approach

3.7.1 Outline of the learner-participants of the study

The learner-participants in this study were 9 at the beginning of the course, with 3 of them withdrawing from the class at an early stage, thus not enabling the teacher-researcher to collect sufficient data on their motivation. Another learner-participant instead, despite the decision to discontinue attending the classes, nonetheless completed the questionnaires and participated in the data collection, thus allowing the construction the profile similar to those who attended regularly.

Following the considerations made by the teacher-researcher after the *Italian Learning Survey*, some important decisions were made for the selection of the participants. In the survey for instance, two questions investigating their L1 and where they came from were included in the questionnaire. However, when analysing the results from the *Italian Learning Survey* such information was varied: it was therefore thought that the different linguistic backgrounds could be an asset for the study, rather than representing a criterion for the selection of the participants (i.e. English native speakers who are willing to undergo an Italian course). Furthermore, a possible multilingual context would have mirrored more accurately the Scottish context and its linguistic diversity (Kanaki, 2021). Lastly, not limiting the participation in the study to English native speakers only could be an occasion to explore diverse motivational contexts and any L1 inferences; not to mention, the possibility of investigating Italian as heritage language aligned with the research questions, so the study would have only benefited from a heterogeneous linguistic sample.

For the above-mentioned reasons, it can be stated that:

- The participation in the study had as solely requested criteria the willingness to learn Italian as beginners at an adult stage (so only over 18-year-old learners could participate) and commit to collaborate for filling up the questionnaires.
- Detailed biographical information were therefore not asked in any of the researching tools used in the Action-Research.

Below, a table representing the main information on the learner-participants is provided in preparation to the next chapter, Chapter 4, where each of them will be presented in detail.

Participant's pseudonym	Mother tongue	Prior experience with language learning (including Italian language learning)	Mode of research participation	Summary of data collected from the participant
James	English	Yes - Little experience	Core and Optional	Questionnaires n =2 L. Diary entries n = 7 Focus Group n = 1
Lara	English	Yes – Extensive experience	Core and Optional	Questionnaires n = 1 Interview n = 1
Percy	English	Yes – Little experience	Core and Optional	Questionnaires n =2 L. Diary entries n = 6 Focus Group n = 1
Samuel	English	Yes – Little experience	Core and Optional	Questionnaires n = 2 L. Diary entries n = 1 Focus Group n = 1
Krystyna	Polish	Yes – Extensive experience	Core and Optional	Questionnaires n =2 L. Diary entries n = 1 Focus Group n = 1
Eddie	English	No – no experience	Core and Optional	Questionnaires n =1 Focus Group n = 1
Jessica	English	Yes – Little experience	Withdrew from course	Questionnaires n =1
Jacob	English	Yes – Little experience	Withdrew from course	Questionnaires n =1
Niamh	English	No – no experience	Withdrew from course	Questionnaires n =1

Table 3.1, Summary of the Learner-participants' information

Chapter 4

Results: The participant-learners' profiles

Introduction

The various participants in the study will be presented separately: each participant's profile will try to give insights on their narratives as learners and attempt to understand their identities, whether these are imagined (Warriner, 2007) or changed in relation to the investment in the language. Norton's (2013) presentation of the women participating in her study was a precious source of inspiration for illustrating the profiles of the learners in the Italian class in the present study. I believe that narrating the single cases – and drawing similarities or differences between them – as stories can align with the overall methodological framework and the research questions themselves, which aim to trace the fluctuations and shifts in motivation, identity and language learning. Thus, the idea of getting to know each participant and unveil their personal narratives through the stages of their learning seems consistent with the overall storyline, that goes from enrolling to a language course – each with their unique backgrounds or previous knowledge -, towards the end of this same course, looking back at effects and evaluating outcomes or future perspectives.

Due to the established participation modalities in the study, which included both a primary (“core”) and an optional mode, it was not feasible to gather an equal quantity of material from each learner-participant. Specifically, for a subset of participants (3 of them), only data from the needs analysis and the notes of the teacher-researcher were subjected to analysis. Despite this limitation, it was deemed that these materials served as an adequate information resource for delineating a motivational profile, particularly at the beginning of the course.

4.1 Profile 1: *James*

4.1.1 Outline of James as learner-participant

The first participant whose profile is going to be outlined will be referred to by the pseudonym of James to ensure anonymity as per the consent form signed by the participants before the beginning of the course (NB by extension, all learner-participants' names which follow are, too, pseudonyms).

James is a male whose age falls under the range 30-44, thus he will be referred to with the pronouns "he/him" throughout. Despite being described in the methodology chapter, it is important to recall that in order to participate in the study, the participants had to be what are defined as beginners in Italian, hence enrolling in a beginners' level for this language. For Italian specifically, beginners' level is intended as the A1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for foreign languages and the participants all claimed to fit that target for attending the course, namely an A1 or beginners' course in Italian. When James was asked about any previous experience with the Italian language in the needs analysis (from now onwards referred to as Questionnaire Zero), he stated:

"I have had 10 lessons with the Language Live School in Glasgow".

(James, Questionnaire Zero, 02/21)

James was indeed an adequate candidate for both the course and the research, being the level of the class suitable for his approach to Italian and being an adult learner. As for other biographical information on the participant, James is an English native speaker from Scotland. However, these details were not considered relevant for the selection of the participants following the considerations made by the teacher-researcher after the *Italian Learning Survey*, as mentioned in the methodology chapter (chapter 3).

For instance, any additional personal notion that will be included in this report was provided by the James himself and not specifically asked by the researcher. In fact, the participant has expressed consent to the sharing of such material as per the dedicated consent form and information sheet prior to the beginning of the course.

Regarding the data collected from James, this constitutes a considerable amount of material. For the current participant, the material collected is consisting of:

- Questionnaire entries, n = 2
- Learning diary entries (including notes and emails), n = 7
- Focus Group transcripts, n = 1

James's profile will commence with the initial information collected from him. It has been deemed appropriate to present his information chronologically to illustrate the evolution of certain aspects throughout the course. Therefore, the answers to Questionnaire zero are being illustrated next.

To cite the opening paragraph of the questionnaire itself, the aim of this preliminary survey was that of gaining essential information about their needs and interests as learners. This was carried out during Lesson Zero, the introductory lesson prior to the proper beginning of the course. James attended the session and completed Questionnaire Zero.

What immediately emerges by looking at James' words, is that initially he was aiming at reaching a basic level of competence of the language. Indeed, the term *basic* appears three times when he was asked to list expectations and reasons for studying Italian:

<i>Expectation 1</i>	<i>To further understand the basics of the Italian language</i>
<i>Expectation 2</i>	<i>To be able to have a basic conversation in Italian</i>
<i>Reason 2</i>	<i>To be able to travel to Italy and have a basic understanding of conversation</i>

(James, Questionnaire Zero, 02/2021)

However, this idea of a basic proficiency in Italian was quickly overcome by the student aiming at a more thorough competence. In a subsequent comment where he was expressing the goals that he had in Italian, his view seems to be slightly different:

“My overall aim is to understand and be understood in Italian, this will be a long journey but one I am happy to go on, I would like more than being able to ask for ‘a beer’ or ‘where the toilets are’”.

(James, Questionnaire 2, 05/2021)

While these words clearly indicate that the proficiency level James aspires to reach goes beyond the basics outlined prior to the starting of the course, another noteworthy aspect surfaces. He is in fact delineating the type of language speaker/user he would like to become - his ideal L2 self, in other terms. James wants to become a speaker capable of going beyond simple restaurant inquiries, perhaps engaging in more detailed conversations. He aims to comprehend and “be understood” in Italian. This shift, moving from the idea of a future-self aiming at the basics to one with enhanced proficiency and adept at using the language in real-world contexts, could have been attributed to James’s growing confidence. He subsequently alludes to perceived improvements in his language skills; nonetheless, it is crucial to observe what his aspirations were at initial phases of the course and how they have evolved throughout the lessons.

Continuing the analysis of the content provided in the first questionnaire – more specifically the section dedicated to the reasons for which the participant began studying Italian - it was inferred that Italian was the first foreign language that James had ever studied. To mention his own words, *“I have always wanted to learn a language and was drawn to Italian”*. This information was useful to outline the learner’s initial conditions: a beginner in Italian with no previous experience of learning a foreign language. He repeated this again during another questionnaire a couple of weeks later, where he added the following: *“I have always wanted to learn a language and am so happy I chose Italian, I have always been drawn to it over other languages.”*

What has just been described through the words of the learner in question encapsulates one of the key models underlying this study, which is Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System – hereafter referred to as L2MSS. As previously mentioned, the most recent frameworks show that the understanding of learners’ identities shifted towards a fluid, context-dependent, and context-producing view (Norton and Toohey, 2011), and therefore motivation itself could not account for being the solely predictive factor for proficient learning. As already mentioned in the literature review, notions like that of investment were the result of such new light in which the correlation between motivation, language learning and identity was investigated by researchers. The present study intends to align with the framework proposed by Norton and thus the lens through which James words will be

analysed is that of investment, or, to what extent he “was invested” in the learning of Italian. In addition, though, the possible selves and projections of the learners’ identities emerge from James’ words, thus the L2MSS depiction of the ideal self and ought-to self will be used as main reference too.

Norton suggested that one can be highly motivated towards the language, but simultaneously less driven towards the teaching techniques, activities or the classroom setting itself. For example, the students involved in this action-research study may have been very committed to learn Italian for multiple and varied reasons – see, above, the description of an ideal-self emerging from James’ words, that is an ideal individual able to speak more than a language and engage in more than a basic conversation with target speakers; however, other factors may have influenced their engagement in class, like the proposed activities. In the L2MSS these fall under the L2 learning experience component (Dörnyei, 2009), being such factors directly determined by the immediate learning environment. To give a concrete example on how all these specifics of the learning environment can determine the investment, the following scenario can serve well: let’s suppose that some students were particularly affected by language anxiety and thus less likely to take part in speaking practice. They are attending a course – like the one in the present study – that offers mostly activities in which their speaking skills are exposed and tested; it is easy to infer that such learners would engage less in classroom practice. While for James this effect did not emerge - as he has always actively engaged in the proposed activities – other participants either admitted preferring certain class practices over others (Samuel and Percy) or had such a poor interaction with classroom activities until dropping the class (Jacob). However, in order to prevent the learners from lacking interest/engagement and, therefore, investment and motivation in the Italian course, the lessons were designed on the basis of their expressed preferences for skills and activities to be covered throughout the course. This was indeed one of the purposes of the Needs Analysis – here referred to as Questionnaire Zero – together with specific sections dedicated to the typology of activities offered in class in the following questionnaires. If we take James’ responses in this regard, it can be noted that Games and Songs were ranked as the least helpful among all the possible learning activities listed. As for the ranking of the skills, he considered *Grammar, Vocabulary, Listening, Speaking* and *Pronunciation* as *Very important*. These preferences are consistent with other entries by the same learner-participant: the desired focus on the grammatical aspect of the language reflects the interest James has often demonstrated towards grammar, and therefore it can be assumed that he would be more invested in a grammar-based course rather than in a communicative approach based one, as his imagined L2 self is a proficient grammar user in both Italian and his L1.

James was invested in classroom practice because the activities proposed over the course were matching his needs to fulfil the Ideal L2 self he wanted to be.

Focusing on James' initial thoughts, he was also aware of some of the challenges that the class could present him: he identified *pronunciation* and *formulating sentence structure* among them.

4.1.2 James and grammar

After expressing his views and opinions on the course, and Italian language more broadly, James began attending the lessons regularly, participating in all sessions from February to May 2021.

James stands out among the participants due to the comprehensive nature of his dataset: he consistently submitted homework assignments, provided comments on the lessons via email, and posed inquiries regarding grammar. The latter, grammar, in particular, has been a focal point for James since the outset of the course. Several weeks into the program, he made the following observation in his notes:

“To give you some background info i [sic] was not taught grammar at school in the sense of what grammatical terms mean and why they are used, we were just thought to read and write so never learned what a preposition, verb conjugations, tenses, gerrunds [sic] etc (I only learned what a gerrund was 6 months ago!!), this is part of my problem when constructing sentences, I am just trying to teach myself now, so forgive my lack of understanding, it is because I was never taught in the first place.”

(James, notes, 03/2021)

So, James seems to identify the lack of knowledge of grammar with a “lack of understanding”, something that was probably interfering with his learning somehow. At the same time though, he has proved to be well invested in filling these identified gaps: James has started to use quite specific terminology when talking about grammar, as it emerged from the following extracts from his notes:

1. *“Why is the feminine indefinite article “UNA” (a) used?, i [sic] understand it is to agree with “città” > “una città (a city), (...) to me the sentence reads: “Sanremo is a city Italian” (literal translation) but would it not translate to “Sanremo is an (un’) italian city?”*

(James, notes 11/03/2021)

2. *“One of my biggest hurdles (of which i [sic]have many :) with the Italian language is when and where do you place the “definite article” in sentence construction?, i [sic] am not too bad on choosing what article to use and understand it has to agree in gender and number but struggle where to place it, i [sic] understand it is used before a noun if at the beginning of a sentence and if you are actually using “the” to describe something (...).”*

(James, notes 01/04/2021)

3. *“Can you tell me why the pronoun CI is used in ci vediamo? is that not the conjugation for “we” to agree with vediamo “ we see” does it mean we will see each other tomorrow as opposed to see you tomorrow ? that confuses me.”*

(James, notes 03/05/2021)

4. *The preposition “da” (from) so why is it used when you corrected “da guardare” & “da capire”? I thought when using the verb in its infinitive form “to” you did not need a preposition and why was it not then “a” used, prepositions I find very challenging, when I think I am starting to understand... I don’t.*

(James, notes /05/2021)

This engagement with grammar insights continues for James throughout the whole duration of the course in a way for which it can be concluded that he identifies Italian grammar as the focus, challenge and at the same time source of motivation. The following answer to a question dedicated to the challenges that emerged during the course is clear evidence of this:

“To be honest I find most aspects of the Italian language challenging, but especially the definite articles there are so many, it depends what you are taking about that will determine which one to use, agreement with the subject, gender, form (s,pl) and where it is placed grammatically in the sentence, and then the prepositions too!!!! (...) The sentence structure although similar to English S>V>O, placement of the actual words are different which can be tricky as it can seem counter intuitive, not being taught the principles of grammar and sentence structure in my own language has not helped!”

(James, Questionnaire 1, 04/2021)

When asked about describing his overall experience with Italian, the shift from acknowledging to have a “lack of understanding” (to use his own words) to what motivates him to continue with the learning is neatly visible. Once again, the ideal self emerges, this

time as a learner enjoying the process of getting to achieve that desired L2 proficiency. Indeed, James describes it in the following terms:

“I am really enjoying my journey with the Italian language, I find it difficult, challenging, frustrating, but I find it also rewarding and captivating in equal measures. I have an appreciation of language I have never had before, although I do not fully understand I am getting a lot of pleasure from my studies.”

(James, Questionnaire 1, 04/2021)

4.1.3 James’s Metalinguistic Awareness

Another interesting aspect that surfaced from James’ material is his awareness of his own progress, which, from the data, appears to have been gained over time. He detailed it quite carefully both in Questionnaires and in the Focus Group session, by even identifying for which ability the progress was or was not made. To the dedicated question, James replied:

“I could not speak any Italian not so long ago, I am now in the process of being able to conjugate verbs in present, simple past and future tenses and construct simple sentences. I am starting to understand the principle [sic] agreement of sentence structure and why, I can read basic text and have an understanding what is written.”

(James, Questionnaire 1, 04/2021)

It can be observed how James is somehow very conscious of the advancement of his learning: he can use relevant terminology to refer to the topics covered in class – one trait that is shared with only a couple of other participants in the research – and he is able to classify such progress by analysing the main abilities separately. This can be understood as metalinguistic awareness – defined as the capability of reflecting upon and evaluating language (Schönpflug, 2001) – and has been found to be an impactful factor in learning a second or third language (Thomas, 1992), mostly because with metalinguistic awareness one develops, for example, learning strategies and applies such techniques. This may become an efficient ally for being invested in the language practices not only inside the class. Indeed, James continues as follows:

“I find listening to real Italians talking very difficult as the talk so fast and my brain cannot process the information, also my vocabulary is not so wide as I am focusing mainly on the foundations of grammar, but I have recently started to have Italian news or QVC on in the background when at home, not to learn per say but to get my brain used to the sound of spoken Italian, immersion is what I believe it’s called.”

(James, Questionnaire 1, 04/2021)

In addition to proving once again a thorough self-awareness of his skills, he shows some genuine effort in improving Italian also outside the class – thus widening the language practices he feels invested in - by focussing on the areas that he feels to be improved. Another minor yet interesting detail is once again James's attempt to use appropriate terminology to describe the processes he has likely heard about – *“immersion is what I believe it’s called”* - and is attempting to apply to himself as a student. He therefore adds on the speaking:

“Spoken practice is also one of the more challenging aspects as I don’t have anyone to practice with, things I can do in my head are more difficult to speak even though I know what it is I want to say, but I will continue in my pursuit (...).”

(James, Questionnaire 1, 04/2021)

There is some clear perception on how to address also this other challenging aspect of the language and this seems to consolidate James’s overall investment.

In terms of objectives, the distinction between the ought-to self and the ideal self is quite subtle. It appears that the target aligns with attributes one believes they should possess before a given time (Darvin and Norton, 2015) rather than reflecting a learner's imagined proficiency:

“As a target I have given myself two years to achieve basic fluency, ask me in 18 months.”

(James, Questionnaire 1, 04/21)

The commitment to learning this foreign language appears to indeed be consistent for James; it is interesting to see how a factor like the lack of solid groundings in grammar, initially perceived as a weakness by the learner himself, turns out to apparently be the main focus for self-improvement.

The Focus Group session in which he took part at the end of the course was a suitable opportunity to express this thought while having a discussion with another participant and the teacher-researcher. It must be noted that, while the teacher-researcher had not included any grammar related question in the list of prompts to give to the students, both sessions lead to a point where they talked about how their grammar knowledge in their L1s (English and Polish respectively) has influenced the overall approach with Italian. James reinforces the ideas already exposed in this report, and adds that he even feels inadequate to learn other languages because of this:

“And I’d always wanted to learn the language, because I never applied myself with skill will not regret it, and especially going abroad...I’ve been to France a few times I’ve not been in Italy yet, but I just have always wanted to try and learn a language I just felt inadequate.”

(James, Focus Group, 06/2021)

The excerpt above is part of a broader discussion on L1 grammar knowledge, a theme that emerged spontaneously during the Focus Group session with another participant (Percy). That “I just felt inadequate” synthesises that familiar feeling of not being sufficiently competent in an area that could lead to not only lack of investment, but lack of motivation itself. While James is addressing a moment in the past for which we do not possess any information aside from his comments, it can be inferred that his ought-to self used to represent an obstacle to his own commitment to learn the language. Thankfully, James managed to overcome such perception of his self and channelled his weaknesses – lack of grammar competence – in forms of investment in learning the so desired foreign language.

4.2 Profile 2: *Lara*

4.2.1 Outline of *Lara* as learner-participant

Before introducing the second profile that has been analysed, it should be pointed out that the following participant started but did not complete the beginners' course. *Lara* – this is the pseudonym that will be used from now onwards to indicate such learner – is a woman in her sixties, who identifies as Scottish and had already gained basic proficiency in Italian thanks to two main occasions:

- A one-year experience in Italy as an English teacher in an international school;
- A beginner's course in Italian in a language school.

Lara decided to take part into the research together with other two participants – respectively James and Martin – who used to attend the same language classes she did, thus the three of them had already known each other.

Lara, as mentioned earlier, was not among those participants that got to the end of the study. She attended the introductory lesson, and a few other ones, abandoning the course before the filling of the questionnaire. She only filled the Needs Analysis distributed during the first encounter with the class, but then decided to resign for reasons that will be illustrated later on in this section.

However, among the theories underlying the present study, one that has always represented an interesting perspective was that looking at various sides of motivation intended as a complex construct. The models designed by scholars are numerous and have been accounted for in the second chapter but aligning with Deci and Ryan's SDT (1985), it is believed that looking at the multi-dimensional view of motivation that was proposed by them could offer an insightful scaffolding of *Lara*'s case. I will thus make references to SDT in the following pages as it finds here what I propose to be an adequate application of this motivational model since it intersects with the other different theories this study draws on. SDT in fact looks at three different dimensions when depicting motivation, which are Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation and Amotivation. A careful commentary of the whole model itself was already offered in the literature review; however, it is worth reminding to a brief definition of the third section of the construct provided by Deci and Ryan, which is the framework under which *Lara* finds a position within this study albeit withdrawing from the class.

Amotivation could be easily disguised as lack of motivation, but to give a more precise contextualisation in the setting of the language class it should be argued that this relates very

often to the abandoning of any effort towards the target on behalf of the learners, as they feel incompetent or missing control (Barkoukis, Tsorbatzoudi, Grouios & Sideridis, 2008). Thus, it is believed that Lara could provide an excellent example of a shift from what was a well driven and goal-oriented learner – as stated in Questionnaire Zero – to an individual that, for various reasons, registered a growing level of amotivation, to use pertinent terminology according to Deci and Ryan’s theory. The amotivated behaviour performed by the current participant led to abandoning the course itself and indirectly to the unfulfilling of the designated tasks for the collection of the data required. However, just the fact that Lara has a full section dedicated to her case proves that her withdrawal from the language class – and availability to collaborate - has been a source of precious information for the whole study and indeed offered an occasion to explore an unusual perspective, which is that of FL attrition. Findings from Oshima and Harvey’s study (2017) may offer some reinforcement to the case of Lara in understanding why she discontinued attending the course but, at the same time, showed willingness to collaborate in the research and resumed learning Italian later – albeit not in the same course. Indeed, in the above-mentioned study it was found that learners discontinued learning the FL – Japanese - also because they believe this would not impede learning it in future stages of their lives (Oshima & Harvey, 2017).

On that account, this introduction served to outline the additional lens through which Lara’s profile will be traced, which is that of a learner whose motivational trajectory was impacted and significantly changed. At the same time, it will be attempted to draw links to her language identity perceptions, in order to align her narrative to that of the other participants and gain relevant information on how this influenced – or was influenced? – her Italian learning outcomes.

4.2.2 Lara’s amotivation

As mentioned above, this participant is a woman whose age falls under the range labelled as 55+. She lives in Glasgow and is an English native speaker, with very little knowledge of foreign languages, as she studied French and Spanish but several years ago. However, Lara worked as a primary school teacher and applies this extensive experience she gained in the educational field to her own learning: she quoted both in the questionnaire and during a one-to-one interview that her experience as a teacher helped her with Italian, mostly for the metalinguistic awareness that came with years of work in teaching English in primary schools. This will be discussed more in detail later in these pages.

Since the present participant withdrew from the class at an early stage, the only data collection tool that shares with the others is the Needs Analysis, which she completed in the

first lesson. Lara had in fact contacted the teacher-researcher together with other two people, flagging up their interest to take part in the course. The three of them had attended an Italian course for beginners and intended to embark in this new one to continue their learning. Lara – unlike the other two learner-participants of the group – was not seeing it as an opportunity for improving her Italian skills but another feature of the course had caught her attention:

“I wasn’t convinced that I should be attending them to begin with, because, when we are learning about motivation and learning a language, I had been involved in beginners Italian so many times that I was finding it, I wanted to move on, I was desperately needing to know more. (...) It’s never a waste of time, and so I thought, no it’s never a waste of time and I was also really interested in your PhD and what your PhD was about, and I was genuinely thinking this.”

(Lara, Interview 05/2022)

I believe that the genuine interest in the research was the reason for which she was willing to help in further stages of the research, even if she was not enthusiastic about going over the beginners’ level of Italian once more. Indeed, despite not attending most of the classes, Lara got in touch with the teacher-researcher for private lessons some months after ending the research course, and the teacher-researcher began teaching her, this time in a much smaller group and a more appropriate level. It was then that she asked updates on the research itself and shared her availability to be interviewed to contribute to the overall data collection, since the teacher-researcher was conducting Focus Groups interviews with the other participants. The interview followed the same format as previous sessions, conducted via Zoom and audio-recorded exclusively. The questions posed to the learners who completed the full course were slightly modified and adapted for consistency. The interview was more an informal conversation rather than an interaction between the teacher-researcher and the participant, with Lara drawing links on her expectations on the classes, the background that she had, what made her drop the course and the effects this had on her motivation overall. In fact, it can be concluded that the interruption of the attendance was caused by several factors that she was able to identify, thus representing the L2MSS’ learning experience component:

- The number of students in the class. She repeated in more than one occasion that “*if it had been a smaller class*” it would have been better.
- The online location: Lara did not hide her struggles with the online platform used for the lessons – that is Zoom – and found relevant reasons for which an off-line class would have been better for her.
- The initial conditions: it can be inferred that she had already gone through the same level of learning, so her expectations did not align with what the course had to offer, and she ended up realising that most probably topics and grammar she had already covered would have been the core of the course.

These reasons will be shortly revised in the next paragraph, and excerpts will be added for validity of the conclusions drawn.

4.2.3 Initial conditions

In order to understand Lara’s investment in Italian we could refer to the initial reasons for which she undertook another course of Italian. When asked to list some of these in the Needs Analysis, she indicated full immersive experiences in both the points covered: her past months spent in Italy and similar future intentions:

“I would like to live in Italy again once I retire.”

(Lara, Questionnaire Zero, 02/21)

While she was in Italy though, she perceived that the basics that she had learned were not sufficient to be considered real progress in the language. She could manage to effectively communicate in a variety of contexts, from dealing with transportation to ordering food. She also explored different registers when addressing people and in various situations, getting to “*know how to greet people in a friendly way*”, for example. Lara was very invested in daily community practices, seeking to expand them through more and more direct contact with native speakers, with the hope of being part of that speaking community. Indeed, the very same cause of her Italian stay – which was the work placement in a school – seems to become a limitation to her changing language identity:

“However, having worked in a British international School I didn’t have the opportunity to speak or listen to native Italian speakers and therefore couldn’t make real progress.”

(Lara, Questionnaire Zero, 02/21)

Lara brought back from her work experience in Italy both the determination to take the learning further and the need to carry this out by attending a grammar-based course with a native speaker, in view of a desired permanent move to the country. Lara was well aware of her level when she started the Italian class and has never hidden the importance of grammar: she ranked it as very important in the list of skills, together with only pronunciation and vocabulary. It is interesting however how another skill, which is writing, was instead ranked as neutral, thus being expressed by her as the least interesting of the language skills. I believe this reflects how she was invested in language practices: she was oriented towards a proficiency that would enable her to correctly communicate within the Italian society, to build relationships with native speakers. Therefore, attaining decent writing skills seems of little use in realising her idea of imagined community (Anderson, 2006), other than being a demanding task, thus it may explain the reason for which it was not favoured among the skills.

Lara felt though sufficient pressure and anxiety when realising that she would produce inaccurate sentences from the point of view of grammar anytime she engaged in conversations in Italy. She indicated this feeling of not perceiving herself enough competent and the lack of confidence underlying her interactions in Italian among the challenges in Questionnaire Zero. These reflections over a sort of sense of legitimacy in participating in this language community echo Norton's work on investment (2010). In fact, for Lara investment affects her engagement not only within the learning context or the classroom, but also within the broader community where the target language is spoken. Investment suggests that learners develop a sense of belonging and identity within the community associated with the target language, which influences their motivation and commitment to learning.

Lara used a peculiar word in the questionnaire, whose choice seems not casual, which is *Apprehension*. Language anxiety especially when we are required to express ourselves in foreign contexts is a common trait among FL learners, and Lara talks about a situation that would make her feel comfortable while in Italy, far from any *judgemental* – this is the adjective used by the participant herself – sight of native speakers:

“When you talk about the anxiety if you look when I speak to children in Italian I have no anxiety. (...) Italian children playing with the English-speaking children in the school, there was no anxiety whatsoever, they just picked up the language from each other in the play, and they would be speaking in both Italian and English and the conversations between them will go from Italian to English from Italian to English and they wouldn't have any

difficulty with it whatsoever. Well, and I used to sit stand in awe think it's because they're not anxious at all...yeah no one's listening to them.”

(Lara, Interview, 05/2021)

In addition to this reflection on the different levels in which children and adult learners deal with handling language anxiety when talking in a FL, Lara implicitly expresses her own perception of her L2-self: you are a learner that, in her own words, “*I think that you're constantly aware of what you don't know rather than what you're learning*”. She would obviously find herself managing to answer or make requests in Italian, but the whole process would cost her effort and result in a source of pressure. In Lara's words detailing her struggle to produce correct phrasing in Italian, especially when she would deal with Italian native speakers that would overestimate her language skills according to her recounts, she would spend a long time in thinking about what to answer, how to structure it, which tense to use, which word means what. Furthermore, the comparison with how children manage to overcome any language barrier so easily is not the only one she made. Lara cites her husband quite often and depicts him as a carefree individual when in Italy, a FL speaker that has never had any interest in properly studying the language – unlike her – but that manages to communicate successfully and gets to know native speakers. This may encapsulate the contrast between the different attitudes and experiences learners have when it comes to acquiring and using a foreign language, and the different L2 selves each one envisions.

So far, the information collected from the current participant were used to describe Lara's investment at the time in which she started the language course, as we referred to her background and previous experience with Italian. In other words, her ideal L2 self emerged in her words, which is that of a competent speaker who can enjoy conversations with members of the community fluently and with a certain level of grammatical accuracy. It appears to be in alignment with successful learning outcomes, which normally are the desired effects of undertaking a course. However, while Lara registered high levels of investment in the language, the same cannot be said of the class practices: she grew disappointed in the course and its format, content, and language practices, until she decided to abandon the class. Her not being invested in the classroom practices could not contribute positively to the fulfilment of imagined identity she had, thus on the contrary this led to an amotivated behaviour in the course. To link this to Dörnyei's L2MSS, the gap between the ought-to self and the ideal self projected by the current learner is tangible. But here the component of the model that finds an immediate exemplification is the L2 learning

experience, which deemed to be crucial in determining the motivational fluctuation of the learner.

Some of the factors – or to keep consistency, some of the classroom practices - that she found to explain this include the setting of the lessons, so the online delivery of the class.

“It became really difficult, there was no way that we could all see each other's body language, for example, and that made it really difficult. In a real class when someone wants to answer you can see, when someone wants to see something, and you get to know the people personally.”

This is only one of the numerous comments on the chosen location for the course, from which Lara's position is clearly visible. It can be inferred that she frequently repeated herself when talking about the online lessons because this represented such a source of struggle on her behalf. Obviously, the reasons for which the study had to take place in an online setting were not in the control of the teacher-researcher, and Lara is aware – and rueful – about it. There is extensive research on how digital technology affects learning, teaching and indirectly also identity, especially after such a massive use of any resource available during the COVID-19 pandemic, as illustrated in the literature review chapter. In Lara's words we can perceive all the sense of lack of competence in using a tool whose functioning could significantly damage the atmosphere in the class. Aside from the missing human and social interaction, it appears that Lara's struggles were mostly linked to technical issues, making the lesson stressful also on that side.

On top of that, the number of the students in the class was not certainly helping in an already difficult context to handle: ten people, plus the teacher, trying to reproduce the context of an in-person classroom:

“Secondly, Zoom made it difficult, and suddenly the amount of students made it difficult, I don't think 10 would have been a problem had we all been in a room.”

(Lara, Interview, 05/21)

However, as mentioned before, the main problem which grew her discontent in the lessons was related to the syllabus. Even if the syllabus for the course was designed and done in collaboration with the students, plus the Needs Analysis' responses that were immediately integrated into the choice of the tasks, Lara believes that with so many different levels of beginners it is hard to find something suitable for all of them. This was exactly her case:

having already a basic knowledge of Italian, she was aiming at improving from beginners' level to intermediate, and this Ought-to L2self could not be fulfilled in that class.

“...because we're all at different levels, because even alone, many of us would begin, I mean let's face it we're all beginners but the beginners at different stages so for an order for you to find a way to challenge all of us.”

(Lara, Interview, 05/21)

4.3 Profile 3: *Percy*

4.3.1 Outline of Percy as learner-participant

The following profile is that of a student that will be referred to as “Percy”. He identifies with the pronouns he/him and is a man in his 40s from Scotland, currently living in Edinburgh.

His previous experience with Italian was that of a beginner’s course and, to quote his words, he said to “*have some basics of Italian so would not consider himself an absolute beginner but definitely struggling to reach conversational level*”.

Percy has been the first one to reach out for information about the language course, and throughout the months he demonstrated continuous work towards reaching the goals that he had envisioned. This is visible from the amount of material collected from the participant in question, which consists of questionnaire entries (n= 2), personal notes (n= 6), and Focus Groups’ transcriptions (n=1).

Percy has always done the homework and would send me over his completed exercise for feedback on his progress. Sometimes he would also ask questions related to grammar doubts arisen while carrying out the homework or add comments to close-ended sections of the questionnaires to explain the choice that he made.

He also attended one of the Focus Group sessions and very interestingly him and James – see profile 1 – led the whole discussion quite smoothly following the few prompts that I had given them. Recurring themes such as grammar and important class practices over others emerged naturally in the flow of the conversation, and I found this interesting because they both engaged in discussing about their own experience with the course and reflected on their previous knowledge of language learning.

Percy’s participation in the study was therefore both core and optional, having actively engaged with all the suggested activities and attended all the lessons of the course. In the following paragraphs a profile based on his motivational behaviours will be attempted and described in detail.

4.3.2 Percy's Initial conditions

When it comes to describing the kind of learner that Percy was at the beginning of the course, he stated quite clearly his expectations and reasons in the Needs Analysis:

- Expectations. he indicated all the three of them, which were the following:

Expectation 1	<i>practice and improve speaking</i>
Expectation 2	<i>learn basics</i>
Expectation 3	<i>listen to others and their experience learning</i>

(Percy, Questionnaire Zero, 02/21)

- Reasons. here he gave three reasons, reported below:

Reason 1	<i>to improve my confidence speaking</i>
Reason 2	<i>it would be good to be able to have short conversations</i>
Reason 3	<i>to improve listening skills</i>

(Percy, Questionnaire Zero, 02/21)

Percy had already attended Italian classes, and he stated that he knew the basics of grammar, so he was not a complete beginner in the language. We can observe how conversation and the focus on the enhancing of speaking in Italian emerge as the main rationale for his investing in a structured learning. This is consistent with what he stated later, when asked to rate the various class practices:

“Conversation - absolutely the best! Very helpful - it's the ultimate goal, so no better way than to do it, and not get disheartened by constant corrections.”

(Percy, Questionnaire 1, 04/2021)

The one reported above was a genuine and spontaneous comment that Percy decided to provide by way of annotation of the Likert Scale present within the questionnaire. He was

the sole participant that commented in such a way on the close-ended section of the questionnaire, and I found it interesting how he felt the urge of adding his own considerations over the usefulness of certain learning techniques or activities. Probably, having participants respond to the data collection procedures in a way that felt most freely enabled them to share their views; this was encouraged as part of the overall ethos of the research design and its principles.

Percy's ideal L2 self seems to emerge from the analysis of preliminary data as a sufficiently proficient Italian speaker, whose aim is to enjoy conversational practice, understand and being understood, most importantly. The focus on the relevance that oral skills have compared to written ones in his own view of an attained language proficiency is never hidden; not only he expressed this in numerous occasions – see the above reported comment – but the initial rating of the importance of different skills sets a clear example. Indeed, before the beginning of the course, Percy as the other participants was asked about his personal view on the linguistic abilities. In the Needs Analysis he rated listening, speaking and pronunciation as *very important*, while reading and writing were considered *somewhat important*. This reflects quite consistently in the other section dedicated to rating class practices, where pronunciation drills, conversation, listening, and grammar practice were all classified as *very important*, thus in the highest ranking of the scale proposed. Please be reminded that the order in which these ratings are presented both in this work and in the questionnaire tools is not relevant.

The ideal L2 projected by Percy values oral skills as a necessary tool to reinforce interpersonal skills; we can infer that “*conversation is the ultimate goal!*” represents the main form of investment in the language that he envisions to perform. The attainment of – correct – speaking competence in the target language facilitates natural social interaction with native speakers, and this may be Percy's main goal. However, the desired focus and attention to oral skills on his behalf also reflect high levels of a parameter that has certainly proven to be worth investigating in FL learning environments, which is the individual's motivation for engaging in social communication. Studies have demonstrated that a person's motivation is interrelated with their engagement in communication (Liu & Park, 2012; Lan, Nikitina & Woo, 2021), and thus this motivation may be subject to change and suffer from fluctuations over time. Nonetheless, Percy's initial conditions show a firm commitment to engaging in conversation.

There does not seem to be any external factor influencing his learning goals and overall motivational behaviours. Indeed, Percy does not mention any language class or intention to spend time in Italy among his preliminary considerations in the Needs Analysis. He will talk later on about the importance of using the language in an authentic context like in the country

itself, stating that “*the best way to learn would be to live in Italy for a while, combined with studying then it would be the best way to learn*”(Percy, Questionnaire 1, 04/21). Other than this and a few references to how beneficial would actually be living in the target language context, he does not indicate any external reasons that can make us think of him as an extrinsically motivated individual. On the other hand, everything seems to point at an ideal L2-self driven by intrinsically motivated behaviours: a confident speaker, whose speaking competence allows him to communicate efficiently in Italian. Additionally, the careful and consistent classification of the skills and classroom practices reflect an early metalinguistic awareness on what can actually work for him to reach his goals. Among others, Forbes and Fisher’s (2015) findings on their action research study investigating speaking abilities of a small class of English-speaking students learning French as a second language suggest that learners’ awareness of class strategies for various tasks impacts on their speaking confidence and proficiency. Percy’s evaluation of the activities that the teacher could propose in class, later contrasted with the same evaluation – and comments - but after several lessons, represent vital information for three reasons:

- Changes will help us understand any identify and motivational shift and, consequently, investment in classroom practices.
- observing how this evaluation becomes more detailed, at the point that he adds comments to explain why such activity is useful or not for his self-development as a learner, shows an ongoing metalinguistic awareness, especially on the strategies. The comments themselves speak for his being more or less invested in certain tasks, establishing possible obstacles to the realization of his Ideal L2 self.
- During the course, it represented valuable feedback, on which the teacher-researcher could draw some teaching practice choices.

4.3.3 Percy: an intrinsically driven individual

As anticipated earlier, Percy's willingness to engage in communication and conversation was the core of his overall reasons and expectations from this course. This emerges from the Needs Analysis – whose data have just been revised – and from the coherent process through which the learner reflects and evaluate different class practices. He appears to be therefore invested in any of the speaking-targeted practices, perhaps seen as the best strategy to a full exercise of his desire to communicate in Italian.

However, despite Percy's firm willingness to engage in communication, at times language anxiety can represent a significant impacting factor for learners, as well as the own perception of their speaking competence (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003). In the questionnaire's question about the challenges in studying Italian Percy wrote the following:

“One aspect I find challenging is perhaps my perception that poorly spoken or incorrect italian is simply not understood at all, whereas I feel that bad English is still understood on a basic level. Perhaps there is very little margin for error with Italian. Maybe because there are relatively few non italians who speak italian. An observation is that in Italian culture quite often things are right, or they are wrong! And Italians have quite strong feelings about what is wrong! From walking with a coffee to eating spaghetti bolognaise!”

(Percy, Questionnaire 1, 04/2021)

This Ought-to L2 self that emerges from this extract is extremely aware of one thought: that one must not only be able to speak Italian but must speak it correctly. Otherwise, native speakers – Italians – will judge the foreign speaker's skills and label them as poor. What Percy wants to convey is that he is insecure to perform speaking competence in Italian unless this is correct as it may result in two effects:

- Being misunderstood;
- Being viewed as a poorly proficient learner, as if his overall competence was assessed during social interactions.

In truth, Percy is not specifically referring to the context of the class, where the teacher can actually – directly or indirectly – evaluate his performances and give feedback. What he is talking about is the context of natural conversations with Italian native speakers, or any real-life interaction where Italian may be brought up, even as a topic. In another extract he indeed continues as follows:

I feel that I am over the most painful stage of Italian, where one spends a lot of time and energy but still barely able to get a sentence out correctly. Something particularly frustrating when others know that you have been learning/studying.

(Percy, Questionnaire 1, 04/2021)

Aside from the perception of the lack of improvement, which is an understandable and quite natural feeling, Percy remarks in the second sentence what really is *frustrating*: the fact that others may evaluate this scarce progress and produce a judgement on him. Again, it seems as if this would not happen if he spoke Italian correctly, making the link between incorrect Italian and total failure in communication obvious in Percy's perception. What he is experiencing and expressing is language anxiety in its definition as encompassing the feelings of worry and negative, fear-related emotions associated with learning or using a language that is not an individual's mother tongue (MacIntyre and Gregersen, 2012: 103). The perceived lack of improvement continues also in other instances like the following, when he was asked about his own progress during the course:

“Yes, but slowly! I have much improved at reading, since I have read a lot, it's the one thing that's hard to come up with excuses to say no. The paradox is the more I improve the more mistakes I make! I think if I had to sum up learning italian it's simply making a million mistakes and not giving up.”

The driving force that seems to motivate Percy to “not give up” despite the *mistakes* – and so the several impediments that make reaching the imagined Ideal L2-self harder – is of an intrinsic nature, to use the SDT terminology. Percy appears to be motivated by an “inherent inner need for self-growth” (Fowler, 2022: 96), rather than by external pressures. At the same time though, we can observe how the initial purpose oriented towards the almost exclusive focus on oral skills for conversational purposes shifted towards other *contextual* factors after a few lessons. While in both the Needs Analysis and previous emails it is impossible to detect influences from other than self-determined ones, in later excerpts we

could already see that the environment or, better, the speakers with whom conversation happens play a significant role in the learner's attitude. However, it is hard to tell whether this can be concluded as integrative motivation or still a failure in meeting the Ideal L2-self, an individual who is able to converse without producing errors that can influence others' perception and judgement on the FL speaker.

4.3.4 Percy's Metalinguistic Awareness

We have already introduced the growing awareness in terms of the teaching strategies, the learning techniques and the various activities that can be associated to these on behalf of Percy. The way in which he spontaneously felt that he could add some more detailed insights to what he had ticked from the Likert Scale was an invaluable and appreciated contribution to his case. Furthermore, it allowed me to gain more in-depth information on an aspect of the research that, given the quantitative nature, was limited to close-ended choices.

Percy has indeed contributed significantly to the curriculum design of the course; comments and emails on his own investment in the activities proposed facilitated the process of design of the collaborative syllabus for the Italian course. Some of the comments will be reported below and briefly discussed, together with notable changes from Needs Analysis – so before the start of the course – to later entries.

- 1) *“Conversation - absolutely the best! Very helpful - it's the ultimate goal, so no better way than to do it, and not get disheartened by constant corrections.”*

(Percy, comments, 05/21)

This was already mentioned earlier; another instance on the clear goal that Percy endorsed, plus another detail: the verb choice - *not get disheartened* – reflects that language anxiety that errors/corrections make him experience. He shows here to be particularly invested in the conversation practice, and elects it as the most helpful among the proposed activities.

- 2) *“Listening - Neutral. I don't like listening exercises, my brain just doesn't seem to engage. I do enjoy listening to italian conversations in real life though.”*

(Percy, comments, 05/21)

Here a change from the preliminary Needs Analysis is visible, as Percy had listed Listening among the most helpful ones, rating it as *very helpful*. His investment in this specific task diminished, as a consequence of a perceived failure in engagement. However, he still makes a distinction between class activities and real-life exposures

to oral language inputs. This was taken into account together with the entries from the other students to reduce the number of listening activities during the lesson.

- 3) *“Working individually - very helpful (repetitive drills such as writing verbs and covering up the answers, reading using word reference) watching videos is good but one can watch lots of videos and not make much progress, which can lead to frustration. Writing/speaking needs correction so not much use individually.”*

(Percy, comments, 05/21)

In this comment, not only he analyses the benefits of working individually, but he adds relevant example of both functional techniques and others that are not appropriate for the case. A clear instance of metalinguistic awareness development, and evaluation of the progress that he as a learner could gain from the single activities.

- 4) *“Working in groups, pairs - Very unhelpful (in classes this was the most pressure and we wasted a lot of time, would have been faster if the teacher just went round one to one while the others read. Perhaps less of an issue intermediate and above).”*

(Percy, comments, 05/21)

This was exactly the kind of contribution that would help the process of collaborative syllabus and the whole point of Action Research itself, the designated approach for the present study. The exchange and continuous evaluation and adjustment of the practice is the core of AR, therefore reading Percy’s words on such activity prompted a reflection on the Teacher-Researcher – me – and subsequent action. The action was reducing group activities for the class, given also the remote environment and technical difficulties in setting up group activities. Not to mention the registered levels of anxiety that can arise from group works, that certainly influenced other participants’ ratings on this activity (the number of students that placed it under “very unhelpful” was 4). Percy indeed refers to it as *the most pressure* and as *a waste of time*.

5)

“Watching videos - ok but I can watch a lot of videos and be not better the following day. They are good in addition to normal work. I like videos in italian with Italian [sic] subtitles. English subtitles are a waste of time.”

- *“Songs - Somewhat unhelpful. Time can be better spent elsewhere I think.”*

(Percy, comments, 05/21)

Audio-visual content was not particularly welcomed by the class, and here Percy gives a clear explanation on the reason. Videos are indeed entertaining, but do not seem to help him make real progress. It is interesting how his own experience led to an apparently discreet understanding of his how-to with a foreign language. He makes assumptions on the basis of what works and what does not for his language skills, like with subtitles (*English subtitles are a waste of time*). Videos and songs as well were therefore eliminated from classroom practice, following the clear absence of enthusiasm on behalf of the students.

- 6) “*Grammar practice - Very helpful. An hour of grammar practice yields more improvement than anything else. Not exactly fun though!*”

(Percy, comments, 05/21)

This comment aligns with the overall aim of Percy, that is producing correct sentences in spoken Italian. Indeed, real improvement to reach the imagined Ideal L2 self comes from intense grammar practice according to the above comment. A detailed section dedicated to the emerging theme of grammar will follow in the next pages. The role of grammar for the present student was consistent throughout all the registered rankings, as it was considered very helpful by him. In addition, homework was almost always pure grammar practice, and Percy has completed it lesson after lesson, asking for feedback and corrections when possible. He was invested in the grammar practice of the course, both in class and out of the class.

- 7) “*Developing knowledge of Italian culture - Somewhat unhelpful. It's a bit of a distraction and takes up time, but more importantly it doesn't help improve language skills much and can create a false sense of improvement. Sometimes discussions lead to the usual cliches of food and football.*”

(Percy, comments, 05/21)

- 5) Another activity for which the rating did not change was this one, whose aim was to represent any cultural content included in exercising Italian. The only difference between Needs Analysis and this entry – from a later questionnaire – is that here Percy expresses in his own words why Italian culture is *somewhat unhelpful* to him. It is so unhelpful that can produce a “*false sense of improvement*” (Percy, comments, 05/21), probably because linguistically the student did not see any productive effect. Knowledge of the culture does not contribute to speaking correctly, and thus does not fit with the imagined self of Percy. Nonetheless, developing cultural knowledge is an important factor for individuals who are moved by a wish to be part, for example, of

an imagined community, or a real community of native speakers of the target language (Norton, 2013). According to the SDT, investment in practices for the development of cultural knowledge is more related to integrative motivation; numerous studies like Yu & Watkins (2008) to quote one, demonstrated that the degree of integrativeness into Chinese culture and motivation were significantly and positively related to Chinese language proficiency. This does not mean that Percy is wrong in saying that developing knowledge of the Italian culture does not help improve language skills; simply, he was not *invested* in it, despite being very motivated in learning Italian.

- 8) *“Reading activities - Somewhat helpful (I have short story books with questions, and to be honest I don't like the questions. With a story there's often too much I didn't get, I'd rather just move on. Occasionally i'll go back and do textual analysis in depth which is fine, it is the most draining activity.”*

With this activity instead we can observe how despite being challenging and not particularly fun for Percy, he is still invested in reading tasks. Grammar practice facilitated his overall understanding of written Italian and in class reading is the predominant ability that each of the participants perform. He says indeed *“i'll go back and do textual analysis in depth which is fine”*, showing that he probably eventually manages to complete simple readings, even if the effort put in that is high.

- 9) *“Pronunciation drills - Very helpful (probably needs feedback though)”*

(Percy, comments, 05/21)

Correct pronunciation can be included in the “ultimate goal” of deploying a proficient, accurate conversation in Italian for Percy. Not only is a stable variable – *very helpful* both pre-course and after the beginning – but he acknowledges the importance of being evaluated and corrected by the teacher before real-life confrontations with native speakers. Insecurity over pronunciation and mispronounced words can cause anxiety as multiple studies demonstrated (Baran-Lucarz, 2014), and ensuring to avoid such embarrassing moments is an obvious purpose for Percy. Pronunciation drills were present in almost every lesson, and it is a practice that one can carry out also individually. However, receiving feedback and being corrected undoubtedly helps the students to gain some confidence with speaking.

4.4 Profile 4: *Samuel*

The next profile that will be outlined is that of a man in his forties, who has lived in Scotland for many years but is originally from England. Samuel, together with the participants detailed in profiles 1 and 2 – respectively James and Lara – attended an Italian language class in the months before the present course started. He had already some groundings of Italian and was suggested this course by the previous teacher, so the three of them – James, Lara and Samuel – decided as a group to take part in the beginners’ course proposed by me.

4.4.1 Samuel’s initial conditions

When enquired about the reasons for which Samuel studied Italian, the following were his responses:

Reason 1	<i>I’ve always wanted to learn a language</i>
Reason 2	<i>I like Italy and may choose to buy a property there one day</i>
Reason 3	<i>I want to be able to talk with locals when I travel/holiday</i>

(Samuel, Questionnaire Zero, 02/21)

Samuel was therefore motivated to study Italian for both what appear to be intrinsic orientations (the desire to learn a language, something that according to his own words has always been a wish of his) and extrinsic ones (the intention to buy a property in Italy in the future and communicating with people from there). The reasons he listed present him as a learner with clear awareness on the motivations for which he chose to study Italian, a balance between an instrumental reason, an integrative reason, and an intrinsically driven reason, to categorize them in SDT terminology.

What emerges from Samuel’s data is a sense of an individual who has a clear understanding of his linguistic origins and a well-defined trajectory for his language-learning journey. This sense of direction is evident in the expectations outlined in Questionnaire 0, to which he provides the following responses:

Expectation 1	<i>To refine the beginners Italian I've been taught do date.</i>
Expectation 2	<i>To discover a different way of learning Italian from a different teacher.</i>
Expectation 3	<i>to learn more beginners Italian to improve me ability to use it.</i>

(Samuel, Questionnaire Zero, 02/21)

Drawing on his expectations and reasons for deciding to take part into the Italian course I was proposing – along with something he did not include, which was the decision to continue this learning together with the people he met in class during the previous course he had attended – Samuel's initial conditions were those of a target-oriented individual towards an Ideal L2-self who can fully enjoy his frequent travels to Italy. He's hoping to gain enough knowledge to strengthen his already existing language skills in Italian, aiming at being able to communicate with locals as he has plans to spend more and more time in Italy, given his intention to buy a house there. As it has been observed for other participants as well, integrativeness and being part of the speaking community is a desire shared by most of the learners-participants, aligning with studies in the field of FL motivation (Gardner, 2001).

Expectation 2, as presented in the table above, introduces an intriguing aspect. Among the students considered in this study, Samuel stands out as the sole participant who explicitly includes the language teacher in the evaluation of expectations for the course. The pivotal role of teachers in shaping students' motivation has been explored in prior classroom-based research (Noels, 2000; Dailey, 2009; Nicholson, 2013). Previous findings have consistently underscored the significance of the teacher-learner relationship, with implications for the level of self-determination exhibited by learners. In the case of Samuel, the desire to explore "a different way of learning Italian from a different teacher" introduces an interesting choice of words, particularly the repetition of the adjective "different." This repetition may indicate an expectation of encountering distinct teaching styles from two different instructors.

Moreover, it is plausible that Samuel, drawing from past experiences in both language learning and Italian language courses, possesses the ability to draw comparisons between the two teaching approaches. This comparative analysis may enable Samuel to identify specific

aspects that could potentially influence his participation in the course under consideration in this study.

In Questionnaire 1 he indeed makes a reference to address what was just mentioned:

“I have been fortunate to have done Italian beginner lessons previous [sic] so have some foundation. Interestingly, I seem to have picked up a nugget of new information related to the Italian language every week that I missed the first time around, making it simpler to understand/learn so I’ve really enjoyed that – waiting for that nugget each week.”

(Samuel, Questionnaire 1, 04/21)

Regrettably, apart from the statements from Questionnaire Zero and the extract cited above, Samuel did not add comments drawing similarities or differences between the two teaching styles he was exposed to; hence it was not possible to delve deeper into how his prior learning experiences may have intertwined with motivation in the current course. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the teacher as a component of his expectations for the course conveys a substantial amount of information about the elements he anticipated in the Italian classes. It can be inferred that the teaching style adopted by the teacher held a certain significance in shaping his overall learning experience. This, perhaps, suggests a possibility that he sought effective techniques to enhance the study of the language.

If we reflect on the language practices that Samuel experienced in class, some slight changes may be noted in the evaluation of the activities proposed by me as the teacher - researcher. “Working Individually”, “Reading activities”, “Pronunciation drills” and “Vocabulary practice” were all rated as “very helpful”, while before the course started – thus in Questionnaire Zero – these were all considered less helpful in the scale provided. It can be therefore deduced that over the lessons he may have changed his mind on how effective such components of learning are, perhaps following what he thinks to enjoy more while attending Italian classes.

“Grammar Practice” instead was a steady option throughout all the material collected from Samuel: rated as “Very helpful” in both Questionnaires, this also aligns with the skills-rating, for which Grammar is the sole entry – together with “Pronunciation” – which was ranked as “Very Important”. It is not surprising, therefore, that the “Grammar” component has also been one of the key focal points in the overall assessment of the course by the same student. He has indeed made numerous references to Italian grammar, both as a source of difficulty and as a tool for comparison with his grammatical preparation in his L1, namely English. This will be addressed in a later paragraph, as “Grammar” was a subject on which some

participants expressed by describing their individual experiences and reflections, albeit not specifically asked about it by me.

However, some lexical choices that Samuel made to discuss it caught my attention. As stated in questionnaire 1, he believes he has a limited understanding of grammar in general, not only in Italian:

“The requirement to combine Italian sentence structuring, singular/plural, masculine/feminine nouns, and verb conjugation in sentences is the most challenging thing I find. Combine this with a poor background in English grammar and it compound the issue.”

(Samuel, Questionnaire 1, 04/21)

When discussing it with fellow classmates during the Focus Group, he initiated the conversation on this topic, characterizing his limited preparation with the term “detrimental”. He employs this word on other occasions as well - for example, when he states "I was at a detriment that we don't teach grammar in the UK" in the same Focus Group session. This choice appears to reflect an awareness on his part that, in his perspective, a deficient grammatical foundation in one's native language may have adversely impacted the learning of additional languages.

4.4.2 Evaluating Samuel’s investment

As seen from the excerpts provided before, Samuel exhibited a notable commitment to the course in terms of expectations before even starting it. He was aiming at becoming conversationally fluent in order to be a proficient Italian language speaker when he travels to Italy, especially in view of future plans, including the prospect of acquiring property in Italy. He seemed to be looking forward to experiencing a “new way of teaching Italian” (Samuel, 10/06/2021), given the different teacher that was going to deliver the lessons.

Nevertheless, akin to the inherent challenges encountered in any educational undertaking, ups and downs were inevitably present also for Samuel, who admittedly struggled with learning Italian during the course.

While he identified the “poor background in English grammar” as one of the causes, in terms of reasons that got him “frustrated” (Samuel, 10/06/2023) he attributed his sense of frustration predominantly to the perceived lack of progress in his language acquisition endeavours. The ideal L2 self he had envisaged, after a few weeks into the course, appeared

to be a scarcely attainable target; when asked about whether he was making any progress in Italian, he responded:

“A little, but the lack of pace of progress has nothing to do the tutoring but my own time capacity (scarce) to practice individually over the last several weeks.”

(Samuel, Questionnaire 1, 04/21)

The fear of not having sufficient time on his behalf was already reported as one of the imagined challenges associated with attending the course. If we observe the complete list of challenges, he had indeed foreseen the potential influence of grammar, time constraints, and motivational factors on his learning achievements:

Challenge 1	Learning the grammar from a low starting point in English grammar
Challenge 2	Maintaining progress with many distractions and little time to study.
Challenge 3	Maintaining motivation on the weeks when I’m not progressing well.

(Samuel, Questionnaire Zero, 02/21)

The data above align with the difficulties that he effectively encountered while attending classes. The cause-effect relationship between “little time to study”, “not progressing well” and “maintaining motivation” are explicated/elucidated in what he added while evaluating his overall experience at the end of the course.

“I found I had to lower my expectations and even I spoke to my previous tutor around this, I became frustrated with myself that relatively simple concepts I wasn't picking up and some weeks, I was just an absolute train wreck, and it took me a while (...).”

(Samuel, Focus Group, 06/21)

In the context of the L2MSS model, it becomes evident that the conceptualized Ideal L2 self by Samuel did not align with the actual learner identity he discerned through reflective assessment of his language proficiency progress. However, he seems not to perceive this as

a major impediment to the performed motivation or to the goals he would like to achieve linguistically speaking. Not only he was present in all the sessions except from one – due to personal reasons – but he was also consistent with homework completion and requesting feedback from the teacher, thus showing a positive level of investment in classroom practice. The strategy he found effective for his circumstances was not that of putting even more effort in his study, as, according to his own words – and to what the teacher-researcher could observe as a teacher, he was already demonstrating dedication and commitment to learning Italian. Samuel is of the opinion that the resolution to the frustration he experienced lays in the deliberate act of "resetting the expectations":

“I was expecting because of you know, because of my academic backgrounds I've picked off left, right and centre and it wouldn't be the same here, but that wasn't the case and I found that I had to actually reset my expectations, to be able to, you know, if I didn't make really simple stupid pronunciation mistakes, I had to celebrate those rather than thinking I should be fluent by now or partially fluent.”

(Samuel, Focus Group 06/21)

Therefore, Samuel appears to be highly engaged and invested in classroom practices and responsive to the teaching methods employed by the teacher. Additionally, he demonstrates an ability to sustain his motivation by re-evaluating his linguistic accomplishments, focusing on errors, and considering them as, albeit minimal, progress. In terms of future selves, this can be interpreted as resetting also his Ought-to L2self idea and projection. Instead of concentrating solely on the frustration stemming from perceived lack of progress, Samuel's strategy of adjusting his expected outcomes appears to have been effective in minimising the gap between his ought-to self and actual progress. His self-assessment of his own competence enabled him to set more reasonable targets and desired outcomes, thus reflecting in a source of motivation rather than losing confidence and interest in Italian.

4.5 Profile 5: *Krystyna*

4.5.1 *Krystyna's initial conditions*

The next profile to be outlined is that of *Krystyna*. *Krystyna* attended all the lessons, completed the questionnaires, and took part in a Focus Group session; there is no learning diary or comments though, but this student was keen on completing the assigned homework every time and expecting feedback and corrections. As the other profiles, the main themes and excerpts will be presented and discussed for *Krystyna*.

Krystyna is a young woman originally from Poland; thus, English is not her native language. However, she is fully competent in English, having lived and worked in Scotland for many years now.

Krystyna's interest in studying Italian arises from a relational factor: she is married to an Italian husband and therefore the willingness to improve communication with him and his family serves as the main impetus for undertaking the course. In the NA she indeed states:

“My husband is Italian. I have Italian friends and visit Italy. I feel that I am gaining some knowledge, especially when in Italy on holiday (having a chance to listen to conversations in Italian no-stop_ However, it is short-lived as my holiday. I feel I understand some basic words/phrases but I can't really say much.”

(*Krystyna*, Questionnaire Zero, 02/21)

As for other participants, also for *Krystyna* integrativeness seems to be the main motivational orientation; the initial conditions are therefore those of an individual – a non-beginner in a sense, given the exposure to Italian that she experiences in her daily life and family context – willing to effectively communicate with native speakers. The imagined community in this case is the reality of social interaction within a family context: *Krystyna* is already part of “*the family*”, but her limitations in understanding and speaking the language do not make her feel integrated enough.

It is not surprising therefore that the ability to communicate while in Italy is listed among both the reasons and the expectations, even if worded in slightly different manners. It appears that this is not casual as *Krystyna* presents as very determined and used to well-structured approaches to tasks; in other words, the teacher-researcher chose not to disregard the perspective wherein we interpret equivalent reasons and expectations as a straightforward and explicit declaration of needs and intentions. For instance, *Krystyna* expresses the desire

to study Italian with the ultimate goal of effective communication. Therefore, her expectation from the course and herself aligns with the aspiration to achieve success in this communicative endeavour.

Krystyna's reasons to study Italian	Krystyna's Expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reason 1: <i>would like to have even simple conversation in Italian</i> • Reason 2: <i>structure my learning and form the basis for further development of my language skills.</i> • Reason 3: <i>able to go to the shop, restraint etc in Italy and being able to communicate</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectation 1: <i>knowledge of some basics</i> • Expectation 2: <i>ability to have some simple conversation</i> • Expectation 3: <i>getting some structure/directions to enable me to work on my language skills in the future</i>

The Ideal L2 self is then that of a proficient user of Italian, a successful learner able to integrate within the community of FL speakers. Krystyna is also aware of the iterative and long process that learning a language represents, as she refers to developing her language skills further in the future and the expectation to get some direction in this through the course, reflecting then metalinguistic awareness.

In terms of identity, the fact that Krystyna is a Polish native speaker that moved to an English-speaking country could let us infer that it is not the first time that she undergoes such identity related shifts. When she moved to the UK the same integrative impetus towards being part of the English-speaking community may have taken place and functioned as the main motivational orientation, as well as her projected self of a someone accepted and integrated in the community where she would work, live, and have social relationships. Unfortunately, we of course do not have data to compare the two language learning experiences – the English and the Italian one – , but for sure Krystyna represents the sole case for which considerations like these can be made.

Krystyna lists only one challenge among the possible ones, which is the difficulty of finding time for practice. She is the only participant who didn't mention language-specific difficulties as challenges. It may be linked to several reasons, from ignoring such difficulties to expressing a confident attitude towards reaching the goal without major challenges. Whichever was the real intention of Krystyna, it is consistent with what she declares in another questionnaire:

“I don’t think anything is exceptionally difficult.”

(Krystyna, Questionnaire 1, 04/21)

In literature it was already demonstrated the correlation between perceived problems or struggling in the FL practices and a negative impact on the motivation and investment, but Krystyna seems to react well to the first real challenge that she detected after starting the course:

“Probably the biggest challenge for me are articles. I think this is due to the fact that I am a native Polish speaker and in Polish language we don’t really use the articles. However, now I understand that I simply should use them at all times.”

(Krystyna, Questionnaire 1, 04/21)

Krystyna is expressing a certain metalinguistic awareness, for which is able to find suitable explanations to the perceived challenging aspect – i.e. being native speaker of a language where that part of speech is less or differently used – and drawing solutions to avoid further complications – “I should use them at all times”. By employing metalinguistic awareness, Krystyna is indeed demonstrating high levels of self-regulation and control, and more self-regulated motivations were found to be predictors of successful learning (Dörnyei, 2003). Her ideal L2-self is not only able to communicate with members of the community but is also aware of the learning strategies to adopt to foster her learning and overcome challenges. Aligning with the current terminology, Krystyna’s behaviour shall be addressed as “self-regulatory learning, which in literature labels the learners’ strategic contribution to their own learning” (Dörnyei, 2003:17).

4.5.2 Evaluating Krystyna’s investment

With other participants deductive methods have been applied to understand how much or how little they were invested in learning Italian. The themes that emerged were interpreted under the lens of the relevant theories – Investment theory, L2MSS – after analysing data. Krystyna expresses with clarity her opinion on the course delivery and classroom practice:

“I enjoy our classes. I want to expand my knowledge further. I think that the teacher-researcher is a great teacher and makes our classes very engaging. I like our written materials. I have something to refer to if required.

I feel that I am making a good progress. This helps me to stay motivated. I think that our classes are structured perfectly. We are moving in a good pace. I can now use the basics I have learned and apply them in real life situations. I am trying to have a basic conversation with my husband who is Italian. I am asking about some phrase and words, trying to use the correct form of verb etc. I think I should spend more time at home practicing Italian.”

(Krystyna, Questionnaire 1, 04/21)

There is a lot to unpack from the excerpt above. Firstly, it has been preferred to report it in its entirety – as it serves as a response to the question "Overall, how is your experience with the Italian language going?" – due to the progression of her thoughts reflecting the structured approach that Krystyna has on learning Italian. She expresses enjoyment of the classes and clearly articulates the positive impact of certain techniques, such as written materials and teaching strategies, on her progress. Additionally, she is aware that this contributes to maintaining her motivation. Moreover, she explores further the material covered in class by reflecting on the topics learned and developing her own strategies to contribute to overall improvement. The answer will now be divided into smaller units for further analysis.

- *“I enjoy our classes. (...) I think that [the teacher-researcher] is a great teacher and makes our classes very engaging. I like our written materials. I have something to refer to if required. I think that our classes are structured perfectly. We are moving in a good pace.”* Krystyna’s words express a genuine satisfaction with all the elements associable to the L2 learning environment and the classroom practice. She is clearly invested in both the study of the language and in the proposed tasks or activities within the lessons. She even touches on the teacher’s strategies, offering support to the crucial role that teachers have in determining students’ investment and engagement (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2021). The content, designed activities, materials available, structure and thus overall syllabus of the course are matching Krystyna’s needs and expectations by the time the questionnaire was taken, so halfway through the course. This overall contentment is diametrically opposed to the effect that the learning environment had on Lara: for her, the

online class and all the components that Krystyna is praising in her comments caused the opposite feeling, being one of the reasons for which she decided to retire from the course. It can be inferred that each of the two participants had such a different response to the shift of all learning from face to face to online because of their own different needs as learners. In fact, with the person-in-context approach (Ryan & Dörnyei, 2013), learners are understood as holistic individuals with complex lives outside the classroom, which uniquely impact on their engagement within it. However, it is interesting to note how the same course and the same environment are evaluated and accepted in diverse ways and we should reflect on how impactful the learning environment is, regardless of it producing positive or negative effects.

- *“I feel that I am making a good progress. This helps me to stay motivated. (...) I can now use the basics I have learned and apply them in real life situations. I am trying to have a basic conversation with my husband who is Italian. I am asking about some phrase and words, trying to use the correct form of verb etc. I think I should spend more time at home practicing Italian.”*
Krystyna here knows she is making progress, she is fully aware of it as she can apply what she learned to her daily life, demonstrating a self-regulatory approach to herself as a learner and metalinguistic awareness on the techniques to foster her progress even more. The attempt and engagement in conversation as well are at the same time both impetus and immediate application of new vocabulary and grammar content learned in class. As stated above, the questionnaire was taken after several lessons, so this evaluation that she outlined reflects a successful progression towards the Ideal L2-self of Krystyna.

Krystyna is an invested learner; researchers associate high levels of investment, being motivated – she admits herself to feel motivated, see the above excerpt – and effective learning strategies to successful learning outcomes (Shan, 2020). While for sure Krystyna’s case may be that of a successful language learner as defined in literature (Griffiths, 2010), there are some variables for which the current collected material cannot provide valid investigations; we refer for example to the personality characteristics, noted among the three main elements for a successful language learner (Ellis, 2008). The present study has indeed

limitations in portraying Krystyna as what research defines successful learner. However, on her progress she adds:

“Definitely, making progress. I feel that starting with basics and building on the knowledge gained is very helpful. It helps with better understanding of the language. It simply makes sense. Now, I can have a small conversation in Italian with my Italian friends and family.”

(Krystyna, Questionnaire 1, 04/21)

Once more she expresses that she is improving, that she knows it and the rationale behind how this was possible. A structured approach to building a solid methodology for future learning and to use what she was taught in immediate real-life circumstances.

She can, *now*, have small conversations with the members of the community she wants to fit in. Even without formal evaluating tools of her attained proficiency (which is beyond the scope of this project), the data that is available suggests a likelihood of success in her becoming the Ideal L2 self she desired to.

4.6 Profile 6: *Eddie*

4.6.1 Outline of Eddie as learner-participant

The next participant whose profile is to be presented goes under the name Eddie and will be referred to as he/him. English is his first language, and he was born and raised in England. The available data does not specify how long he has been living in Scotland at the time of the course, as he has not provided this detail. As for his age, he was in his late twenties when he attended the lessons.

Eddie has only returned Questionnaire Zero, as he did not return the other questionnaire nor did he deliver any notes or personal thoughts on the course. However, he did attend one of the Focus Group sessions. Considering these sessions were organised immediately after the end of lessons, we can infer some insights into his initial and concluding impressions of the course. Hence, the data collected from him underwent the same analysis applied to all other participants, revealing themes from his responses, and contributing to trace a narrative, albeit shorter than others.

4.6.2 Eddie's initial conditions

Eddie had expressed great enthusiasm about starting to study Italian in the emails that he exchanged with the teacher-researcher prior to the course. He mentioned that he had begun learning with the assistance of his partner – who was Italian - and a language app, thus covering only a few basic topics at that point, as he reported in Questionnaire Zero:

“I have started basic Italian with my partner, learning about articles, plurals and definitive articles, in addition to some basic phrases.”

(Eddie, Questionnaire Zero, 02/2021)

Eddie can be categorized as a beginner rather than a complete beginner due to his existing familiarity with certain groundings of Italian. Additionally, noteworthy is his ability to effectively reference the grammar learned, employing precise terminology, and demonstrating accuracy in identifying grammatical categories, as evidenced by his recognition of "definite articles" in the response above. This aspect will be revisited later in a section dedicated to the topic of grammar; however, it is interesting to note how he has provided detailed information about his previous knowledge of Italian.

He had of course also some expectations from the course, listed below:

Expectation 1	To gain a better understanding of the language.
Expectation 2	To be more confident in speaking basic Italian.
Expectation 3	To give myself more motivation to learn once I've completed the course.

(Eddie, Questionnaire Zero, 02/2021)

To delineate his ideal L2 self, another detail emerges from the listed expectations: aside from aiming for a confident speaking ability, Eddie hints at a positive impact on his motivation to learn, as it can be observed in the third entry. Therefore, he foresees becoming an Italian speaker capable of sustaining motivation throughout – perhaps future - learning processes. Through this assertion, it can be deduced that he may have been aware of the research questions underpinning the project — namely, investigating motivation — and he may have expressed interest in this aspect and its potential implications.

However, even though motivation - or how to leverage it for the purpose of learning - represents an expectation and a goal for Eddie, it is also simultaneously one of the major challenges he has envisioned. In the section dedicated to the challenges of learning Italian, Eddie succinctly and directly states the following:

Challenge 1	Time I have to commit to learning a new language
Challenge 2	Motivation
Challenge 3	<i>none given</i>

(Eddie, Questionnaire Zero, 02/2021)

It can be inferred that Eddie had definitely understood how challenging it could be to maintain motivation, and likely, according to his words, the course could have helped him channel it. Acknowledging the responsibility of finding time to dedicate to learning a foreign language is another aspect that Eddie recognizes; however, apart from these two challenges, it is notable that he did not mention a third challenge.

Concerning the reasons, Eddie had previously stated that his primary reason for learning Italian stemmed from his Italian partner, as he expressed a desire to effectively communicate with her or visit Italy; both these reasons categorise as extrinsic to some extent, as they are

related to an external factor, which is represented by his Italian partner. He indicates also an intrinsically driven reason though:

Reason 1	My partner is Italian
Reason 2	Have plans to visit Italy
Reason 3	Have always wanted to learn a new language

(Eddie, Questionnaire Zero, 02/21)

Although the response was expressed in a simple and concise manner in the first questionnaire, Eddie provided significantly more detailed insights into his initial motivation during the Focus Group session. Consequently, it became feasible to obtain a deeper understanding of his initial reasons for enrolling in an Italian course. Indeed, while the fact that his partner's native language is Italian may have influenced his decision to pursue Italian as a foreign language, the process of learning a new language held inherent significance for Eddie beyond mere communication with his partner – hereafter addressed as Mara (also a pseudonym).

“You know, initially I wanted to learn because of Mara, but also because I don't really challenge myself that much in terms of learning. I challenged myself physically, you know, like in sports and things, but not with learning, I don't really kind of...I don't do this, and I thought this is a job, let's give it a try and I'm really glad I did because you know, I wanna... I want to be more learning, not just Italian. So yeah, that was my motivation for learning and I'm glad I did.”

(Eddie, Focus Group 06/21)

Interpreting Eddie's statements through the lenses of both – respectively - the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Eddie's ideal L2 self entails achieving a basic proficiency level that enables him to effectively communicate with his partner Mara and understand local speakers, particularly in anticipation of a journey to Italy.

2. Furthermore, Eddie exhibits intrinsic motivation, which represents "the prototypic manifestation of the human tendency toward learning and creativity" (Ryan, 2000: 69). This intrinsic motivation is evident in his innate willingness to engage in learning for personal growth and the challenge it presents. Pursuing a new task, something he has never attempted before, underscores his self-determined disposition according to the principles of SDT.

4.6.3 Motivational shifts

While Eddie initially presented himself as a motivated and enthusiastic learner based on the analysis of his responses in Questionnaire Zero, his progress in Italian was not as straightforward as he had anticipated or hoped, despite his determined attitude and clearly defined goals. Eddie attended all the lessons until April but then missed several classes due to a combination of personal commitments overlapping and some absences made on purpose, as he claimed after the conclusion of the course. What becomes evident from the inconsistent attendance during the latter part of the course – and Eddie’s own words in the Focus Group session - is a lack of investment in either the course content itself or the classroom practice; This contrasted sharply with the level of motivation demonstrated at the beginning of the course, resulting in increased absences and reduced diligence in his pursuit of learning Italian overall.

In seeking to understand the factors influencing and leading to this shift in his commitment, Eddie demonstrated a clear comprehension during the conversation with the other participants in a Focus Group session. He delineated two distinct phases in his attitude towards Italian:

“I really enjoyed myself at the first half of the course: I thought we were going at a really good pace and you know, I was always keeping up and that was, you know...getting the flow in you, that was great you know, I was doing... I was doing great, and I was keeping up well for this. The second half, I really started to struggle and I again, I have had to lower my expectations on what I wanted to get out of this course. I thought I would be able to at least have a semi basic conversation with Mara in Italian.”

(Eddie, Focus Group 06/2021)

Not only did he distinguish between the initial set of lessons and subsequent ones, but it is also evident how the "struggle" he experienced led to the realization that the anticipated

progress in understanding and speaking Italian was not achieved. In other words, his ideal L2-self remained far from attainment, potentially leading to frustration for Eddie.

Later in the same session, Eddie proceeds to describe how he felt when it was time to begin the lesson, providing details on how different the situation was compared to February, which was when the course had commenced:

“I like to go to places where, uhm... I need to be, especially because we're working from home. Maybe if I was working at my work and then came back and then was doing lessons in the house would maybe feel a bit different. For the fact that I'm working here and then I'm learning in the same space, it felt like my work was two hours longer than it normally was on that day. And initially the novelty of the course was like that doesn't matter, right? Because I was enjoying it, it was great and then again, I refer to the latter half of the course where I really started to struggle. I even messaged you and I said 'look, this is very difficult, I'm finding this so difficult'.”

(Eddie, Focus Group, 06/2021)

From the excerpt above, it appears that a significant impact was posed by the online environment of the course, which proved to be less than stimulating for someone who works in the same space. This feeling is captured in his statement “It felt that my work was two hours longer”, which encapsulates a negative attitude contrasting with the terminology used to express the effects of the lessons during the first half of the course – “it was great, I was doing great”. Indeed, he continues to remark the diverse approach to the lessons and how it varied over time, regardless of the location where his learning took place. The forced virtual classroom – given the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions – combined with work being mostly in a remote format has undeniably influenced Eddie’s motivation. However, it is likely that these were not the sole factors contributing to the decline in motivation.

“My girlfriend was not putting pressure on me at all, or anything like that, but she, you know, she wants me to succeed right, she wants me to do well, and I feel that pressure not from her. She's not putting the pressure on me, but I feel it myself to learn, and the fact that I wasn't learning in that latter half as much as I was or as fast or as well as I had hoped it really, really upset me. It's just that, I was just upset, and I was going on during the lesson after the lesson, because I was really trying, but I just couldn't get it”

(Eddie, Focus Group, 06/2021)

In the excerpt above, drawn from the same conversation with the teacher-researcher and fellow participants, Eddie discusses the primary factor behind his challenges: likely due to the perceived rapid pace of the second half of the course and its associated difficulty, he found himself confronted with a sense of inadequacy. This led to feelings of frustration and disillusionment. Through the lens of the L2MSS terminology, a prominent concept of the Ought-to L2self emerges: a learner who experiences pressure, whether from external sources or internal expectations, regarding their inability to meet predefined expectations and standards.

Eddie's ought-to self was expected to adjust to the pace of the course and not encounter difficulties with new grammar content; this envisioned self should have reached capability to engage in conversations with native Italian speakers already, but this was not the case. However, he attempts to determine the motivation behind this altered attitude towards how he approached the "latter half" of the course, and he appears to attribute it to the possibility that he may have set overly ambitious expectations regarding his attained proficiency level, or that he had underestimated the challenges inherent in studying a foreign language. Eddie continued as follows on this:

"I don't think that I truly appreciated just how difficult it would be, and so maybe I didn't approach it with the right mindset. I kind of came in and thinking 'oh yeah, you know, learning a language will be fun, whatever! I'll just go through the motions!'. In fact, you have to really commit. And I didn't know just how much commitment to remember things and because there's so much, so much to remember, so much to learn, but you can't learn unless you repeat these things and keep doing them."

(Eddie, Focus Group, 06/2021)

It can be observed that Eddie has, to some extent, rationalized and understood the reasons why towards the end of the course, he began to perceive the lessons as a task, an obligation, something not easy to tackle, to the degree of missing a few sessions. He also seems to have realized that he was not very invested in the lessons and did not put into practice what would have brought him closer to his Ought-to L2self. Eddie speaks of "really commit", an attitude he is aware is necessary to achieve good results in learning a foreign language, but one that he apparently lacked. This discourse concludes as follows:

"So yeah I felt like there was a little bit of lack of motivation, towards the end but I stuck it out. I'm glad I did stick it out, and you know, I would like to continue."

(Eddie, Focus Group, 06/2021)

From the beginning, Eddie demonstrated an awareness of the pivotal role that motivation plays, as evidenced by his responses in Questionnaire Zero. The phenomenon that he describes as a "lack of motivation" could be reformulated according to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, under the terminology of Amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As observed with another participant – Lara - this manifested differently, leading her to abandon the classes. In Eddie's case, however, his words demonstrate a decrease in motivation, yet he managed to persevere and complete the course despite missing some sessions. That concluding statement - "I would like to continue" - also sets promising prospects for overcoming the experienced amotivation and perhaps pursuing Italian beyond the course proposed in this study.

4.6.4 Eddie's investment

In the previous section it has been illustrated how the present participant underwent lower motivation – specifically, amotivation - from the second half of the course onwards. He attributed this downturn to both the online environment of the classroom and the underestimated challenges and dedication required for language learning. In terms of investment, it can be inferred that he was not particularly invested in the classroom setting due to another factor beyond the sense of spending prolonged periods in the same space, where the distinction between work and leisure time becomes blurred.

In fact, concerning the online format of the course, Eddie also added the following:

“I definitely would say that I would have preferred a classroom setting and sort of face-to-face interaction, because I feel like there's that opportunity to again bounce ideas off each other, to maybe even get yourself teacher-researcher to, you know, come over and kind of just speak to me for five minutes, just to ask you questions, ‘is this...? Am I doing this in the right direction?’ and you kind of point me in that direction.”

(Eddie, Focus Group 06/2021)

Eddie's complaint here revolves around a lack of interaction between students but most importantly, between the learner and the teacher. Indeed, a virtual classroom setting does not facilitate the exchange of a few words between the teacher and an individual student without it being shared with the rest of the class. Eddie seems to believe that he would have benefited from a different environment, one that would have allowed for a unique relationship with the teacher, providing space to ask questions or address individual concerns.

However, this is not the last aspect of the online classroom that he addresses. Eddie also explains how it is more convenient to disengage - or to “hide” to use his own words - in an online setting, which has frequently impacted and prevented from his class participation:

“When you would ask a question about you know, ‘give me an example of’ or ‘can you say this sentence’ or ‘how should this sentence be structured’ there was quite a lot of opportunity to hide in that environment, you know, because I didn't necessarily know or I didn't want to embarrass myself. But I just wouldn't say anything, and I feel like you're...you can actually hide easier when you're on Zoom, whereas in the classroom you've just got to say it, and if I was in the classroom when you asked me, I would try to say it, but being on Zoom you can kind of just fade into the background”

(Eddie, Focus Group 06/2021)

The classroom setting was indeed impacting on Eddie’s investment to the extent to which he was not engaged in the activities and realised all the differences with a real classroom-based course; it is interesting how he could picture what the other setting - that of a real space - could have given to him as a learner in contrast with what his actual experience was.

Eddie seems to show limited investment in certain classroom practices, particularly regarding homework and exercises, as well as the methods through which these assignments were managed. As mentioned earlier, the teacher-researcher would assign homework after each lesson for the subsequent week's class. While homework was not mandatory, it was strongly encouraged as a means for students to maintain pace with their progress and self-assess their understanding of the lesson topics. Nonetheless, Eddie has never completed these assigned tasks. He explains his reasons by suggesting that he may have required additional encouragement or a “push”:

“I didn't do the homework and I feel like maybe if I was kind of pushed a little bit to give me a reason to do the homework, because it almost felt like you would yeah, this is not... this is not anything that goes to you [teacher-researcher], you know, but obviously you were too nice about the homework, to let us get away with not doing it, and I feel like if there was kind of you know, like a mini test or there's something to be like ‘oh shoot, I need to do the homework because [the teacher-researcher] is going to test me on Tuesday!’. I just felt like I could just not do it, and I could do other things that needs to get done so...”

(Eddie, Focus Group, 02/21)

This excerpt demonstrates that Eddie was not fully invested in the teaching practices established by the teacher. Norton and Toohey (2011:421) contended that “the language learner's conception of good language teaching may not be consistent with that of the teacher, compromising the learner's investment in the language practices of the classroom”. This indeed appears to be a situation where Eddie's personal idea of effective teaching practice involved placing greater emphasis on homework, recognizing the potential benefits of additional practice outside the classroom. Simultaneously, he seems to be aware of how this could impact his motivation, as indicated by his statements that he lacked a "*reason to do the homework*" and felt that he "*could just not do it*" and prioritize other tasks instead.

Eddie's stress on the necessity of homework completion, as well as the presence of a potential test to assess his skills and provide him with a reason to adequately prepare, suggests a reliance on external incentives to drive his engagement. He even draws a comparison with his previous experiences in compulsory education:

“Well, I mean let's put it this way, if my high school teachers said ‘Oh, you know, I'm gonna give you this homework, but don't worry!’ I definitely would not have had to do my homework in high school!”

(Eddie, Focus Group, 06/21)

Viewing through the lens of SDT, it becomes evident that Eddie requires to be extrinsically motivated. He acknowledges that a stricter emphasis on homework, such as the teacher-researcher checking it in class and assigning mandatory tasks regularly, might have stimulated his motivation - it might have “pushed” it, to cite his words. He needed external factors to channel his motivation, hence the flexible approach adopted by the teacher-researcher did not prove effective in this regard, leading to his lack of investment.

4.7 The students that withdrew from the course: *Jacob, Jessica and Niamh*

4.7.1 Jacob, Jessica and Niamh's participation in the study

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the quantity and quality of data collected for each participant varied due to the diverse nature of the data collection methods employed. As observed in the profiles of other learner-participants, students engaged in varying degrees, with some contributing with substantial datasets while others provided minimal data.

For instance, Jacob, Jessica, and Niamh are fictional names assigned to three participants who attended only a few sessions before discontinuing their study of Italian within the scope of the current research project for various reasons. Therefore, it was not possible to construct profiles for them, and their narratives, following the terminology adopted by the teacher-researcher, cannot be elaborated upon due to the limited information available.

However, since they all completed the Needs Analysis, we can at least briefly outline their initial conditions and motivations here, providing insight into the reasons that drove them to study Italian and their imagined selves' projections.

In Fact, although they did not fully contribute to the configuration of the profiles like the other learner-participants, the initial conditions of Jacob, Jessica and Niamh offer a valuable - albeit minimal - contribution to the understanding of the motives that lead learners outside of Italy to pursue Italian as a FL. Their responses will be therefore examined and presented collectively in the following paragraphs, highlighting similarities and differences.

4.7.2 Expectations

Jacob, Jessica and Niamh are all English native speakers, the first two come from Scotland while the last is from Ireland. Since they have not provided any information regarding their age, - and being this deemed an irrelevant information for the present study - they will be categorized simply as young adults. As for pronouns, Jacob will be referred to as he/him, while Jessica and Niamh will both be referred to as she/her.

In terms of FL proficiency, they are all complete beginners, as they all claimed not to have had ever studied Italian before. During lesson Zero, all of them filled the Questionnaire Zero. Their expectations are summarised in the chart below:

	Expectation 1	Expectation 2	Expectation 3
Jacob	A better grasp on conversational Italian	An insight into Italian culture.	<i>none given</i>
Jessica	To understand some basic phrases etc in Italian.	To gain some tips to help with motivation to learning languages	<i>none given</i>
Niamh	Basic vocabulary	Able to order food & drinks	Able to communicate in a small casual way

Table 4.1, Expectations from Questionnaire Zero

The three of them appear to anticipate diverse hoped outcomes from the course, spanning from achieving basic proficiency to engage in "small" conversations, to exploring possibilities for learning foreign languages, to gaining insights into cultural aspects. Indeed, Jacob was notably one of the few participants to mention an interest in Italian culture, which may have stemmed from his exposure to Italian films and TV shows. He identified these as his primary sources of prior knowledge of Italian in the dedicated question. The adjective "better" in the first response given, presupposes this as well, indicating a sort of minimal understanding of conversational, thus spoken, Italian.

4.7.3 Reasons for studying Italian

Niamh also expressed a distinct interest in Italian culture, citing it as one of the reasons for her decision to participate in the course:

	Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3
Jacob	An interest in Italian from a young age.	General interest in foreign languages.	Interest in foreign travel.
Jessica	My Boyfriend's family are Italian, it would be nice to converse with them.	I like to learn languages.	<i>none given</i>
Niamh	Holidays	Potential work trips to Italian factories	Really love Italian culture!

Table 4.2, Reasons from Questionnaire Zero

Here, the variety of motivations is even more apparent, highlighting how each individual is driven by different reasons and, consequently, has different learning needs for a given foreign language. In the case of Italian, the motivations among the three learners presented are notably diverse, encompassing reasons such as travel or vacation experiences in Italy, family or relationship connections, an interest in the Italian language and culture, and finally, work-related considerations.

When categorizing these motivations using SDT terminology, it can be observed that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are present among the three participants. Jessica and Niamh exhibit elements of both types of motivation: intrinsic motivation is demonstrated by Jessica's enjoyment of learning foreign languages and Niamh's passion for Italian culture. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is influenced by various external factors: Jessica's desire to communicate with her boyfriend's family illustrates integrative reasons (Gardner, 2001). Conversely, Niamh's external motivation is linked to her work, making her the only participant to mention this factor. This finding is consistent with a recent study by D'Orazi and Hajek, which investigated motivations for undertaking Italian studies in Australia. The

study found that work, particularly in industries related to Italian luxury brands, was among the most common instrumental motivations indicated by the Australian university students involved (D'Orazi & Hajek, 2021). In the UK context, however, Ferrari (2013) conforms with earlier work by Arton & Beaton, who found, in research conducted in 1990 and 1997, that only a small percentage of foreign language learners in England cited "work" as a motive, positioning foreign language study in England primarily as a leisure pursuit. While this data pertains to a relatively dated context and it is likely that many aspects of the foreign language learning landscape in the UK have evolved since then - not to mention the specificity of Italian among the FLs - it is noteworthy that in the small sample of the present study, only Niamh mentioned work-related reasons. Furthermore, in Niamh's case, apparently this did not emerge as a compelling reason for course completion, as she withdrew after a few sessions.

Jacob's motivations can be summarised by the consistent use of the word "interest" in all three of his responses. This choice of language exemplifies the intrinsic motivation that initially led him to study Italian. Unlike Jessica and Niamh, who also mentioned external factors influencing their decision, Jacob appears to be solely driven by personal curiosity towards various aspects of the Italian language. While he had previously expressed interest in Italian culture, here he expands upon a broader interest that has persisted since a young age, encompassing other languages and travel. This underscores the intrinsic motivation that guided him at the beginning of the course.

4.7.4 Challenges

The challenges that Jacob, Jessica and Niamh had envisioned before starting the course also picture a varied scenario. These are reported in the following tab.

	Challenge 1	Challenge 2	Challenge 3
Jacob	Lack of (non-native) people to practise with outside the course.	Gendered language. I have struggled with this before in French.	<i>none given</i>
Jessica	Remembering sentence structures	Remembering vocabulary	<i>none given</i>
Niamh	Speed at which people speak	Not spending enough time practicing	Confidence in speaking

Table 4.3, Reasons from Questionnaire Zero

While each of the participants identified distinct difficult aspects they anticipated encountering, examining their responses collectively reveals an overall metalinguistic awareness on their part. They address different areas of the language that may present them with difficulties, from syntax and vocabulary to the possible lack of practice and the arduousness of abilities such as listening and speaking in a foreign language, especially with native speakers of such language. The terminology used and the aspects they highlighted may suggest prior experience with learning foreign languages and a familiarity with learning approaches and strategies. Jacob, for instance, makes explicit references to his previous experience learning French, demonstrating awareness of the difficulties inherent in language learning. Furthermore, he articulates specific challenges, such as the similarities between Italian and French, both of which involve inflections for gender and number. He is also aware of the importance of relying in native speakers or speakers of the language to practice with outside the context of the lessons, as deduced from his first response. Lastly, Jacob has also

included “*small amounts of practise with native speakers*” as part of his response to previous knowledge of Italian in Questionnaire Zero.

On the other hand, Niamh appears to have had prior exposure to spoken Italian or another language, as she demonstrates a keen awareness of the challenges associated with listening and speaking in real-life situations. She acknowledges the situations where likely emotions, such as frustration and lack of understanding, can arise due to the perceived speed of speech or a lack of confidence when communicating in another language. Her challenges, however, also mirror part of her needs from the course (communicating in a “*small and casual way*”) and her consideration of important skills in a foreign language. In fact, “Speaking,” “Listening,” and “Pronunciation” were indicated by Niamh as the most important skills among those listed in the dedicated questionnaire’s section, reflecting a strong interest in the oral and communicative aspects of the Italian language.

Also Jessica’s identified areas of the language - namely “sentence structure” and “vocabulary” - may indicate that she previously underwent studying another foreign language. This choice of areas to highlight implies that she is familiar with the challenges posed by syntax, possibly from a language where syntax is a prominent and challenging aspect.

4.7.5 Withdrawal from the class

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, Jacob, Jessica, and Niamh attended only a few lessons before discontinuing the course. The possibility for early withdrawal from the research study was something the teacher-researcher had considered prior to the course's commencement, particularly given the challenging circumstances of the course environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of the three participants contacted the teacher-researcher individually and privately, citing primarily personal reasons related to time management and conflicting work commitments. Therefore, it is not possible in this context to analyse either the reasons for their decision to drop out of the course or any changes in their motivation. However, the fact that they discontinued a language course shortly after its start speaks volumes about their level of motivation. It could be that certain aspects of the course itself influenced their decision, while external pressures, such as work or other commitments, may have also played a significant role in their choice. Research on FL learning attrition shows that there are multiple and varied reasons for which students discontinue FL learning, ranging from the difficulty of language, too much workload to the view for which the interruption of the course will not affect future learning of the language (Oshima & Harvey, 2017). Whatever the reason, their behaviour can be categorised as *amotivated*, adopting SDT principles.

4.8 Identifying commonalities among the cases: Questions of Grammar

4.8.1 Why grammar?

All the profiles outlined in this chapter have shared their perceived challenges, expectations, and difficulties in the Needs Analysis; most of them have detailed such aspects in successive questionnaires and during the Focus Group sessions. A small number of participants even wrote personal comments on their overall experience with the course and the Italian language. However, there was a recurrent – and spontaneous – element that emerged from the comparison between data from each student, which is their prior grammar knowledge. Thematic analysis enabled the teacher-researcher to identify it as a major theme, while through Constant Comparison Analysis it was possible to find a common pattern between the different Focus Group sessions.

“Thus, Focus Groups are most helpful to the researcher when they approach the topic to be explored in a flexible manner, with general research questions of what they might hope to find the answers to, but with an openness to being surprised by the data produced and willing to be participant-led in the direction the subsequent questioning and the subsequent data produced takes” (Horsnby, 2022: 116).

This quote has now been presented because it encapsulates exactly what the teacher-researcher hoped to achieve from conducting several separate Focus Group sessions. The nature in which the learner-participants led the conversation - after some initial prompts - exchanging opinions and ideas on language/learning-related topics, would have produced results that were not particularly organised and structured, and there was a possibility that the discourse would veer towards topics irrelevant to the research. Instead, unexpectedly, the learner-participants decided to delve into a theme, that of grammar and their own knowledge of it, entirely autonomously, in both groups. Indeed, the theme of Grammar – at times conflating with that of Metalinguistic Awareness, being one of its ways of expression – was shared in all the Focus Groups sessions. Students engaged in discussion over the difficulties experienced in studying Italian and confronted one another with diverse background in grammar knowledge, reflecting on their preparation in grammar in their own L1.

Results from these fruitful conversations are presented below, with relevant excerpts.

4.8.2 Italian grammar and L1 grammar

“The thing I found, though, I was at a detriment that we don't teach grammar in the UK. the lack of grammar, of English grammar was so detrimental to me in learning English, and you know things like sentence structuring, subjects, verbs, objects.”

(Samuel, Focus Group, 06/2021)

Four students out of the total number of the participants found as common factor for their perceived difficulty of learning Italian the “lack of grammar”, to cite Samuel’s words. He defined this as “detrimental”, something damaging his learning. The same observation was made by other participants, such as Eddie: the two of them agreed on this point during a Focus Group session and identified in their L1 education the cause for the insufficient knowledge of grammar.

“But just kind of following on for what Samuel said there, I think one of the biggest challenges for me was one I haven't been in education, for a long time. And you know, I was in the military, since I was 16 so I haven't really kind of had any opportunity to learn, in this kind of environment before, you know. But secondly, was the fact that grammar just isn't taught that way in English as it is in Italian and really found myself almost questioning sometimes kind of what, like, what an article was you know, and I know that sounds ridiculous.”

(Eddie, Focus Group, 06/2021)

Aside from the reference to education in their own country – and in their own language – it can be observed how the lack of solid grammar skills enabling them to classify parts of speech or, at least, to understand them, contributed to make both learners quite insecure with Italian as well.

Research conducted by Cenoz (2013) has established that metalinguistic awareness confers an advantage in the acquisition of FLs. This awareness empowers learners to juxtapose the languages they are proficient in, fostering reflective insights into the FL under study and its governing rules. In the context of the present case study involving students, a notable absence is observed in terms of explicit recognition and utilization of the grammatical terminology required for labelling and comprehending grammar content:

“You were saying ‘we’re going to learn articles’ or ‘we’re going to learn verbs’ for example...all these terms, you know, regular verbs or irregular verbs I mean, I may have very, very briefly covered that in English, when I was a child, but even then, I don't think very much. So, I didn't know even what these English words meant, let alone what they meant in Italian or what they actually were in Italian.”

(Eddie, Focus Group 06/21)

Needless to say, this lack of metalinguistic awareness led Eddie to experience difficulty with keeping up with the course, as covered in the section dedicated to his profile. He described the beginning as “*manageable*” while towards the end he claimed that he was “*not able to keep up*” (Eddie, Focus Group, 06/21).

The level of preparation they felt to have in grammar generally, as previously mentioned, affected several of the participants and prompted a reflection on their very own awareness over the parts of speech of the language they speak in everyday life. What Eddie and Samuel brought up – a perhaps different approach to grammar that dates to their compulsory education years at school – as partly responsible for the difficulty experienced while following the Italian course, was shared also by other participants during one of the Focus Groups. Before reporting the words of respectively Percy and James in this regard, I would like to remark that their reply was addressing the various difficulties found in the study of Italian, thus they were not asked specifically about grammar. It is believed that the nature in which such similarities emerged during two separate sessions of Focus Groups constitutes an interesting parallelism: in both cases, at the very beginning of the conversation, participants mentioned grammar as the most immediate link to the overall experience with the course. What is curious though, is that none of them refers to the Italian grammar being complex and difficult itself, but rather to their knowledge of grammar in general that they believe to be “not enough”.

“I think, just English people in general, maybe at school, we didn't get, or I certainly didn't get instructed on technical grammar to the level that generally is taught in Europe, so if people are talking about, you know, ‘technical words’ then, a lot of English people might just be not that used to thinking about. We know verbs, adjectives and names, but beyond that you'll probably find that a lot of people who speak English are not that confident talking about very specific things to do with sentence structure and grammar.”

(Percy, Focus Group, 06/21)

When it was James's turn to speak about his own experience with Italian on a general level, he followed up to what Percy had just said.

"It's just the way my tongue isn't used to pronunciation of the phonetics of I suppose, I mean, a lot of that's practice saying don't get that so that's for the speaking problem.

It's just getting your head around sentence structure, we really only taught in school, we were taught all grammar, but we weren't taught what it was that you were learning. You were taught like past tense, present tense or future tense, but we weren't actually taught why or how. You were just taught to speak. So when it comes to Italian, and it's very grammar based, you try and deconstruct a sentence and reconstruct it, it's quite difficult because for me I don't fully understand the English language too well. So that's maybe why it is a bit more difficult, I think. But that's just because we're not taught cause Percy was saying the way you're taught in Europe you're actually taught sentence structure, the whys the hows and the rules we weren't really taught that as such, we were just taught to speak. So that's why it's more difficult for us, the lack of education momentum, more than anything but it's rewarding, I mean when you get into it, I started to learn quite a lot about the sentence structure and vocabulary just through Italian, which is really interesting I'm not there yet, but I'm on a journey which I'm really enjoying. So I'm kind of learning through Italian, I'm learning English vocabulary and structure and re-do back again Italian."

(James, Focus Group 06/2021)

All the reported excerpts of these group conversations seem to align with the underlying idea that a better knowledge of grammar may have facilitated their learning of Italian. Expressions on being more or less confident based on the grammar skills they "were taught" suggest that this was somehow impactful on what the students experienced during the classes. In some cases – like James, Percy, and Samuel – it resulted in persevering albeit the evident difficulties, if we look at the participation in class activities, homework and overall enthusiasm expressed by the present participants. If we base this assumption on the words of Percy, for example, while stating that "the most people who seem to have a grasp of grammar to a deeper level and it definitely shows when they're trying to learn language" (Percy, 08/06/2021), we can also infer that the advantageous impact of grammar on FL learning was acknowledged.

In some other cases though, we can observe how this resulted in a decreased motivation towards the language: Eddie admittedly linked the inability to follow the course content – due to the reasons reported earlier in this section – to the deliberate choice of not attending

most of the sessions in the second half of the course. The fact that he encountered some sort of struggle can be read in his words while confronting with the others in the Focus Group:

“It was, yeah like I would say there was about learning English as much as Italian and I felt that was manageable at the start, because we took it quite slowly, but then sort of at the end of the course I feel like I know, obviously, you know we extended the lessons a little bit because you were running out of time, but I felt like we were going quite difficult towards the end, quite fast I couldn't keep up. Because, again, I was kind of like thinking about the English and the Italian so that was my experience on then I would say difficult if you just got to put a little bit more time into it just kind of understand what these things mean, you know these verbs, and these articles and etc, so difficult, but I think it's manageable, at least at the beginning of the course it was.”

(Eddie, Focus Group, 06/2021)

While the focus was shifted to individual grammar knowledge prior to the course by the totality of the participants in the Focus Groups, not all of them agreed in finding it obstructive to their study of Italian. While James, Percy, Eddie and Samuel identified it as a source of struggle or an obstacle to their own attainment in learning, Krystyna had a different opinion on the subject.

“I don't think that Italian is as difficult as some other languages and in school, I was learning a little bit of German and I was thinking actually it was more difficult than Italian even that technically it's the same family. Maybe I feel this way because in Poland, you pay a big attention to grammar basically so that's, the first thing which you are taught in school, when you are young so actually. I like the idea that there is a structure and some rules, and we can build on this because it's easier to understand the language for me.”

(Krystyna, Focus Group, 06/2021)

While on one hand she denies the connection/linkage between difficulty and Italian grammar found instead by the others, on the other hand Krystyna's words seem to confirm that a more solid knowledge of the grammar implant may facilitate the experience of learning an FL. Or, at least, this seems to be the case talking about herself, a Polish native speaker who did not identify grammar terminology or grammar itself as strain, maybe thanks to the more thorough study of grammar when she was younger. Not only did it not represent source of “detriment”, but her prior metalinguistic awareness constituted a positive approach to the new language's own set of rules and grammar system. Paradowski (2008) elaborates on

drawing on the learner's L1 and showing comparisons and contrasts between this and the FL as a method to facilitate and accelerate the processes which occur independently in the learners' mind; the author uses a powerful image to describe the – unconscious maybe – exploration on the FL learners' behalf: “The basic reason why we look for familiar orientation points and similarities when in new circumstances is our natural need for safety. We feel more comfortable and at ease at home, in our district and city, than at a new venue, even though the latter may be objectively better-appointed, more attractive and safer, just because in the former we could take more things for granted. This is also why the target language should literally be taught in the framework of the learner's L1.” (Paradowski, 2008: 515).

4.9 Descriptive Statistics: rating skills and class activities

The few quantitative data collected were consisting of Likert Scales in the Questionnaires. In these questions, learner-participants were asked to rate some FL skills – namely *Pronunciation, Writing, Reading, Speaking, Listening, Vocabulary* and *Grammar* – and a set of FL classroom activities, which were *Working individually, Working in pairs or groups, Reading activities, Pronunciation drills, Watching videos, Games, Conversation, Vocabulary practice, Listening, Grammar practice, Songs* and *Developing knowledge of Italian culture*.

The descriptive analysis of their responses had both the scope of contributing to the learner-participants' individual profiles and the immediate effect of feedback based on which the teacher-researcher was able to design an adequate syllabus; this process, as detailed in the methodology chapter (chapter 3) is part of the iterative reflection of Action-Research. The effects and how this was integrated will be described in chapter 6, dedicated to the component of the teacher-researcher as practitioner and the collaborative syllabus, where students' opinions – like the ones presented in the statistics below – played a significant role.

4.9.1 Item 4 of Questionnaire Zero: “*To what extent do you find the following skills important?*”

Responses to this question show that the learner-participants rated the majority of the skills as important, with no negative rating registered. *Pronunciation, Speaking* and *Listening* stand out as the most important skills for the learner-participants, evidencing the interest on their behalf in attaining proficiency to engage in conversations in Italian with native speakers. This same desire is expressed in the ideal-L2-selves envisioned by some of the students – as detailed in the profiles – and also more explicitly in the reasons and expectations listed in the Questionnaire Zero. *Pronunciation, Speaking* and *Listening* were rated “Very Important” by 7 participants out of 9.

The *Grammar* skills are the second ones in terms of importance for the students, with 6 participants out of 9 agreeing that are “Very important”, and 2 rating them as “Somewhat important”. This aligns with the overall findings in the study, as Grammar is one of the themes that have emerged from the analysis of the whole dataset.

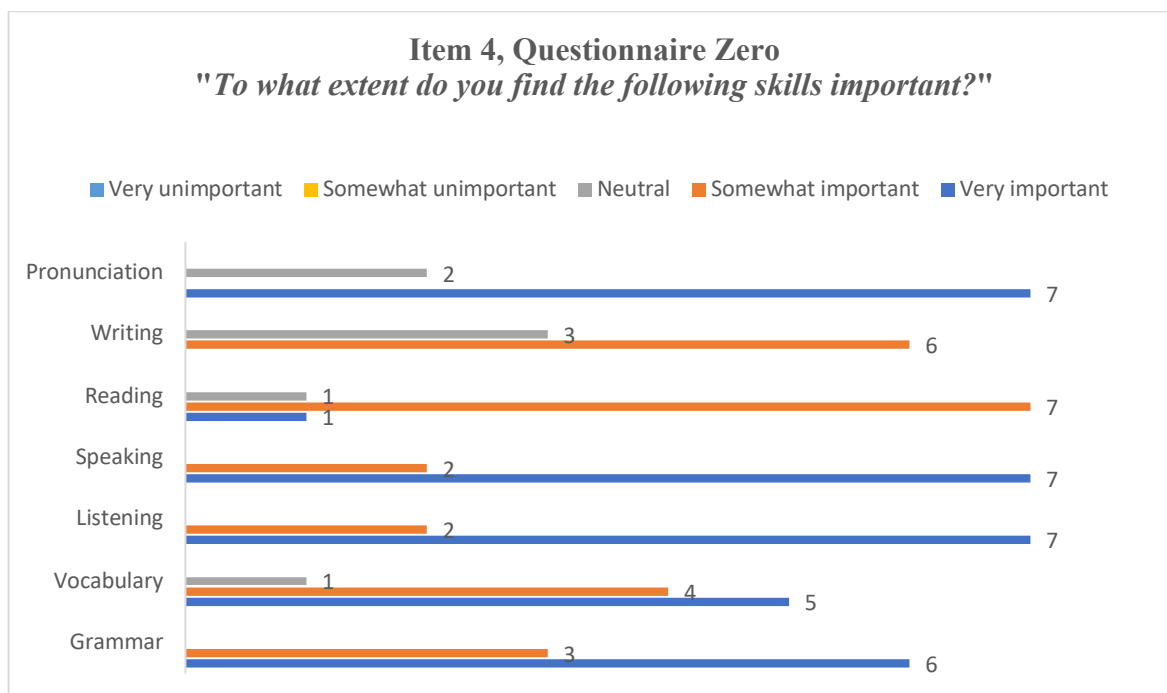


Figure 4.1 Results for Item 4 of Questionnaire Zero

4.9.2 Item 5 of Questionnaire Zero: "To what extent are the following activities helpful?"

The other Likert Scale in the questionnaire aims at evaluating class activities. Here the responses show some variation between the options, with two of them being categorised as "somewhat unhelpful" by a certain number of participants. "*Developing knowledge of Italian culture*" was considered "somewhat unhelpful" by 2 learner-participants, while "*Songs*" was deemed to be "somewhat unhelpful" by 4 participants out of 9. In chapter 6 there will be an example of an error on behalf of the teacher-researcher in her teaching, and this was due to underestimating some results from the Needs Analysis. The teacher-researcher indeed proposed a class activity based on Italian songs and tasks to complete; unfortunately, students did not engage as with other typologies of material.

It can also be observed how *Grammar Practice*, *Conversation* and *Pronunciation drills* scored as the most helpful activities, aligning with what students found to be the most important skills.

Item 5, Questionnaire Zero
"To what extent are the following activities helpful?"

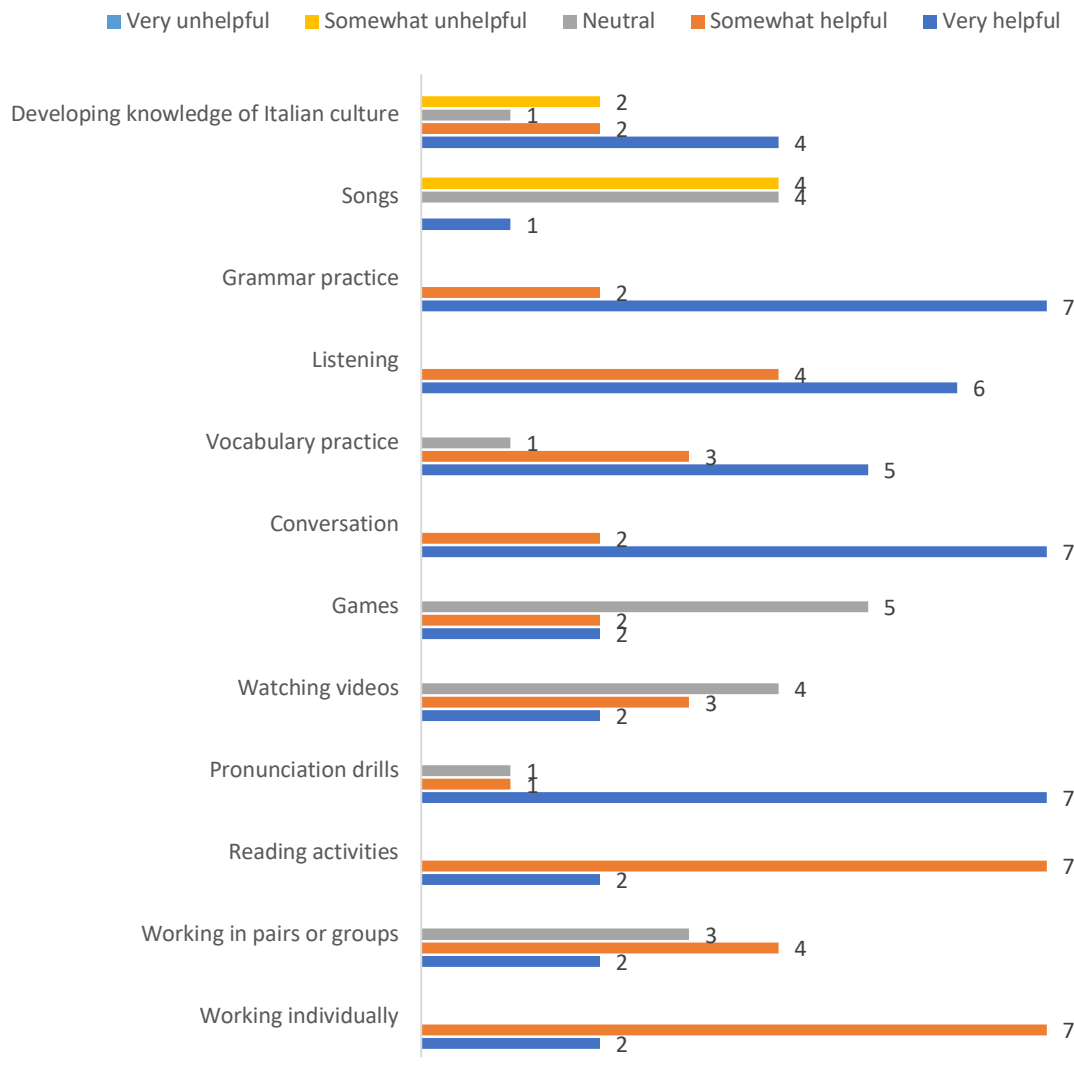


Figure 4.2, Results for Item 5 of Questionnaire Zero

4.10 Conclusions: an overall look at the themes

In this chapter all the relevant results have been presented and discussed, expanding on the themes that emerged during the analysis of the data. As outlined in the chapter's introduction, the teacher-researcher opted to present the results by examining each learner-participant individually, constructing a narrative for each case. The learners were then observed through the lens of identity and shifts in motivation, aligning with the theoretical framework of the study, thus applying principles of SDT, L2MSS and investment theory.

As it could be inferred from reading through the profiles of the learner-participants, albeit in different ways, the levels of motivation and identity did not remain stable during the course but underwent changes. The same could be observed for their investment, as some demonstrated to be poorly invested in classroom practices. The resulting fluctuations in motivation, identity and investment levels confirm the accepted view in literature for which learners are “conceived as having a complex identity, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social interaction” (Norton, 2010: 354).

What emerged from a close look to the words of the learner-participants is a picture that sees them as protagonists of the learning process, capable of evaluating their own progress, successes or lack thereof, their own motivation, and critically reflecting on potentially functional strategies to enhance their learning. At the same time, however, as seen for some of them in the classroom, the failure to reach their imagined L2 selves was a source of frustration.

Although each of them was presented individually, a comparison of the individual profiles led to common themes and patterns, factors or conditions that similarly influenced their learning trajectory. These will be illustrated in the next chapter, namely Chapter 5.

Analysing the transcripts of the Focus Group instead reinforced a theme that had already emerged from the datasets of the individual participants, as it had already been mentioned in other circumstances by them, in questionnaires and Learning Diary entries, which was grammar. When comparing the themes identified in the two sessions, which took place in different days and with different learners, it was found that they started sharing their experience and view with grammar at the same way, naturally and without the intervention or prompt of the teacher-researcher.

In the following table, the key themes are briefly summarised.

Themes	Sub-themes	Description	n. of respondents that mentioned the themes one or more times (%)
Grammar	L1 grammar	Knowledge of L1 grammar	83.3%
	Italian grammar	Reflections over Italian grammar	
	Difficulty	If they found it difficult or not	
Metalinguistic Awareness	Pertinent vocabulary	Use of the relevant terminology to describe the FL, for example by employing terms like <i>gerund</i> , <i>adjectives</i> , <i>regular verbs</i> , etc.	50%
	Learning strategies	The development of metacognitive strategies to facilitate and control their learning	
Online classes	Different interaction	The different dynamics when communicating in class, especially compared to face-to-face classrooms Feeling less motivated to attend an online class	83.3%
	Less motivation	Too many students may cause interaction and carrying out tasks more difficult i.e. one may speak over another, problems with mute functions, etc.	
	Smaller classes		

<i>Expectations</i>	Higher Expectations	When students had higher expectations at the beginning of the course in terms of language proficiency	50%
	Progress	The perceived progress during the course	
	Concrete use of the language	Being able to use the language outside the class	
<i>Motivational Awareness</i>	Feeling motivated Feeling less motivated	Students explicitly saying that they were feeling motivated or not much motivated during the course and reflecting over their own motivation	66.7%
<i>Language Practices</i>	Teacher and teaching methods	Describing aspects related to the teaching methods and how the teacher delivers lessons	50%
	Homework	The home practice to complete outside the class, which was encouraged but not compulsory	

Table 4.4 Summary of the Themes

Chapter 5

Discussion Chapter

In the preceding chapter, all pertinent results were presented. I have examined participants' responses both individually and collectively, including their contributions during the Focus Group interactions and the experiences of the three students who attended a few sessions before withdrawing from the course.

In this chapter, however, we will enumerate the responses to the research questions underlying the study.

5.1 Research Question 1:

Which are the factors influencing the levels of motivation of adult learners within this Italian language course designed to address their needs?

Several factors influencing the motivation of the adult learners participating in the course have emerged.

5.1.1 The learning environment: Zoom

The COVID-19 restrictions necessitated the transition of the course from in-person to online. Several participants in the study have shared how this change has affected their motivation, with the majority expressing a negative impact. This was particularly evident for Lara, Samuel, and Eddie, who faced tangible challenges in staying engaged during the Zoom sessions. For two of them, this resulted in a confessed lack of motivation, ultimately leading to their decision to stop attending lessons. The learning environment proved to be less than ideal for the mentioned participants, highlighting the significant impact it can have on individuals' engagement in class activities. This situation aligns with the investment theory in language learning: Lara, Samuel, and Eddie, initially motivated to learn Italian as outlined in their respective profiles in the Results chapter, exhibited reduced investment in their learning context over time, resulting in decreased engagement with the course. In fact, as reiterated in several occasions within this work, for investment theory one can be motivated in learning a language but, at the same time, not invested in some learning practices (Norton, 2000). Our findings for the mentioned learner-participants align with those of Bannink and Van Dam (2021), proving the difficulty posed by the exceptional circumstance of COVID-19 in adapting to a non-traditional learning setting and to the new dynamics of the online learning setting, which were different from face-to-face ones. As in Bannink and Van Dam

(2021), these challenges resulted in decreased engagement and motivation among the learner-participants.

A further consideration needs to be done in terms of the L2 learning experience as component of the renowned L2MSS initially designed by Dörnyei (2009). The significance of the classroom environment has not only been extensively explored and emphasised in recent research, aligning with the theoretical framework of the learner as a person-in-context (Ushioda, 2011), but the L2 learning experience inherently includes the enjoyment of the classroom setting as one of its components. Described as "the strongest predictor in the L2MSS" (e.g., Lamb, 2012; Papi & Teimouri, 2012; Dörnyei, 2019), the L2 learning experience remains a pivotal variable, as evidenced by the reflections of the participants involved, which do not only address the classroom setting but will extend to also other factors proposed in later sections within this chapter.

While the current study did not intend to specifically measure the L2 learning experience for the participants, it is nonetheless true that this component contributes to the motivational dynamics over time, albeit challenging to quantify due to its multifaceted nature (Li, 2023). In You & Dörnyei (2016) it is noteworthy how for the Chinese students involved in the study "the desire to invest time and energy in language learning seems to be associated first and foremost with the evaluation of the learning process" (You & Dörnyei, 2016: 512). Here, Lara, Samuel, and Eddie seem to confirm these findings, with an evaluation of the learning environment - as representative of their overall *engagement* as per the reconceptualization of the L2 learning experience in Dörnyei (2019) - that did not satisfy their needs for multiple reasons.

Even if "Zoom" emerged as a common theme from the participants, the context to consider, however, extends beyond the confines of the classroom. As observed in the case of Eddie, the necessity to conduct the course via Zoom and his assessment of this situation collided with his – and that of nearly everyone's – daily reality during the COVID-19 pandemic, which involved conducting all activities online and remotely, including work. Eddie specifically lamented this detail, as both his work and the Italian course were conducted online, making it difficult for him to perceive the latter as anything other than work. At a certain point, he viewed it almost as an extension of the work shift.

It is evident, therefore, that the same learning environment exhibits various facets, mirroring the multifaceted complexity of the L2 learning experience component. Dörnyei, in his 2019 revision, theorizes this component – which was previously less articulated and lacking in theoretical exploration (Csizér and Kálmán, 2019a) – through the lens of the notion of engagement. As mentioned while reviewing the literature on the L2MSS, Dörnyei thus

elaborates on five aspects through which learners can engage to understand the level of engagement that determines the L2 learning experience, namely: school context, syllabus and teaching materials, learning tasks, one's peers, and finally, the teacher (Dörnyei, 2019: 25). During the period in which the course took place, the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been observed how such factors further influenced the compulsory participation in the online course, highlighting additional related aspects. Some of Dörnyei's identified ones were indeed lacking: for example, the exploration of group dynamics or active interaction with other classmates - for him classified under the voice "one's peers". For instance, for Lara there were simply too many people in a virtual class; for Samuel, the inability to interact with others meant not being able to help each other, resulting in each person merely waiting their turn to speak; for Eddie, instead, it was easier to "hide" on Zoom and therefore avoid actively participating in activities when he did not feel confident. In a real classroom, not only Eddie believes he would have had to face these fears of exposure, but he is also convinced that he would have benefited from it. However, as he said, "being on zoom you can kind of *just fade into the background* and not always answer this question" (Eddie, 06/2021).

This data seems to be consistent with the empirical results obtained by Guo, Xu, and Chen (2022), indicating that language learners exhibit the highest degree of active participation - or engagement - in more interactive classroom environments. The impressions shared by the three participants in this regard only serve to confirm this view, with lesser engagement observed among those who perceived the class as having somewhat limited interaction opportunities.

Furthermore, while opportunities for peer interactions were notably restricted, with the shift to online learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic the relationship between teacher and student became more crucial (Li, 2023). The significance of the student-teacher relationship is widely acknowledged, and even prior to the pandemic, its role in online education was recognized to hold an even more heightened importance compared to traditional learning settings (Carter and Ruckholm, 2008). Extensive research conducted during nearly two years of mandatory online education across various educational levels has underscored the importance of the teacher-student relationship. This significance is supported by findings such as those indicating that teacher-student interaction in such setting enhances students' learning engagement by fostering a positive psychological atmosphere that directly impacts learning outcomes (Sun, Sun, Sha, Gu, Hou, Zhu and Fang, 2022). Indeed, it is precisely this aspect that further disappointed Eddie about Zoom in this study. Apparently, in his view, a scenario where he could ask questions and discuss them with the teacher was unattainable

online. He refers to the missed opportunity to "talk even just for a few minutes" (Eddie, 06/2021) and get to know the teacher-researcher better, who, in turn, would have been able to point him in the right direction when he made mistakes or asked questions in a face-to-face context.

In summary, "Zoom" emerged as a prominent theme in the dataset, with nearly all participants expressing their views on it. It was considered a factor capable of influencing learners' motivation aligning with relevant empirical research in the field, thereby affecting their L2 learning experience in terms of the level of engagement shown in the virtual environment of Zoom. However, the way this influenced motivation varied among the students in the Italian course. In fact, some - like Percy - expressed positive views, highlighting Zoom's potential to replicate the same level of active participation as a "real" lesson, which contrasts with the opinions of others. In addition, Krystyna found the convenience of not having to go anywhere for classes to be a motivating factor. She argues that since the lessons were online, she had no excuses not to participate, as they were easily accessible. The ease with which she could attend class thus served as an incentive for her to not miss any sessions and to demonstrate high engagement as a result. Our findings in this sense confirm what Zhijie & Bingyu (2023) demonstrated, reinforcing the strong link between motivation and self-efficacy, which in this study (Zhijie & Bingyu, 2023) emerged as a crucial factor mediating the relationship between ideal L2 self, grit – intended as per Duckworth et al. (2007) as the “as the compound of passion and perseverance for long-term goals” (Duckworth et al., 2021: 573) - and online learning satisfaction.

5.1.2 Metalinguistic awareness

Another prominent theme revolved around metalinguistic awareness, which entails the capacity to consciously contemplate the characteristics of language. In this case as well, the theme encompassed various aspects of language, ranging from the grammar of one's native language and knowledge thereof, to an awareness of linguistic skills and how to utilize them to enhance practice in the target FL, which was Italian. Given that these “aspects” grouped as sub-themes - intended as more specific topics compared to the broader and generic base theme - each of them will be hereafter addressed separately.

5.1.3 Sub-theme 1: L1 grammar influence

The knowledge or lack of L1 grammar was extensively discussed in the previous chapter, being a unanimously shared theme among all participants in the Focus Group sessions. The ease with which this theme surfaced in the conversation, primarily in response to individual

learners' difficulties, is why it has already been addressed, highlighting elements of the discussion that facilitated a comparison based on the grammatical preparation received in school.

In essence, those who perceive themselves to have a poor understanding of grammar in their native language have noticed that this also affects their comprehension of the FL / Italian grammar. Specifically, they all seem to have had difficulty even recognizing parts of speech, such as identifying an adjective or a verb in a sentence. These are concepts that are necessarily introduced to them from the very first lessons, where, inevitably, they must be mentioned, as Italian is a language that inflects in number and in gender, unlike English. For instance, to explain a basic rule even just for introducing oneself in Italian, it is necessary to immediately teach the concept of grammatical agreement, for which all elements in the sentence must agree in gender and number, thus reflecting in different endings for such words. Regardless of the “type” of grammar being taught, or whether a structuralist or communicative approach is adopted (Benucci, 2018), teaching Italian therefore may presuppose fairly solid foundational knowledge of the grammar of the learners' L1. This could facilitate the initial lessons where adjectives, nouns, agreement, singular, plural, masculine, and feminine are discussed.

Recent studies (i.e. McManus, Marsden, 2017; Dault & Collins, 2016) have only confirmed the crucial role that the first language plays in producing positive outcomes in foreign language learning; for example, by highlighting the importance of utilizing the L1 to discuss and convey metalinguistic information about grammar. According to these, it is suggested that such use of the first language aids in developing awareness of differences between the first and second languages, enhances cognitive processing, and may contribute to long-term language acquisition (De la Fuente & Goldenberg, 2022).

In this study, as it has been pointed out previously, it is intriguing how students spontaneously linked their difficulties in understanding not only grammar rules but also the terminology used when the teacher referred to various parts of speech, to a limited use of their previous grammatical knowledge before studying Italian. It is as if they had sensed the valuable role that a stronger grammatical knowledge could play in their learning journey, making it, if not easier, at least more understandable. Their words and significant excerpts supporting these conclusions have already been reviewed in the previous chapter, but it is worth recalling what Eddie, for example, summarized as what he and at least three other participants expressed:

“You were saying ‘we’re going to learn articles’ or ‘we’re going to learn verbs’ for example...all these terms, you know, regular verbs or irregular verbs I mean, I may have very, very briefly covered that in English, when I was a child, but even then, I don't think very much. So, I didn't know even what these English words meant, let alone what they meant in Italian or what they actually were in Italian.”

(Eddie, Focus Group 06/2021)

Therefore, we do not know how a greater knowledge of the grammatical structures of their L1 would have helped the students in our course, but we do know how the absence of this triggered reflection on language and its potential effects. The connection with a negative impact was naturally made by the students themselves, first individually and then shared as they spoke in the Focus Groups. On the other hand, while this was true for all other Focus Group participants lamenting difficulties related to grammar, it was in stark contrast to what was stated by one participant - Krystyna - who did not encounter certain difficulties. By her own admission, she received a strong foundation at school, studying the grammar of her own language, and therefore felt prepared enough to attend the classes and fully understand the content each time. Thus, she did not share the view expressed by her peers, seeming to embody the sole individual representing and confirming the causal link between metalinguistic and L1 awareness and positive outcomes in FL learning when employing those during the process.

To date, there is still limited literature that has investigated how L1KAL - which stands for L1 Knowledge about a Language - is adopted by students (Bell, Fortier & Gauvin, 2020). In fact, unlike the studies examining whether teachers employ this technique during FL instruction - where still a few studies have been conducted and limited pedagogical use has been discovered (Dault and Collins, 2016), there is even less research on how learners spontaneously employ L1 knowledge and their own grammatical skills for a better understanding of the FL structures. The fact that the learners in our Italian course have even considered using their L1 grammatical knowledge and skills as an aid for better understanding Italian structures seems to address a potential research question and fill a gap highlighted in the field of language acquisition and L1 interference. Thus, while this aspect has been investigated from the teachers' perspective, as mentioned earlier, there is still insufficient data to understand if students *spontaneously* make use of cross-linguistic connections (hereafter abbreviated in CLCs).

This gap is indeed what Bell, Fortier & Gauvin (2020) aimed to address. They attempted to investigate whether ESL learners in an elementary and a secondary class spontaneously made CLCs between French - their native language - and English for error correction

activities. The results indicate that although the sample analysed infrequently used CLCs to correct errors, when employed, the correction was accurate. The authors have identified, of course, limitations and some determining factors for the findings, such as teachers not proposing nor encouraging reflection on their L1 as a possible tool available to the pupils. Hence the authors' urge to promote L1KAL and CLCs in language educational settings, given the limited pedagogical use detected among FL teachers.

Therefore, it is possible to observe a certain continuity between the mentioned study and the experiences of James, Samuel, Eddie, Percy, and Krystyna. Indeed, Italian learners in our course not only reflected on their L1 but did so *spontaneously*, and the repetition of this term is intended to show alignment with both Bell, Fortier & Gauvin's research questions and our own results. However, since for most of the participants this metalinguistic awareness led to the realization of the lack of adequate L1 grammatical references to employ - and since the present study did not include any official evaluation or measurement of outcomes, except from individual self-assessment - it was not possible to confirm how accurate the outcomes from cross-linguistic connections are. In other words, it proved unfeasible to measure or investigate more closely any potential benefits resulting from the demonstrated metalinguistic awareness in terms of FL proficiency for our Italian beginner's class.

However, the metalinguistic awareness intended as L1 grammar competence was intended as a shared factor that influenced their motivation, rather than unveiling actual language proficiency outcomes deriving from this.

Possible pedagogical implications will be adequately discussed in the relevant section.

5.1.4 Sub-theme 2: Language abilities and activities

This sub-theme pertains to another aspect of metalinguistic awareness exhibited by the students, as elucidated by a specific participant: Percy. As detailed in the previous chapter, this learner voluntarily produced and attached comprehensive comments to the evaluations of the classroom activities, along with personal assessments and other reflections on language learning in general. Given that metalinguistic awareness is understood and acknowledged as the ability to reflect on the language itself and its structures and components, in this study, Percy's meticulous review of Italian language learning across the four primary skills is construed as such. It can be argued that he embarked on a metalinguistic task as defined in literature: "a metalinguistic task is one which requires the individual to think about the linguistic nature of the message, to attend to and reflect on the structural features of language. To be metalinguistically aware, then, is to know how to approach and solve certain types of problems which themselves demand certain cognitive and linguistic

skills” (Malakoff, 1992: 518). This is exactly what Percy did throughout the Italian beginner’s course and expressed in his comments.

However, the framework within which Percy emerges as the primary representative of this sub-theme also encompasses another dimension. Indeed, given that his reflections extend beyond the language itself to encompass his learning methods and the extent to which the teacher-prepared activities facilitated or hindered his progress, Percy might be better categorized as an exponent of robust metacognitive awareness. More precisely, the type of metacognition exhibited by this student also includes what are known as metalinguistic strategies (Schraw et al., 2006), which refer to the control exerted by the student over their own learning through various actions. For instance, assessing the most effective learning strategies for a given task, monitoring progress, and evaluating one's own results.

It has already been covered indeed how well Percy rated each of the activities after integrating his own perceived progress and impressions on what worked and what did not, towards his main goal - or, as he pointed out, “*the ultimate goal*” (Percy, 05/2021) in terms of developing language proficiency in Italian, which was the ability to engage in a conversation in Italian. The case of Percy and his personal structuring of the most effective learning strategies for him indicates, as stated in his profile, an expression of self-regulation that aligns with current literature and studies conducted on the effects of metalinguistic awareness and metacognitive awareness on FL learning. It was widely demonstrated and accepted that “learners who are equipped with metacognitive strategies, are aware of their learning and they know how and when to employ the most relevant strategies to accomplish a given task; they know how to accomplish a particular task in the most effective way” (Raofi & Chan & Mukundan & Md Rashid, 2013: 37). From research, it also appears that learners who use metacognitive strategies are more self-regulated, and the importance of self-regulation for motivation has often been emphasized in this study. In recent years, promoting a sort of instruction in developing metacognitive awareness has been one of the aspects deemed important to ensure greater success in learning (Rahimi, Katal, 2012; Wenden, 1998). Encouraging students to reflect on the strategies applied and how they find them functional is an opportunity that both researchers and teachers have recommended to include in their pedagogy and teaching approach. Wenden (2002) inserted it among the processes to enhance the learner’s development that should be integrated into the classroom environment to help students develop this sense of monitoring and their own learning strategies. Obviously, the inclusion of a perspective aimed at “teaching” self-regulated metacognition techniques or promote metalinguistic strategies (Schraw et al., 2006) is possible and in line with a learner-centred and collaborative approach to curriculum design. In this sense, a linearity can be highlighted between our Italian course - conducted with a

negotiated syllabus, as described in the research approach - and the emergence of self-regulated behaviours by some of the learners, such as Percy.

However, Krystyna also exhibited a high level of self-regulation. While not providing detailed comments like Percy or evaluating each activity individually, she conveyed her efforts to monitor and reflect on her own development as a learner, informing the teacher-researcher of which practices outside of class she found effective or not.

Finally, James expressed his ongoing adjustments to practice at home as well as Krystyna did, showing that in order to better develop some language abilities like the listening, he was trying to apply strategies he had probably heard or was informed about. For instance, when he outlines the strategy in place for overcoming the listening difficulties, James says that he had started to listen to the news in Italian in the background while at home, “not to learn per se” but to get his brain “used to the sound of spoken Italian” (James, 05/21). However, he adds immediately that this technique for enhancing listening practice may be called “immersion” (“*immersion is what I believe it’s called*”, James, 05/2021), making an evident reference to personal built-up knowledge of such technique. It is likely that James researched effective methods to improve the areas of the language he felt weak in. The teacher-researcher had not suggested the “immersion” that James mentions, so sources for it are external to the classroom context as far as the teacher is aware. Regardless of where James learned about it, this shows that not only he embodies self-regulatory orientations, but also some concrete evidence of metacognitive actions employed to “self-teach” himself on learning development. James’s metacognition here has strong echoes with the work of Goh (2008), aligning with the idea that listening skills can be indeed fostered through the application of metacognitive awareness.

5.1.4 “Motivational” awareness: self-assessing motivation

With the title given to this section, namely “Motivational Awareness,” we aim to highlight another theme emerging from the analysis of the material collected in the Italian class: a type of awareness focused on the motivation itself. We refer to the fact that a common aspect among the participants was reflecting on the progress of the lessons not only from the perspective of perceived outcomes and strategies adopted - the metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness just presented above - but also by evaluating their own motivation. Students seem to have frequently questioned themselves about whether they felt motivated or not and reported this to the teacher in terms of motivation.

Krystyna, for example, pointed out that she was motivated because of her progress; Samuel, includes “maintaining motivation” among the challenges of the course, especially when

there is little improvement on his Italian; Eddie talks instead of a proper “lack of motivation”, identifying the circumstances that led to it.

While the teacher-researcher has never enquired about motivation directly, instead using myriad means to capture its fluctuations implicitly among the learner-participants students expressing considerations on this topic were nonetheless acutely aware that this was the overall focus of the study. Before the beginning of the classes, all learners were informed about the study that they were about to take part in. The teacher-researcher had explained the overall objective of the investigation, namely motivation, and briefly touched on its importance when studying a FL. It is interesting to notice how some of them clearly understood their progress or lack of it by explicitly considering motivation. In other words, students’ reflection on motivation - that could be called here “meta-motivational knowledge” by adopting a currently accepted terminology (Miele, Scholer, & Fujita, 2020: 3) was employed by them to evaluate the overall progression in Italian learning. Positive connections between metamotivational knowledge, self-determination, and successful learning have already been highlighted in a considerable number of studies (Yu, Zhang & Nunes, 2023), with researchers placing it among those possible aspects to be fostered in education and from which learners could benefit.

5.1.5 Teaching practice and material

Another factor influencing the motivation of the learner-participants was represented by the content of the course itself on one side and by the figure of the teacher-researcher as the deliverer of such content on the other. Despite the centrality of the learner in the adopted approach to the study, it was inevitable that the role covered by the teacher-researcher would have played a crucial part in orienting the participants’ motivation. Indeed, it was already reviewed in the results chapter how some choices made by the teacher-researcher triggered certain reactions in terms of motivation - as per the students’ admission - or produced positive inputs for them. It was already mentioned that while undoubtedly there are motivational effects, what is being assessed here is the extent to which a learner is invested in the teaching practice in class, to give an example. Norton’s investment, in this case, serves as the framework where teaching styles and methodologies - or, simply, teaching practice - are positioned from a learner’s perspective. Darwin and Norton (2015) indeed stated that “while it is important to ask the question, ‘Are students MOTIVATED to learn a language?’ it is equally productive to ask, ‘Are students INVESTED in the language practices of the classroom or community?’”(Darvin & Norton, 2015: 37) and by focusing on whether students are invested in language practices, educators can better address the unequal power dynamics that exist within the language learning environment (Darvin & Norton, 2023).

In order to better illustrate this point, a negative example from our dataset is proposed. Eddie admittedly struggled to maintain his motivation during the course, and he elucidated different reasons that may have caused it. One aspect in which he was not invested was the decision on behalf of the teacher to not assign mandatory homework between one lesson and the other. Eddie found this choice far from useful, albeit the underlying considerations made by the teacher-researcher (i.e. the fact that it was adult learning, mostly for leisure) had led me to believe that non-mandatory homework was a reasonable solution for the class, giving the possibility of practice to everyone but without putting unnecessary pressure on them to complete tasks before the following lesson. This proved to be appreciated by the rest of the class, as everyone else, even if not consistently, completed the assigned tasks and sent them over to receive feedback. On the other hand, Eddie found the “freedom” to choose whether or not to do the homework as not being binding enough, and therefore he never felt sufficiently motivated to continue practicing at home. Needless to say, this triggered a chain reaction where, along with not enjoying online classes, the lack of practice likely affected his ability to keep up with the content and led him to prefer skipping some classes and feeling very challenged. When Eddie's example was introduced, it was not labelled as "a negative example" by chance, because it is believed to fully represent a learner who was not aligned with the teaching strategies adopted by the teacher and her decisions. This certainly influenced his motivation and determined his actions towards the course. A similar case is described in Teng (2019): Rick - an EFL Chinese learner whose investment was studied to understand identity shifts - ended up not continuing his English learning as he was not invested in multiple facets of the University course he was attending. Among the factors that this student identified, the teaching method contributed significantly, described as “teacher-dominated” (Teng, 2019: 50), culminating in Rick’s interruption of EFL studies. However, even if Eddie made analogous considerations - more expressing discontent over the methods and pace of the course towards the end - and was neither invested nor motivated by those, the epilogue was a different one, with him not withdrawing from the Italian course.

Hence, the teaching strategies and practice were an important factor activating motivational reactions in the learners; however, not all of these were as negatively impacted as Eddie’s ones. Indeed, the rest of the class was deemed to be well engaged in the teaching decisions adopted by their teacher-researcher, sharing the methodology - the non-compulsory but highly encouraged home practice, to give an example - and most of the activities proposed. This is consistent with the foundation of the current research being Action-Research, where the nature of such an approach was realised by designing a negotiated syllabus, integrating students’ suggestions and comments over the weeks. Therefore, this collaborative nature of the course content and practice may have favoured the other learners’ satisfaction with the

“hows and the whats” of the lessons. For example, Krystyna particularly appreciated “our written materials”, as she “has something to refer to if required” (Krystyna, Questionnaire 2, 05/21). Moreover, she appeared to reflect her enthusiasm for how classes were structured into a positive evaluation of the figure of the teacher herself, evident in comments like the following: *“I enjoy our classes. I want to expand my knowledge further. I think that the teacher-researcher is a great teacher and makes our classes very engaging”* (Krystyna, Questionnaire 2, 05/21).

Samuel instead manifested similar positive impact of the teaching on his experience by making comparisons between this and the previous Italian classes he had attended. Interestingly, he managed to find good aspects in both courses and teaching methods, highlighting how albeit different, each sort of “was complementary” to the other. Samuel explicitly appreciated the content, as he was able to pick some “nuggets” - as he calls them - he had missed in the other class, especially because of the focus on Italian grammar and verbs. He also communicated satisfaction with the preparation and delivery of the materials, reflecting on the diverse workload that online classes place on the teacher:

“We spent a lot of time on verbs and the six conjugations in my previous course, and you spent a lot more time on sentence structuring and just putting those two together has really helped. (...) I have to pay you a compliment because after each lesson I thought you must be absolutely shattered. You know, you have to keep it going for one hour and a half, and you do that regularly, I don’t know how tiring that can be.”

(Samuel, Focus Group, 06/21)

Krystyna and Samuel, even in a diversified way and for different reasons, admittedly engaged with the teaching, as did James and Percy, who made other kind of references but still appeared motivated in and by the teacher’s strategy. Samuel, as evident from the excerpt reported just above, even seems to empathise with the teacher, understanding and probably acknowledging the efforts made on the instructor’s part. As reported by Mceown & Takeuchi (2012), “studies conducted by Noels, Pelletier, and Clément (1999) and Sugita and Takeuchi (2010) indicated that students’ proficiency levels and motivational intensity levels have some effect on the students’ perception of the teachers’ teaching style” (Mceown & Takeuchi, 2012: 23); based on these previous findings, our own learners’ perceptions appear to find more solid grounding to assume that they were motivated, in addition to being invested in the teaching styles.

Furthermore, the teacher and the adopted teaching practice are two more facets of the L2 Learning experience dimension by Dörnyei (2019), thus they belong to the set of variables contributing to the learner's evaluation of the overall experience with the language.

However, a note must be made to this almost entirely positive picture in which the Italian course students - except for one - have shown great enthusiasm towards the teacher. Indeed, given the overlap between the researcher and the teacher roles, these statements, mostly praising the teacher's performance, may not be entirely reliable, or they may have been influenced to some extent. It could be that students have preferred to express positive opinions and have withheld any less complimentary opinions or comments due to direct interaction with the teacher herself. This had been considered among the limitations that the teacher and researcher role within the same person could imply in the present study, but the "teacher as researcher" became also one of the prerogatives of Action Research in education as it evolved over the years (Belanger, 1992).

5.1.6 Progress and self-evaluation

A significant factor for learners' motivation was undoubtedly marked by the "whether I am making progress or not" self-assessment. As already mentioned previously, the course did not involve any kind of assessment, apart from the feedback that the teacher provided for homework or in-class exercise after students' interventions (mostly in the form of encouragements, for example "well done!" or "correct"). More or less after half of the lessons had been delivered, the teacher inserted an exercise among the home material whose scope was that of self-testing their abilities individually. The exercise consisted of a set of questions addressing all the grammar content that was covered in class to that point, and it was assigned to them as both a revision practice and a way to test their understanding until then. Unfortunately, aside from their comments, the teacher did not gain access to their results, given that this was suggested as oral practice, and thus could not actually measure their progress. However, this triggered some considerations on behalf of the students and a process of self-evaluation of their own improvements or weaknesses.

Surely, perceiving that one is improving in learning has a positive effect; research proved that self-assessment has an important impact on both boosting the motivation and the development of metacognition or a proper awareness of their knowledge attainment (Herrera, Cuesta Melo, and Lucero Zambrano, 2022). As mentioned previously, Krystyna not only was able to apply metacognitively acquired techniques to her own method of study, but she also managed to self-assess the gained knowledge by reflecting on practical real-life usage of Italian. She admitted to experiment what learned in class to be functioning when talking to

her husband, and that this contributed to an overall satisfaction with the course and with herself as a successful learner. On the other hand, instead, those who failed to detect any progress from their own assessment suffered significant damage to their motivation, which inevitably appeared diminished (Samuel and Eddie, for instance).

5.2 Research Question 2:

What is the interaction between their motivation, and the learning process?

The previous section listed all the factors that were deemed to be significant to some extent for learners' motivation. As anticipated while detailing both the individual participants' profiles and in the aforementioned outline of the factors, their motivation impacted in the learning process. The pivotal role of motivation was obviously taken as the main foundation for the present study, and the effects that have been extensively examined through countless empirical studies, hence Research Question 2 had another objective: that of unveiling how it interacts with the learning process.

An additional clarification – more a reminder - needs to be made at this point, which is related to the theoretical framework underpinning the study. This framework indeed comprises two primary theories delineating motivational constructs, namely Self Determination Theory and the L2MSS.

The following statement in Dörnyei, & Macintyre, & Henry (2014) serves as a perfect example of the theories as the chosen application:

“We believed that the topic of L2 motivation was an ideal content area for such an endeavour, partly because motivation, with its ups and downs and ebbs and flows, was an SLA phenomenon that seemed to lend itself to the application of dynamically informed research designs, and partly because the currently most established constructs in the field – the various L2 self-guides – are by nature inherently dynamic and would therefore be well suited targets for investigation using dynamic approaches” (Introduction to Chapter 1, 2014: no page number given).

Thus, while CDST represents a theoretical perspective discussed for revisiting motivation, Self-Determination Theory and the L2MSS are the two models that were adopted to look *at* and *into* motivation in the present study. These two models are often presented as separate approaches, given the nature in which they were developed, the first as continuation of Gardner's socio-educational model (1985) and embodying how internal and external factors are regulated within the learner, and the second being more the result of reconceptualising motivation in light of how learners' identities relate with the communities and social dimension. However, this study decided to include a more complementary view of the two theories, aligning with the correlations found in Takahashi & Im (2020) when empirically applying both Self-Determination Theory and the L2MSS to L2 learning environments. Hence, emerging themes and results were found to be corresponding to aspects of self-

determined individuals – so interpreted considering SDT – and by valuing the future selves and exchanges of identity pertaining to the participants. In order to investigate the latter therefore, the L2MSS multi-dimensional construct was taken into account.

Thus, how did motivation and the learning process interact during the Italian beginners' course? To partly answer Research Question 2, first some interactions will be presented by employing the Self-Determination Theory lens.

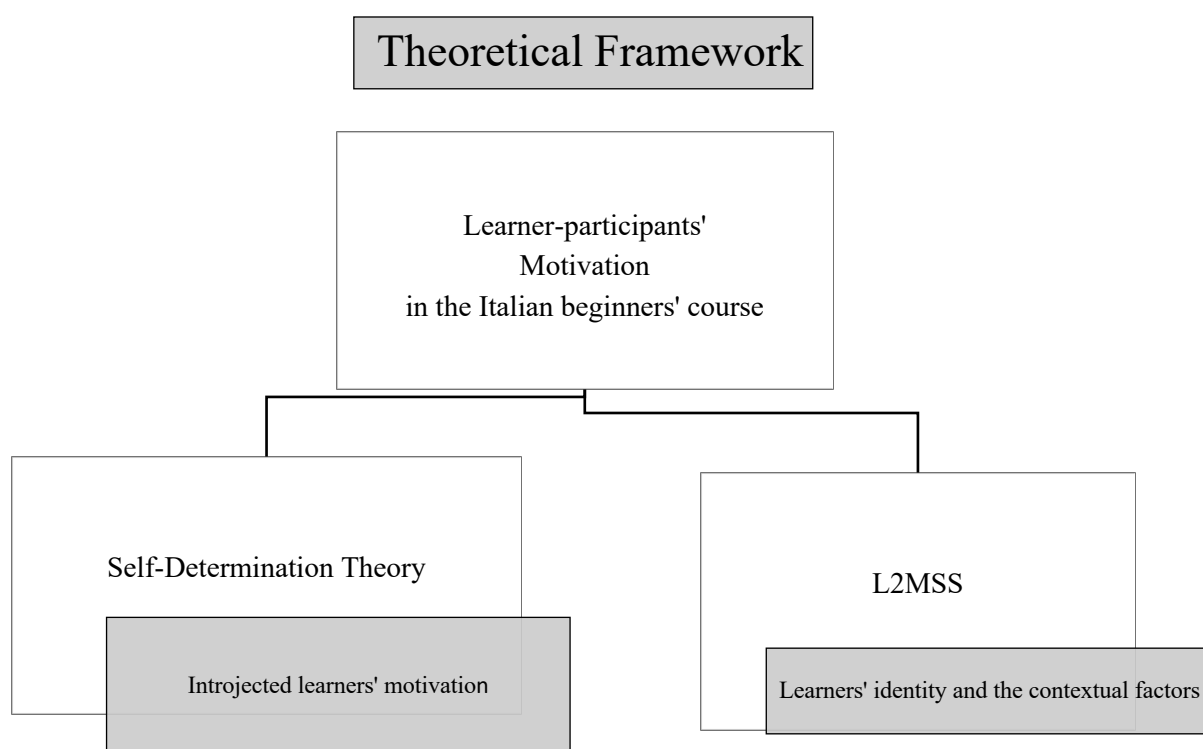


Figure 5.1 Summary of the Theoretical Framework employed to interpret Italian Learners' Motivation

5.2.1 SDT and the course: *Intrinsically-driven learners*

By applying SDT categorisation of motivation, it appears that most learners attending the Italian course were motivated by intrinsic orientations, especially at the beginning of the course. Questionnaire Zero – representing the Needs Analysis – highlighted the reasons behind the learners' choice to develop Italian knowledge, thus allowing the teacher-researcher to classify those reasons in light of Intrinsic or Extrinsic motivation leading them. It must be reminded that being an in-depth qualitative study, data were analysed through a thematic analysis, so none of the existing scales based on Self-Determination Theory used to measure motivation – for instance, to mention a few, the LLOS-IEA (Language Learning Orientations Scale - Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Amotivation) by Noels

(1999), or the more recent applications of the Global Motivation Scale (Zycinska, Januszek, 2021) or SDT-L2 scale (Alamer, 2021) - were adopted. In fact, while these validated scales certainly contributed to a better understanding of the identified themes as SDT relevant traits and provided empirical implications on FL learners, the learners in this study deemed to be performing more or less self-regulated behaviours by interpreting their motivational fluctuations over the temporal continuum of the Italian course, comprising their prior – admitted – orientations for learning Italian.

All the students participating exhibited intrinsic motivation except from one. If we include also the three participants withdrawing from the course at a very early stage, Niamh, Jacob and Jessica all expressed reasons and expectations that can be seen as an intrinsically driven choice, ranging from a “general interest in foreign languages” and “an interest in Italian from a young age” (Jacob, Questionnaire Zero), to a more explicit “I really love Italian culture!” (Niamh, Questionnaire Zero). However, these three instances could not be used to support how the surfacing intrinsic motivation interacted with their learning process, given the early interruption of their Italian studies and therefore impossible analysis over different stages of the learning as per the chosen approach.

Nevertheless, it is still interesting considering Niamh, Jacob and Jessica’s statements for a better and perhaps realistic grasp of the initial reasons pushing people to pursue Italian as FL learning outside Italy. While it is difficult to draw some concrete data on the Italian presence in other countries – for example, the Scottish context was outlined for this study, and it was highlighted the challenging task of building a reliable portrait of Adult Italian learning – recently a number of studies were conducted to assess motivations to learn it. Fristachi (2016) offers an investigation over Italian FL learners in Czech Republic, from whose results “a significant 65% of the learners indicated that the main reason behind their choice of Italian studying was their attraction towards the Italian language and / or culture” (Fristachi, 2016: 50). By sharp contrast with the other reasons in the designed questionnaire tool, which registered a much minor percentage, Fristachi’s study seem to contribute to a view for which Italian is mostly studied for intrinsic reasons; indeed, the other variables included in the survey were more instrumental and extrinsic, hence related to work or other external factors or pressures.

Additionally, in a study preliminary to the present one (2019), the teacher-researcher had conducted a survey on motivation in learning Italian in Scotland. Data collected confirmed a similar scenario to Fristachi’s results: participants in the questionnaire selected entries categorised as intrinsic reasons to study Italian; furthermore, the results from this quantitative motivational investigation strongly suggest that Italian is not seen as an instrumental language for foreign learners, and therefore not useful, for example, for work-

related purposes. These findings seem to align with the identified orientations that our learners have shown at the beginning of the course. Therefore, it can be deduced that Italian is not primarily studied for, for example, work-related reasons, but rather it is studied for internal and introjected motivations. Such deductions can fit into the landscape concerning motivation in LOTEs; perhaps, according to these, Italian can be classified among those languages studied mostly for leisure or consumption (Kubota, 2011). However, while similar reflections clearly have future implications – like exploring Italian as a LOTE and framing its motivations among learners outside Italy – for the present study these considerations remain useful references for the initial conditions of the participants.

Indeed, while both the “resigning” learners (Niamh, Jacob and Jessica) and the actual ones completing the course and the requested questionnaires demonstrated intrinsically motivated behaviours, only for the second group it was possible to see how these impacted the learning process.

James, Krystyna, Eddie, Samuel and Percy all appeared to be motivated by intrinsic regulations, as per the early conceptualisation of the SDT continuum made by Ryan & Deci (2000). The relationship between this motivation – often found to be positively correlated with variables such as autonomy and self-regulation, and therefore successful outcomes (Dörnyei, 2005) - and their learning journey has been anything but linear. Or at least, not for all of them:

Percy for example, was deemed to be motivated by solely intrinsic motivation, mirroring his Willingness to Communicate leading desire. His motivation appeared to be stable throughout the entire duration of the course, exhibiting a strong self-regulation and translating into metacognitive and metalinguistic reflections to improve self-practice. He showed control over his perceived weaknesses and improvements, and actively engaged in class activities and lessons. Krystyna is an analogue case, with the only exception that she had indicated some extrinsic motivation underlying her study of the language, given her Italian husband and her being in Italy visiting his family quite often. Her commitment, evaluation and progress though were as positive as Percy, showing that strongly self-regulated motivation had a more than successful impact on the students.

James is to be considered separately, albeit being intrinsically driven, as he appeared to exercise less controlled regulation compared to the other two. His journey started with admittedly present “lacks” of any grammar competence, representing a further level to work on, other than Italian grammar itself. Despite the evident challenges implied in this task, his dedication and completion of all homework cannot be described in other terms than those of an internal force. He was consistent and invested in the content of the lessons, and never hinted to be demotivated even after the feedback from the teacher, which was often full of

corrections. While this could have been a reason for seeing his progress *not really progressing*, James kept attending classes and remained well-determined to improve to reach proficiency, enquiring grammar and sharing derivate doubts with the teacher-researcher. To add more support to the view of James's learning as a successful experience, some more context is provided: he in fact continued building up Italian proficiency by attending private classes after the end of the course.

Samuel and Eddie instead struggled with motivation to some extent and for similar reasons, producing different consequences in their learning process and practice. Both were being mostly intrinsically driven but also having external reasons influencing their undertaking of Italian study – namely, the frequent travels to Italy and future purchase of a property there and, for the other, having an Italian partner. They shared how after some lessons started to find the course difficult and Samuel thought he was not progressing. However, he had to “lower his expectations” and this proved to be an effective strategy to re-establish motivation when he felt it was unstable. He completed the course and continued studying Italian after, despite the weeks where he was not registering any improvement. Eddie's case, on the other hand, has shown how the lack of progress, an environment considered uninspiring and not stimulating – the online class -, and disagreeing with some of the teacher's choices have triggered a chain reaction culminating in preferring to skip classes. This represents a shift to the opposite extreme of the SDT continuum, categorising Eddie's behaviour as Amotivation. With Lara, the scenario was even another one: despite the solid background and previous experience with the language, due to both her metalinguistic awareness developed in years of work in language education and her past time spent in Italy, her initial conditions marked some doubtful stances on her behalf. For example, she was unsure on whether she could have benefited from “another” beginners' course, as Lara's level was probably already more advanced. Indeed, she found herself not invested in both the content and other factors related to the learning environment, and abandoned the course after careful considerations. She embodied an example of how one can be very motivated towards the language but not invested in the same way towards other aspects of the learning. In fact, she later reached back to the teacher-researcher and resumed lessons in other “learning” conditions, more respectful towards her ideas of progressive learning.

5.3 Research Question 3:

What is the relationship between their motivation and identity?

For Research Question 3, it is evident how the applicable model of motivation was the L2MSS, being this linking the notions of motivation to those of identity and investment. Indeed, the diverse future-selves depicted by the students were carefully reviewed and presented in the previous chapter: the profiles *constructed* – the choice of vocabulary is not casual, as it is in the desire of the teacher-researcher to use a terminology that can reflect the process of constructing/deconstructing these ideas of selves – unveiled different narratives and how the Ideal L2 or ought-to selves interacted with each of their motivations.

Every participant had their own identities expressed through attitudes, decisions, and words in respect to the Italian course, and the preliminary Needs Analysis – Questionnaire Zero – enabled the teacher / researcher to envision the imagined selves they were aiming at becoming.

Although different and personal ideal L2 selves could be glimpsed for each individual - for a full elaboration on these, reference is made to the profiles outlined previously - what the study seems to confirm in response to Research Question 3 is that motivation and identity have certainly interacted during the course. It was true indeed that, when students struggled to match their L2-self ideas, motivational implications were registered. Lara grew amotivation following the realisation between her projected Ideal L2-self and the actual L2 self she represented during the course. She also detailed a more concrete manifestation of the mismatch between her desired L2-self and the learner she actually was when she reported the confrontation with her husband: Lara mentioned that he, unlike her, was perfectly capable of communicating in Italian to the extent of building relationships with Italian native speakers and local people during their visits to Italy, even if he had never properly studied Italian before. Furthermore, she would refer also to how kids in the school she worked in were speaking English – their FL – without any fear or language anxiety. It is likely then that her desired L2-ideal self was that of a foreign Italian speaker capable of using their acquired skills without any sort of anxiety, naturally interacting with local people.

Samuel admittedly became demotivated when his L2-ideal self was not matched, as he was not meeting the expected learning outcomes he had planned. He thought he would be able to produce a basic and error-free conversation in Italian after attending some lessons; instead, this clashed with the recognition of much more work on grammar to be done before that target could be met. He had to then to lower and set new expectations, fact that the teacher / researcher interpreted as a probable manifestation of the L2-ought-to self.

Hence, the causal effect relationship between motivation and identity finds some good grounding in all the cases described in our study, aligning with current empirical research like Papi, Bondarenko, Mansouri, Feng & Jiang (2019), where strong correlations were evidenced to the point that the ought-L2 self was identified as the strongest predictor of motivation. For this reason, possible pedagogical implications were recently considered by scholars, suggesting that awareness on the L2MSS and the imagined L2-selves could be a strategy to integrate for fostering motivated behaviours in educational contexts (Al-Murtadha, 2023). Further considerations on the applications of the L2MSS to teaching practice will be illustrated in the next chapter.

5.4 Research Question 4:

How can an understanding of these learners' motivation and identity inform the pedagogical development of an Italian curriculum?

This was the last Research Question that this study tried to answer and consisted in the pedagogical implications arising from investigating motivation in an Italian as FL learning classroom. It also followed the overall methodological approach, which included the design and delivery of a negotiated syllabus in an attempt to reflect information and feedback gained during the course into improved class practice.

The study and successive interpretation of the data gathered during the Italian classes certainly led to the definition of common factors impacting on the learning of the subjects analysed. However, being this an in-depth qualitative study, with a very small sample of participants, results cannot be generalised or extended to the totality of Italian language learners. Moreover, each country may present different contextual elements, not to mention the individual and subjective variables a singular person comes with.

Nevertheless, certain applicable patterns for the development of an Italian curriculum have been identified, stemming precisely from the understanding of students' motivation. These are going to be presented in the following chapter, chapter 6, which is specifically dedicated to reflections and the possible “implications for practice”, thus addressing Research Question 4 more carefully.

Chapter 6

Reflections and Implications for practice

Introduction

Implicit in the process of educational Action-Research is the notion that teacher-researchers have the capacity to reflect on their practice, enact corrections, and implement requested changes. What will be presented hereafter are reflections over this cycle of Action-Research conducted during the delivery of the Italian classes, following the analysis of the negotiated syllabus and the changes the teacher-researcher integrated in my own teaching practice.

With the first part of this chapter, I intend to present the implications for practice that during the time of the course were integrated in the lessons. The role of teacher-researcher – I will refer to myself by using this terminology throughout the chapter - enabled me to test the ground for the immediate effects of my practice as a teacher, offering me the possibility of experimenting and learning over my own teaching at the same time and thus contributing to my own teacher identity formation (Banegas, Beltrán-Palanques & Salas, 2023). On the other hand, the data gained from the learner-participants informed such development of practice, as well providing insights to their needs, requests, or motivational states.

Furthermore, on the basis of such information, some possible implications will be derived and discussed, illustrating its potential application in shaping future directions for an Italian curriculum design.

6.1 Why a negotiated syllabus for the Italian curriculum?

The syllabus used for the curriculum was a negotiated one, that is a syllabus designed on the basis of what students communicated to the teacher–researcher. Since its early conceptualisation, such a syllabus typically involves active learner participation in decision-making across various course elements, including content selection, timings, and delivery methods (Clarke, 1991). Undoubtedly, adopting a syllabus – whether fully or partially - based on negotiations with the learners highlights a solid learner-centred position, and the dimension of the education is one where the traditional institutional teacher-student role is subverted (Prior, 2022). This latter subversion was occasionally perceived as problematic, as illustrated, for instance, in Budd and Wright's work (1990): given the learners' conventional expectations of teachers' roles and their well-known responsibilities within the course, learners may not feel entirely satisfied or prepared to embrace this partial shift of responsibility. Or it could be the case that students simply feel “uncomfortable” confronting with a figure that is “a source of knowledge and highly respected” when deciding what to do in class (Öztürk, 2013: 38). However, the teacher-researcher has chosen to adopt it for reasons already declared, but that are going to be briefly summarised as follows as a reminder before elucidating the steps taken for this study’s curriculum design.

- **The capacity to mirror the methodological approach of the chosen study.** Indeed, a negotiated syllabus is often referred to as *process* syllabus in literature (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000a, 2000b), especially in its earlier appearances in pedagogical contexts. The core aspect of the process or negotiated syllabus is that cycle of exchanging and integrating ideas within the course of the learning itself, thus similarly reflecting the iterative nature of Action-Research. Therefore, it was deemed to be the most suitable tool by the teacher-researcher, for mirroring the cyclical process activated by the Action-Research-based approach of the study. In particular, the recent and extensive research conducted by Prior (2023) provided additional validation to the employment of negotiations in in such teaching practice, having adopted negotiated syllabuses in the Action-Research cycles carried out in this language classroom study. Alignments between Prior (2023) and our own implications will be detailed in later sections.
- **The motivational effects.** The beneficial effects of a negotiated syllabus on learners' motivation have been documented in prior studies involving ESL students (Abbasian & Malardi, 2013; Pakdaman, Alibakhshi & Baradaran, 2022). For instance, these

studies have highlighted the enhancement of student autonomy, self-regulation, and self-efficacy as outcomes of negotiated syllabi. Such developments have been positively correlated with increased motivation, establishing negotiated syllabi as valuable tools for fostering motivation in the classroom. Therefore, basing the curriculum design on this aspect has been considered the most suitable choice, given that the present study focuses on motivation research.

- **The learner-centred perspective.** Similarly to what has just been mentioned regarding motivation, this type of syllabus also reflects another fundamental aspect of the study in question, which is the focus on the learner (Brown, 2012). By collaborating with the teacher, the student no longer has a passive role but becomes much more of an agent (van Lier, 2007) communicating their needs or opinions on the *hows* and *whats* the lessons should entail. Therefore, the negotiated syllabus represents their opportunity for expression, positioning them in an even more central role. Hence, this learner-centred perspective was consistent with the teacher-researcher's educational philosophy.

6.2 Curriculum Design: the syllabus

Before the beginning of the Italian beginners' course, the teacher-researcher had indeed taken the necessary decisions for the way in which lessons were to be taught and the course was going to be structured. The Needs Analysis, scheduled for Lesson Zero, the introductory session, aimed to gather insights into students' perspectives and language learning objectives. This served as the initial phase in the chosen collaborative curriculum design process. However, ultimately, the syllabus was not fully negotiated. In fact, some elements – for example the content and the home practice decisions – were chosen by the teacher-researcher after consulting other typologies of syllabi and the objectives for levels in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages, therefore Italian. Other aspects of the course were the result of the integration of students' views and comments, especially in respect to the activities to do in class. In addition, the teacher-researcher would take notes after each lesson, a sort of “teaching journal”, with comments on impressions related to how the students had interacted, how they participated, and any significant observation made. These two elements combined were used to give shape to the syllabus. Hereafter, some reflections on the overall process of negotiation of the syllabus will be presented.

6.2.1 A concrete example of negotiation: Songs and Cultural knowledge tasks

For instance, after reviewing the responses to Questionnaire Zero, the teacher-researcher had an initial idea of what learners may have preferred or disliked in terms of classroom tasks. Previously, I had observed many Italian teachers integrating elements such as media as supplementary activities for language practice, such as the "filling the gaps with the right words" exercises during listening tasks, which had the dual effect of both developing listening skills and helping students gain some cultural knowledge through the use of authentic material like songs or videos.

Indeed, using songs for teaching is a well-established tool for Italian L2 (Mauroni, 2011; Coveri, 2020). Coveri (2020) summarised the precious role of songs for language teaching as follows:

“Non è ormai una novità nella didattica delle lingue moderne. Il medium si presta in modo particolare a una forte motivazione nell’ambito di una didattica ludica in prospettiva umanistico-affettiva. La canzone offre infatti una serie di stimoli linguistici e socioculturali; è privilegiata rispetto ad altri mezzi di comunicazione di massa per la sua memorizzabilità e ripetibilità; gode di un’ampia diffusione sociale e di grande disponibilità di materiali, oggi esaltata dalle risorse della rete, e può già contare su una ricca letteratura glottodidattica. (Griffiths 2013; Kao, Oxford, Murphey, 1990; Willis 2008; Schoen et al 2008, etc.)”

In English as follows: *“It is not a novelty anymore in modern language education. The medium is particularly suitable for strong motivation within a playful and humanistic affective teaching perspective. Indeed, songs offer a series of linguistic and sociocultural stimuli; they are privileged compared to other mass communication means due to their memorability and repeatability; they enjoy wide social diffusion and great availability of materials, today enhanced by online resources, and can already rely on rich language teaching literature”* (My translation; Coveri, 2020: 173).

Therefore, given the proven positive impact on learners and considering the rich variety of resources on integrating songs into Italian language teaching and its actual use in the classroom (such as "Cantagramma. Apprendere la grammatica italiana con le canzoni", in English *“Cantagramma. Learning Italian grammar through songs”* by Mezzadri, 2006), the teacher-researcher decided that it could be an option to include in the syllabus and in the lessons.

However, prior to the beginning of the course, the majority of learners had expressed minimal interest in the "songs" category when rating activities. Additionally, also the “Developing of Italian cultural knowledge” option indicated less enthusiasm than what was

expected. Given these results, other activities – which on the contrary had registered “very helpful” as the most common response – were prioritised and proposed the most in class. By the halfway point of the course, Questionnaire 1 indicated “what was working and what was not”, so which aspects were effective and where improvements could be made to enhance engagement and interaction in the classroom. All activities listed in the Questionnaire Zero chart had been implemented to some extent, allowing students to experience each one.

Since a significant annual event in Italy—the Sanremo music festival—was approaching and considering the recent popularity of Italian music due to past festival winners, the teacher-researcher contemplated creating exercises focused on the festival. These exercises primarily consisted of simplified texts for reading comprehension and vocabulary practice containing real information about this renowned event. During the "Sanremo" lesson, a listening exercise was included, providing students with the opportunity to listen to internationally famous Italian songs. Despite these efforts, the class did not exhibit much enthusiasm, and responses to the Questionnaire reaffirmed their previously indicated level of (dis)preference for such activities, with most finding them "not helpful." Consequently, for the remainder of the course, the teacher-researcher refrained from offering similar tasks involving more cultural insights or music. Instead, I reminded students that if any of them were interested in such activities, I could provide suggestions.

This collaborative choice, if we consider those who proved to maintain a motivated behaviour throughout the course and what they stated (i.e. the fact that they enjoyed lessons and the selection of tasks, admittedly reported by Krystyna, Samuel, Percy and James), may partly demonstrate the positive impact on their overall investment in the class practice.

On the other hand, the teacher-researcher had to revise her prior decisions or assumptions on the potential benefits of incorporating songs or music, which represent a cultural aspect of language knowledge, into this particular class. It appears that the learners in the Italian beginner's course may not have been highly interested in exploring these areas further, as these were not deemed to immediate use to any of them towards a better understanding of the language or its proficiency. In fact, the only ones that had expressed some sort of curiosity about enhancing their knowledge of Italian culture in Questionnaire Zero were the ones that withdrew from the course at a very early stage, namely Niamh, Jessica and Jacob. Consequently, their responses towards the inclusion of activities targeted to these aspects was not assessed, and the negative feedback from other students prevailed. For instance, Percy described songs as unhelpful because he thought that “time can be better spent elsewhere” (Percy, comments, 04/21). Similarly, he addresses any culturally tailored task as

unhelpful, as he believes that “it doesn't help improve language skills much and can create a false sense of improvement” (Percy, comments, 04/21).

6.2.2 The teacher-researcher's observational input: two examples

However, while data from learners' responses represented concretely their views on the course, the teacher-researcher's active observation in class was another element that helped in shaping the syllabus. More precisely, the teacher-researcher decided to take notes after every lesson detailing the impressions on how students had reacted to a specific task, as well as the level of attention and participation on their behalf. These observations were based on my perceptions of the learners and the classroom environment in my role as teacher-researcher, and given the environment of the class – a virtual one on Zoom – they were deemed to be necessary for understanding students' enjoyment and the relationship with the teacher. Indeed, the teacher's role and her impact on learners' motivation is one of the foundational aspects underlying the study. Moreover, it was among my intentions as teacher-researcher to explore the teacher-student relationship and its interaction with learning outcomes; however, COVID-19, as remarked already several times in the current work, interfered significantly with the realisation of such purposes, shifting the focus on online classes and the adaptation to this non-traditional setting.

For the above reasons, “class observation” was mostly based on the teacher-researcher's perceptions, used for immediate reflection over her own teaching practice.

In literature, incorporating teacher's perspectives within Action-Research in education is described an invaluable and necessary tool. In Kong (2020) it was demonstrated how teacher's perception on English language teaching strategies in Chinese secondary schools contributes to teacher autonomy, which is correlated with enhancing learner's autonomy as well. Class observation was a useful asset to data collection in Kong's study, where the “field notes comments about the interactions occurring in the classroom setting” included all sorts of notes, “who talks to whom, whose opinion is sought, who are the listeners, and what is the body language of the teachers and students” (Kong, 2020: 100). However, while the latter is a relevant example of findings adding validation to the importance of teacher's perceptions and class interactions or feedbacks on behalf of educators, my study and the adopted methodology aligns more with that of researchers being practitioners, as in Action-Research studies. The particularity of language teacher's research is indeed a blend of – mostly qualitative - research and reflexivity, merging research and practice seamlessly and seeing these two elements as interconnected facets (Johnston and Irujo, 2001). In this perspective, it appears that, despite the learner-centred underlying framework, the teacher-researcher's notes find a rightful place within the dataset. They not only contributed to syllabus

development but also played a crucial role in mirroring the cyclical and iterative process of Action-Research.

Similarly to other empirical practitioner enquiries in language classrooms (Brown, 2012; Kojima, 2012), the teacher-researcher working on this study therefore included her own observations and reflections after each lesson was delivered. If we refer to the example illustrated in the previous paragraph, the “Sanremo Music Festival” lesson and related tasks, it was very easy to understand whether the class appreciated or not the proposed themed activities. The teacher-researcher had in fact noted down about the poor interaction during such activities, and a lack of questions, unlike in other lessons, perceiving this as lack of curiosity and positive engagement in the tasks. Additionally, when given the choice of listening again to the song after the second time, just for a better completion of the listening exercise, none of the students welcomed this suggestion, opting instead for correcting the exercise despite the poor understanding of the words. In an environment where learners’ enjoyment was considered a priority, I accepted the fact that the elements I had prepared, along with the topic, were not deemed suitable nor useful for that group of learners. The impressions formed during the "Sanremo Music Festival" lesson observation were corroborated by the individual responses given in the subsequent Questionnaire.

Another aspect that emerges from a closer examination of this “teacher’s diary” that was translated into reflection and implementation in practice was related to working in groups. This aspect was also investigated in the Questionnaires, but the responses generated vague and inconsistent results. In fact, in contrast to what they had expressed in Questionnaire Zero – where both “Working individually” and “Working in pairs or groups” were rated as either “somewhat helpful” or “very helpful”, thus without one prevailing over the other – class observation revealed a slight preference for individual work. This is likely attributable to the fact that the lessons were conducted on Zoom, making genuine cooperation difficult without it being mediated by virtual collaboration platforms. The teacher-researcher had already experimented with the "breakout rooms" feature on Zoom, thinking that these would allow students to have their own space to work together on exercises without the pressure of the instructor monitoring them. However, every time that group tasks were suggested, some evident problems could be noticed: technical issues in joining the breakout rooms or understanding its functioning (for example, it happened more than once that students mistakenly abandoned the meeting instead of returning to the main session), timing issues as some would finish the exercise in advance and others not with the time allocated not being ideal, and, simply, the difficult logistics of how to seek clarification from the teacher, who was in the main session. These are all problems that in a real classroom setting would not

have existed; on the other hand, though, when performing collaborative tasks in FL exercises the speaking ability of learners is involved, regardless of the environment, and it is notably identified as source of language anxiety (Melouah, 2013). Nevertheless, recent findings have noted no difference in language anxiety levels when carrying out collaborative activities between in-person group works or online ones (Bozkurt & Aydin, 2023). Despite the general widespread recognition of collaborative tasks as highly effective and beneficial teaching techniques (Rao, 2019), the teacher-researcher could not help but notice an overall dissatisfaction in students' response whenever group work was suggested during the lessons. For example, the problems highlighted above were in turn remarked when the allocated time in breakout rooms was over and they automatically returned to the main session, and this would happen in every instance of online group work. They would comment on the fact that either they could not finish talking about the exercise or complain that the task was not clear to them and did not know how to call the teacher for further explanation. At times, since the class was a small one, breakout rooms were small and counting only pairs of them, so if one had technical issues, the other one could not complete the assigned activity. All these were cues that the teacher-researcher interpreted as discontent with collaborative tasks in the Italian classroom. Therefore, where language anxiety deriving from performing speaking skills was not the root cause of such reaction, the difficulties linked to online transposition of in-class collaboration was instead the source of frustration among the learners. Once again, Percy validated the aforementioned impressions in one of his comments, defining “working in group or pairs” as “very unhelpful”, adding that “in classes this was the most pressure and we wasted a lot of time” (Percy, comments, 04/21).

Hence, how were these observations made during the lessons translated into curriculum changes? Despite valuing group work and sharing the widely recognised benefits documented in the literature, the teacher-researcher found it unconstructive to continue imposing it in a context where it was evident that it was not effective. Therefore, to mitigate potential consequences on learners' investment and motivation in attending the lessons, I decided to first reduce and then eliminate this type of exercise in class. In fact, the teacher-researcher noticed that some students found other opportunities to express themselves in Italian during the lesson, while others limited themselves to responding when called upon, thus still practising their speaking skills. Nonetheless, they all seemed to enjoy more assignments to reflect on individually, followed by a feedback or correction together with the teacher, rather than working with other classmates on their own.

6.2.3 An instance of failed negotiation: homework practice

When considering elements typically resulting from collaborative decisions, it has been noted that not all of these are necessarily negotiated in curriculum design. For instance, in the Italian beginner's course, while certain aspects were negotiated, others, such as the course content, for which significant portions relied on established syllabi and language levels outlined in the CEFR, were only partially negotiated. For instance, an important feature of language learning was probably underestimated both before and during the Italian course delivery, namely homework practice.

Being an adult learners' group, the teacher-researcher was well aware that those attending the lessons likely had their own lives filled with work and other commitments, where Italian classes occupied only a small portion of their time. As Ryan and Dörnyei (2013) pointed out, "Language learners do other things in addition to learning languages and in order to understand fully their motivation to learn a language it is important to look at the person as a whole, not just those aspects that mark them as a 'language learner'" (2013: 91). The authors argued that it is essential to gain insight into the learner's broader context, including who they are, their social connections, the environment in which they learn, the timing of their learning, adopting this "person-in-context" perspective (Ryan and Dörnyei, 2013: 91). Therefore, I deemed it necessary to assign homework, albeit not compulsory practice, by providing tasks at the end of each lesson and reiterating my availability to correct them and provide feedback to the students. The teacher-researcher indeed considers homework assignments to be a crucial tool for achieving positive results, aligning with studies that have examined their effectiveness, given homework's "role in extending classroom learning" (Wallinger, 2000: 484). Hence, I dedicated time to explain both orally and in detail in the weekly emails the various tasks to be completed at home. Furthermore, I frequently encouraged students to complete these assignments, even though they were not mandatory, emphasising the importance of practicing outside of lessons and the derived benefits for continuous learning.

All the above considerations, though made with full respect for the adult learner's profile, thus outside of school contexts and with specific environmental needs and factors different from younger learners, such as limited time and energy (Bai, 2022), were decided by the teacher-researcher and therefore were not negotiated aspects. This decision and the consequent flexibility over homework were not well received by all students in the class.

We have observed before how one specific student, Eddie, identified his absence of effort in completing home assignments with the non-compulsory nature of the assignments themselves. He expressed that, if the teacher was stricter on homework, to the extent that he

would have felt some urge or pressure in exercising his Italian outside the class, he may have done it. Instead, he ended up not doing homework, and this contributed to his falling behind the course and struggle with maintaining motivation.

However, when Eddie shared these feelings the course was already finished, being this emerged in the final Focus Group sessions; therefore, no adjustments could be made in terms of homework practice.

The teacher-researcher has identified two issues, after reflecting over Eddie's statements. Firstly, as anticipated, the missing collaboration on how to structure any homework practice with the class. Although the intention was to respect the needs of adult learners by not assigning mandatory tasks, the decision made solely by the instructor reflected teacher autonomy (Aoki, 2000), thus contrasting with the whole learner-centred focus of the course. Secondly, and as a consequence of what is just been mentioned, not negotiating on the homework practice resulted in an undervaluation of this essential aspect of learning. For instance, Eddie's perspective on homework was unknown to the teacher-researcher because no reference or question was included in the Needs Analysis to assess it and gather information before the course began. While Eddie was the only student expressing discontent with non-mandatory homework, it is possible that other learners could have benefited from compulsory assignments, rather than relying solely on their own motivation or judgment to work on their language skills outside of class.

In conclusion, this aspect could have been addressed if there had been indicators suggesting the need for changes in homework management, as no one was specifically asked about it. Perhaps, simply, the teacher could have reviewed homework assignments in class, providing detailed feedback privately to those who submitted them. These reflections in hindsight, while not actionable during the course, have nonetheless shed light on the importance of a curriculum aspect that was unintentionally undervalued. Yet, it has been shown to have significant effects on student investment and motivation, as illustrated by Eddie's profile. Therefore, while it remained unaddressed in this course, homework practice will certainly be a consideration for future implementations of negotiated syllabi with students.

6.2.4 Metalinguistic awareness and the need for grammar-based lessons

The importance posed by learners' development of metalinguistic awareness has been extensively debated throughout this study, highlighting the striking effect that it had on some students' motivation. In order to support the central role that it played for them, it will be briefly outlined how the teacher-researcher deemed necessary to refine the curriculum accordingly.

Students made immediate references to grammar content, both in Questionnaire responses and in questions sent via email, as parts of their learning diary. This showed reflections on Italian grammar and, for some of them (for example, James) a thorough interest in understanding how the basics of Italian grammar worked.

As already reiterated multiple times, the general curriculum planning in terms of content mostly adhered to the CEFR guidelines to achieve level A1-A2 in Italian. It should be reminded though, that the CEFR takes into account linguistic competence in all its various aspects, such as grammatical correctness, lexical, phonological, and orthographic mastery (Council of Europe, 2020). For FL learning/teaching, both the CEFR and recent frameworks suggest a communicative approach, whose aim is to reach a linguistic-communicative competence, ““la competenza linguistico-comunicativa è intesa come capacità di un individuo di agire socialmente utilizzando strategicamente le risorse linguistiche, in lingua madre e in lingua seconda, insieme alle altre risorse, cognitive, conoscitive, personali, relazionali, di cui l'individuo dispone. Dal punto di vista linguistico, interagire in contesti e situazioni date comporta la ricezione e la produzione di testi (scritti e orali)”, in English “*understood as an individual's ability to act socially using linguistic resources strategically, in both the native and second language, along with other cognitive, knowledge-based, personal, and relational resources available to the individual*”⁶ (My translation in English; Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014: 31). Remarkably the notion of linguistic-communicative competence serves as a crucial reminder regarding the primary planning for the Italian beginner's course. This was indeed done by underscoring the alignment with the aforementioned perspective and the resources, including textbooks and guidelines, consulted

⁶ Translated into English from the following extract: “*la competenza linguistico-comunicativa è intesa come capacità di un individuo di agire socialmente utilizzando strategicamente le risorse linguistiche, in lingua madre e in lingua seconda, insieme alle altre risorse, cognitive, conoscitive, personali, relazionali, di cui l'individuo dispone. Dal punto di vista linguistico, interagire in contesti e situazioni date comporta la ricezione e la produzione di testi (scritti e orali).*” Borri, A., Minuz, F., Rocca, L., Sola, C. (2014). *Italiano L2 in Contesti migratori: Sillabo e descrittori dall'alfabetizzazione all'a1*. Torino: Loescher.

by the teacher-researcher for better preparation of the initial lessons. According to this view, while grammar remains essential, its role is somewhat marginalised, in favour of the multidimensional – and more realistic - aspect of the language proficiency envisioned by the chosen approach. In Borri et Al. (2014), for the design of an Italian syllabi for migrants, they assert the following:

“La conoscenza della lingua, intesa anche come conoscenza della sua grammatica e del suo lessico, è parte importante della competenza linguistico-comunicativa, ma non la esaurisce. La competenza è un saper fare: forme e strutture realizzano atti di comunicazione; al suo esito contribuiscono anche la capacità di: dire, scrivere, capire (ricevere e produrre testi) in maniera adeguata al contesto e agli interlocutori; riconoscere gli aspetti culturali che sottostanno agli scambi comunicativi tra parlanti lingue diverse; superare le difficoltà della comunicazione in lingua straniera attraverso strategie; essere consapevoli dei propri processi di apprendimento, sia nelle situazioni di studio sia nel contatto quotidiano con la LT”.

In English as follows: “*Language knowledge, including knowledge of its grammar and vocabulary, is an important part of linguistic-communicative competence, but it does not exhaust it. Competence is a practical skill: forms and structures realise acts of communication; its outcome also depends on the ability to: speak, write, understand (receive and produce texts) appropriately for the context and interlocutors; recognize the cultural aspects underlying communicative exchanges among speakers of different languages; overcome communication difficulties in a foreign language through strategies; be aware of one's own learning processes, both in study situations and in daily contact with the FL*”⁷(My translation; Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014: 31).

Starting from these important premises, the first lessons were structured by giving space to the development of the various "sub-competences," with exercises on pronunciation, readings, and expressions to memorise, all balanced with some grammatical elements. However, already from the first lesson, students had to familiarise themselves with strictly grammatical concepts in Italian, such as agreement in gender and number; in fact, even just to introduce oneself, it is a step that must be introduced at a very early stage.

⁷ Translated from the following extract “*La conoscenza della lingua, intesa anche come conoscenza della sua grammatica e del suo lessico, è parte importante della competenza linguistico-comunicativa, ma non la esaurisce. La competenza è un saper fare: forme e strutture realizzano atti di comunicazione; al suo esito contribuiscono*

anche la capacità di: dire, scrivere, capire (ricevere e produrre testi) in maniera adeguata al contesto e agli interlocutori; riconoscere gli aspetti culturali che sottostanno agli scambi comunicativi tra parlanti lingue diverse; superare le difficoltà della comunicazione in lingua straniera attraverso strategie; essere consapevoli dei propri processi di apprendimento, sia nelle situazioni di studio sia nel contatto quotidiano con la LT.” Borri, A., Minuz, F., Rocca, L., Sola, C. (2014). Italiano L2 in Contesti migratori: Sillabo e descrittori dall’alfabetizzazione all’a1. Torino: Loescher.

After some lessons, a number of students started asking very specific questions on grammar, both via email and in class. The doubts and the terminology used – it has already been remarked how James, Samuel and Percy exhibited a prominent, growing, metalinguistic awareness - hinted an interest in reaching a type of linguistic proficiency that aimed at being correct from the point of view of grammar. The same objective was shared also by Lara, albeit not present during most of the lessons since she withdrew from the course after a couple ones. In fact, one of the reasons that convinced her to drop the course, together with the online space that she deemed to not be ideal for her, was related to the approach to grammar and course content: she believed that it would cover the same basic topics she was already familiar with, not enabling her to gain enough grammar accuracy when communicating in Italian.

Faced with these veiled requirements - further confirmed by what was recorded in the questionnaires, where everyone indicated "Grammar" among the skills to acquire and "Grammar practice" in the section of classroom activities as respectively "very important" and "very helpful" - the teacher-researcher tried to tailor the syllabus accordingly to respond to the call for a more grammar-based approach.

For example, a significant change can be observed in the focus on delivering lessons from lesson three onwards, where grammar rules were explicitly introduced and presented in English – including elements to stimulate individual contrastive analysis with English grammar – and addressed by employing proper terminology.

In Italian also the adjectives and any word referred to a noun inflects in the same gender (and number of course)

Una casa bella e nuova
A beautiful and new house

CASA is the noun to which both **UNA** (article) and **BELLA e NUOVA** (adjectives) refer to. **CASA** is *femminile*, so all the words that go with it need to be *femminili*.

What if we change the noun *casa* with *libro*? What will we have then?

Un libro bello e nuovo
A beautiful and new book

Genere...e numero
Singular and plural of nouns in Italian

Italian has different endings for nouns depending on whether they're **singular** or **plural**.

While in English in most times is necessary to add -s or -es to form the plural, in Italian we'll have four main endings:

	Singolare	Plurale
Nouns ending in -a > -e	Studentessa Macchina Casa Amica	Studentesse Macchine Case Amiche
Nouns ending in -o > -i	Mano Gatto Alunno Amico	Mani Gatti Alunni Amici
Nouns ending in -e > -i	Eroe Chiave Cane Televisione	Eroi Chiavi Cani Televisioni

But before that...let's quickly see the subject pronouns!

These pronouns indicate the subject of any sentence. In Italian these can be also omitted!

As you can observe from the chart, we do have two different pronouns for the second person singular and plural. It is like the Scottish use of *you* and *yous* ☺

	Italiano	Inglese
Singular pronouns	IO	I
	<u>TU</u>	YOU
	LUI / LEI	HE / SHE
Plural pronouns	NOI	WE
	<u>VOI</u>	YOU
	LORO	THEY

What about "it"?
To refer to inanimate objects, we commonly repeat the name of the object, or use "questo/a, questi/e" (this, these)

Fig. 6.1,6.2 and 6.3 - Examples of different grammar inputs presented in class taken from different lessons

Using grammatical terms to describe which elements they were about to learn, like the different parts of speech and sub-categories (i.e. articles, *articoli* in Italian, with their set of definite and indefinite articles, *articoli determinativi* and *indeterminativi*), along with explicitly presenting students with grammar rules, may be seen as a form of explicit grammar teaching (Stern, 1992; Ling, 2015) and thus purely reflecting a teacher-centred approach (Zohrabi & Torabi & Baybourdiani, 2012). Despite going against the conventional association that sees more implicit and descriptive grammar being a suitable strategy to support a learner-centred approach (Ling, 2015), the teacher-researcher believed that the adjustments made were more and effectively addressing her students' needs. By negotiating the choice of being taught "explicitly", learners in the Italian beginner's class managed to express their ideal L2-selves, attending lessons that probably perceived to be interesting and useful for this purpose.

As observed in other chapters, the focus on grammar has triggered reflections not only on Italian but also on their knowledge of the L1. Three students, in fact, stated that they had questioned the role of grammar in their own language, namely English, following what we learned in class. James even mentioned learning in Italian for the first time what the parts of speech were, and thus distinguishing articles from verbs and nouns first in Italian than in English. The metalinguistic awareness that derived from the explicit teaching of grammar proved to be, in the Italian beginner's class, an asset to their investment, even if presenting them with challenges and difficulty at times.

Therefore, this aspect of the syllabus, a result of collaboration and communication between the teacher-researcher and students, was deemed to be effective to sustain the motivation of the participants that had expressed an interest in more grammar-based lessons. Eddie, who was the only one for whom the latter statement was not true in terms of motivation, confronted himself with other factors impacting on his "feeling behind" (Eddie, Focus Group), and did not register dissatisfaction with how classes were structured.

Finally, the successful adoption of an explicit grammar teaching method appeared to confirm findings from other studies, like Nazari (2013), according to whom "when learners are informed of the grammatical rules, they feel more comfortable, self-confident and motivated in the classroom" (Nazari, 2013: 161).

6.3 Reflections on digital materials design

It can be said that the circumstances under which the course was organized and carried out were exceptional; indeed, what was meant to be an in-person Italian course had to be conducted online, using the Zoom platform. The difficulties and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic for the education sector, both for teachers and students, have already been outlined, and were many. The teacher-researcher aimed to implement strategies to compensate, as much as possible, for the lack of face-to-face interaction with the learners. After careful consideration, the teacher-researcher decided not to adopt a textbook for the course, both because I had not identified a suitable one (given the decision to use a procedural and negotiated syllabus, thus subject to variation) and to avoid issues related to the accessibility of such textbook. The idea was to provide all possible materials to the students during and after the lessons, drawing from various resources for teaching Italian as a foreign language for the design of teaching materials.

The main challenge, however, was to create material from scratch to maintain students' attention for the entire duration of the lesson, which was an hour and a half every week. Moreover, such materials had to align with their stated needs and interests to sustain their motivation. Studies on the impact of instructional material design have found that learners' motivation was affected (Ismailov and Ono, 2021). Even though at the time there was not as much information and evidence available about virtual learning environments as there is today, the teacher-researcher had anticipated that additional effort would be needed in preparing the material and designing the lessons. Therefore, special attention was given to making the classroom presentations as interactive and engaging as possible. Each lesson was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation that complemented the explanation, featuring exercises with animations and effects aimed at enhancing interactivity. For instance, catchy colours and animations were used to simplify the display of corrections or solutions to exercises, and to facilitate understanding of the progression from one task to another.

Despite the efforts in improving the appeal of what was done in class, better-looking and catchy instructional resources did not cause nor indicate a particular effect on students' motivation. From the exception to this was Samuel, who empathised with the teacher, recognising the work and preparation behind every lesson, and implicitly acknowledging the more challenging aspect of delivering online classes, other students did not express any thought on the digital materials design. While it could be inferred from an absence of complaints or comments that the material designed and digital resources offered succeeded

in attaining students' engagement, there is no evidence that this contributed significantly to the overall motivation. Furthermore, in hindsight, such a careful preparation of each presentation required hours on behalf of the teacher-researcher that could be dedicated to other elements of curriculum design.

Nonetheless, an engaging design of digital materials represents a successful strategy to foster attention and participation in online learning environments, and COVID-19 posed a worldwide challenge for practical suggestions for practitioners to enhance engagement in such contexts (Chiu, 2021). Given when the Italian beginner's course was held, during the height of the emergency and the transition to online delivery, certain choices regarding curriculum design, such as the excessive material development, were likely influenced by that specific historical moment. Now, undoubtedly, the teacher-researcher would not focus too much on the aspect of materials and lessons in general, perhaps due to the familiarity with virtual contexts brought about by two years of the pandemic, especially from the students' perspective.

6.4 Implications for practice

After concluding the Action-Research and analysing the collected data on learners' motivation, this study can offer some practical implications for teaching Italian as a foreign language. While these are mostly applicable to similar contexts, which is that of Italian taught outside of Italy to adult learners and mostly for leisure purposes, it is believed that some of the suggested implications could be generalised to Italian as FL teaching practice for other cohorts of learners, too.

6.4.1 The use of Needs Analysis

While Needs Analysis is a well-established tool for understanding learners' views, gaining popularity especially in ESL/EFL teaching, it appears that for LOTEs not all FL teachers implement it in their own approach to a new group of learners. Aside from the notable use of Needs Analysis as the preliminary stage to a better understanding of learners' needs, and thus to placing the learner in a central role, in my study, it also served to raise students' awareness about their own needs and expectations. In other words, it enabled them to stimulate reflection about their language identities, to understand what kind of learner or Italian speaker they wanted to become. Conducting a detailed Needs Analysis may therefore be an instrument from which both the teacher and the student benefit, and it is suggested particularly for LOTEs, given the plurality of reasons leading learners towards learning a LOTE compared to those for English. Current research contributions evidenced the call for a deepening in the understanding of the LOTEs dimension (Zheng, Lu and Ren, 2020; Lu

and Shen, 2021; Guo, Zhou, Gao, 2021), with findings confirming different motivational and environmental facets coming into play, compared to the much well-known learning of English. This study not only aligns with the idea shared in LOTEs-related research of a learner-centred pedagogy (Ushioda, 2020) and therefore in employing all the relevant tools to enable a comprehensive view of learners' – like Needs Analysis -, but it also posits that integrating this understanding into immediate practice can generate a more positive language experience for the learner.

Additionally, within the realm of LOTEs, there has been limited exploration of Italian as a Foreign Language (FL) beyond Italy. Therefore, the outcomes of this study aim to enrich the design of Italian language teaching and contribute to the establishment of potential frameworks for investigating the learning of this LOTE.

6.4.2 Promoting Metalinguistic Awareness

Another implication for practice comes from the findings related to the strong link between metalinguistic awareness and motivation. Stimulating a reflection over grammar, extending to other aspects of the language itself, has effects on the learner's self-efficacy and self-autonomy, impacting their motivation regardless of the difficulties faced. This is especially true for languages like Italian, where grammar is necessarily present from an early stage. Despite being perceived as a difficult hurdle and often avoided in favour of more communicative approaches because in classrooms at times "any mention of grammar causes the student moments of discomfort and sometimes even terror" (Almekhlafi & Perur Nagaratnam, 2011: 69), it has been observed from this study that for the majority of learners, it represented a positive stimulus and led to greater awareness of the linguistic dimension, both of Italian and their own L1. In terms of possible implications, this aligns for example with the extensive work by Jessner, fostering the integration of language awareness and cross-linguistic relationships in the FL classroom (Jessner, 1999; 2003) and the application of metacognition and metalanguage to multilinguals (Jessner, 2008). Additionally, Gayton and Fisher (2022) propose another approach to enhance metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness through an identity-driven pedagogy designed to foster reflection on language-related and specific aspects.

To put it in Swain's (1995) words, my study's findings reinforce the idea that "under some circumstances, the activity of producing the target language may prompt second language learners to consciously recognize some of their linguistic problems; it may bring to their attention something they need to discover about their L2 (Swain 1993). This may trigger cognitive processes which might generate linguistic knowledge that is new for learners, or

which consolidate their existing knowledge (Swain and Lapkin 1994)” (1995: 126). While in the case of the Italian beginner’s class metalinguistic awareness emerged naturally, it can be promoted by employing elements of explicit grammar among the teaching practice, thus enabling learners to familiarise with grammatical features and terms in well-structured way. As pointed out by some scholars for Italian learning and metalinguistic reflection, “l’obiettivo è in definitiva quello di mettere l’apprendente in grado di ricorrere a tali capacità non solo su stimolo del docente e in un momento circoscritto (la lezione di lingua), ma come abito mentale attivabile ogniqualvolta ci si confronti con la comunicazione, nella propria lingua o in una lingua straniera” (Diadori, Palermo, Troncarelli, 2015: 155). In English as follows: “*the ultimate goal is to enable the learner to employ these skills not only upon the teacher’s stimulus and in a specific moment (the language lesson), but as a mental habit that can be activated whenever one engages in communication, whether in their own language or in a foreign language.*” (My translation).

6.4.3 Encouraging motivation through “meta-motivation”

Motivation is a crucial and decisive factor, but not all learners are aware of its pivotal role. Some of the findings from this study suggest that informing students about the purpose of the course and the motivational research has contributed to an awareness of its importance for their own outcomes in Italian. Some students have made explicit reference to feeling more or less motivated at certain times, reflecting how they associated declines in motivation with potential dangers and obstacles to linguistic achievement. As a result, they also developed and implemented strategies on how to overcome such decrease in motivation, and in all students, this seemed to indicate greater self-regulation, control and self-autonomy. This "meta-motivation" is therefore something to consider in curriculum development. While meta-motivational skills were indicated among the self-regulatory skills for self-regulated learning (Boekaerts, 1995), little research was conducted on the application of such technique to the field of FL learning and thus investigating its potential in channelling control over learners’ motivation. Thus, aligning with existing literature, defining meta-motivational processes as crucial for students to monitor their motivational states (Miele & Scholer, 2018), it is believed that the findings in the present study can contribute to strengthen the role of meta-motivation and place it within the strategies to promote in a FL class. Including some notions, perhaps initially, about the journey motivation takes with them, as well as the fact that it is mutable and subject to change, can promote greater

awareness of the learner's agency and trigger strategies to sustain it or to defuse declines or crises.

Hence, findings from our Italian beginner's class confirm the importance of meta-motivation envisioned by Miele, Scholer & Fujita (2020), supporting the adoption of "meta-motivational monitoring - assessing both the quantity and quality of one's motivation to pursue a particular goal" (2020: 3) as an ideal candidate for pedagogical implications.

6.5 Research Question 4

The previous pages served as a summary of the answer to Research Question 4, "*How can an understanding of these learners' motivation and identity inform the pedagogical development of an Italian curriculum?*".

As a final consideration, it can be reaffirmed that understanding both learners' motivation and identity, with all their contextual features, needs, and desires, can certainly inform curriculum development. Specifically for Italian, as a LOTE, there are specific aspects to focus on and integrate into a properly negotiated curriculum, such as the grammatical approach. On the other hand, it is evident that the common factor and the way in which the study of certain variables – namely, motivation and identity - informs curriculum design is primarily due to mediation between teacher and students and the promotion of a collaborative syllabus. This will give voice to the needs and concerns of the learner, enabling mutual reflections and adjustments on behalf of the teacher.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and directions for future research

7.1 Final considerations and future directions

This study on motivation in a beginner Italian class in Scotland examined the trajectory of motivation throughout the course from a strictly qualitative perspective. The results of the analysis of the motivation allowed for the construction of detailed learner profiles, revealing various fluctuations in terms of motivation, negotiated identities, and investment in the various components of language practice. As Gayton and Fisher (2022) assumed, “the languages classroom is a site for the development of linguistic identity” (2022: 299), and in my study it was illustrated how various identities were envisioned by the students and how these surfaced in terms of *which* language speakers they wanted to become.

As a teacher-researcher, I assumed the role of a practitioner in closely monitoring the progress of the aforementioned factors and adjusting or modifying my own practice by integrating the views of the learner-participants. The syllabus - though not entirely - negotiated, reflected a positive collaborative relationship between me and the students. In fact, the aspects adequately negotiated resulted in positive effects on their engagement in class; on the other hand, those that were not negotiated or discussed proved detrimental to the investment of some participants, causing amotivation and leading them to skip classes. Several themes emerged as strikingly decisive for determining the students’ behaviours, mostly aligning with results from other studies in the field that evidenced how, for example, the online environment because of COVID-19 contributed negatively to motivation.

Among the emerging themes, metalinguistic awareness stands out as one with significant implications and directions for future research. It is a process shared by all learner-participants in the study and has sparked reflections extending to their understanding of their own native language. Future research could build upon this by exploring how students naturally incorporate their L1 knowledge about a language into their FL learning process. While there has been some investigation into whether teachers utilise this technique during FL teaching, there is still limited understanding of how learners independently employ their L1 knowledge and grammatical skills to enhance their comprehension of FL structures. Therefore, future research in this direction could involve developing such techniques to

promote metalinguistic awareness and testing their effectiveness in teaching Italian to foreigners. Thus, facilitating the learner towards this role of “protagonista di attività cognitive complesse quali compiere inferenze, ipotesi, astrazioni e generalizzazioni sulla lingua e sulle sue strutture” (Diadori, Palermo, Troncarelli, 2015: 155); in English as follows “*protagonist of complex cognitive activities such as making inferences, hypotheses, abstractions, and generalizations about the language and its structures*” (My translation). For the learner-participants in the Italian Beginner’s course, Grammar resulted to be a steady Theme. As mentioned earlier, despite the encountered difficulties, it served as a reflection tool and also as a means to measure one's own progress. At this point, one might wonder if Italian language teaching represents a unique case in FL education and if further investigation could be conducted on the use of explicit grammar in teaching. Indeed, often this technique is favoured less compared to communicatively oriented approaches. Therefore, another direction for further studies in Italian language teaching could be trying to restore a more prominent role to grammar, investigating it as a tool to motivate learners while still supporting a learner-centred approach.

Hence, in light of the results of my study, there is strong support for future research focusing on a more thorough examination of metalinguistic awareness and metacognition, particularly regarding their potential influence on motivation. Such investigations are highly encouraged as they may deepen our understanding of the intricate relationships between language awareness, cognitive processes, and motivational factors in the context of FL learning and entail significant implications in pedagogy.

Another contribution towards potential pedagogical implications is represented by awareness of motivation itself. While on one hand, this seems to have contributed to greater self-regulation, this study might represent only a starting point for a closer examination of meta-motivation. Similarly to Metalinguistic Awareness, exploring possible techniques to encourage it and investigating its effects more thoroughly could further inform curriculum design processes from a learner-oriented perspective, thus being an opportunity to include in future directions.

My study furthermore provided more evidence to the adoption of learner-centred tools, such as Needs Analysis, and its functional use towards a thorough understanding of learners’ needs and expectations. With the findings from the application of Needs Analysis to set up course syllabi, this study may contribute to the field of LOTEs learning. Specifically focusing on Italian as a representative language in this category, the continued application and expansion of Needs Analysis could enhance the recognition of Italian language learning

abroad and shed light on its unique contextual factors affecting learners. Future directions may be to apply learner-centred methodologies like Needs Analysis to larger groups of Italian learners, in order to investigate more broadly *who these learners are* and for which reasons they pursue Italian learning outside of Italy. Indeed, one aspect that this study could not fully address, is the dimension of the context posed by Scotland. Perhaps by extending the study on a larger scale - for instance, through a longitudinal study in Scottish secondary schools or at university level, thereby gaining access to a greater number of participants - one could investigate the role of Italian as a heritage language in Scotland, or at the very least, obtain a more precise understanding of the LOTE's position in this country.

Finally, this study has employed a figure such as the *teacher-as-researcher* and advocates for it as a highly valuable and precious method for analysing FL language education from within. Therefore, to stimulate future research in the learning of LOTEs, an Action Research based approach could deem to be the recommended strategy to thoroughly investigate motivation and identity of LOTE learners.

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Appendix

Italian Learning Survey

Introduction

This survey is aimed at all learners who have attended or are currently attending Italian language courses.

Please select the options that best answer the questions or, when required, indicate the extent to which you agree with the statements.

This survey is anonymous, and all information provided will be used solely for research purposes. Thank you for your participation, your answers will significantly contribute to the study.

SECTION 1: PERSONAL INFORMATION

In this section, please select the option that best answers the following questions.

1. Please select your gender

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary/Other
- Prefer not to say

2. Please select your age range

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55+

3. Is this the first Italian course you have attended?

- Yes
- No

4. Had you already studied other Romance languages before learning Italian?

- Yes
- No

5. Please select your current level of Italian

- A1 (Beginner)
- A2 (Elementary)
- B1 (Intermediate)
- B2 (Upper Intermediate)
- C1 (Advanced)
- C2 (Proficiency)

SECTION 2: MOTIVATION

6. In this section, you are asked to rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement.

Strongly Disagree (1) - Disagree (2) - Neutral (3) - Agree (4) - Strongly Agree (5)

"I decided to study Italian..."

Because I feel more satisfied when I learn new languages.

1 2 3 4 5

Because I enjoy acquiring knowledge about the Italian culture and way of life.

1 2 3 4 5

Because I would like to better integrate into the Italian community in Scotland.

1 2 3 4 5

Because having this language skill on my CV is important.

1 2 3 4 5

In order to achieve an academic goal.

1 2 3 4 5

To enjoy events and activities organized by the Italian community in Scotland.

1 2 3 4 5

Because I like the idea of travelling to Italy and communicating in Italian.

1 2 3 4 5

Because I am of Italian descent.

1 2 3 4 5

Because I have Italian relatives and need it to communicate with them.

1 2 3 4 5

In order to get a prestigious job related to Italian brands.

1 2 3 4 5

Because I plan to move to Italy.

1 2 3 4 5

Because I need it to work.

1 2 3 4 5

Because I usually buy and eat Italian food.

1 2 3 4 5

SECTION 3: THE LANGUAGE COURSE

In this section, please answer the following questions related to your study of Italian:

7. What type of Italian course have you attended? (Please check all that apply)

- University or College course
- Private language school
- Online course
- Self-study (e.g., using apps or books)
- Community group/class
- Other (Please specify): _____

8. Why did you choose this specific course?

9. How did you find the experience of learning Italian in this course?

10. What aspects of the course did you find most beneficial for your learning?

Thank you for participating in this survey!

[Questionnaire 0]
Gathering your views

The following questionnaire is very important to gain essential information about your needs and interests as a learner. The answers that you provide will be used to inform the development of the syllabus of the Italian course that you are about to start. Please feel free to ask any questions if anything is unclear.

1. What do you expect from this Italian course? Please list up to three expectations.

- Expectation 1:
- Expectation 2:
- Expectation 3:

2. What are your main reasons for learning Italian? Please list up to three reasons.

- Reason 1:
- Reason 2:
- Reason 3:

3. What are the main challenges that you foresee in starting to learn Italian? Please list up to three challenges.

- Challenge 1:
- Challenge 2:
- Challenge 3:

4. To what extent do you find the following skills important?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Neutral	Somewhat unimportant	Very unimportant
Grammar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. To what extent are the following activities helpful?

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Neutral	Somewhat unhelpful	Very unhelpful
Working individually	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working in pairs or groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pronunciation drills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Watching videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vocabulary practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grammar practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Songs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing knowledge of Italian culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Do you have any previous knowledge of the Italian language? Please describe below.

Thank you/Grazie!

[Questionnaire *N*]

You are asked to answer to the following questions. You will have time until the next lesson to fill the questionnaire and return it to me via email. Remember that it is completely up to you how much you want to write or if you want to leave some questions blank.

I am available for any questions or further information concerning the questionnaire and the study. You can either talk to me during the class or contact me at the following email address:

[teacher-researcher's email]

Thank you for your time and collaboration in the research!

- 1. Are there any aspects of the Italian language that you are finding challenging? Please describe below.**

- 2. Overall, how is your experience with the Italian language going? Please describe below.**

3. To what extent are you finding the following activities helpful in class?

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Neutral	Somewhat unhelpful	Very unhelpful
Working individually	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working in pairs or groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pronunciation drills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Watching videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vocabulary practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grammar practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Songs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing knowledge of Italian culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Do you feel you are making progress in Italian? Please describe below.

Thank you/Grazie

[Focus Group]

Prompt 1: How do you feel about learning Italian? Do you find it challenging, or has it been easier than expected?

Prompt 2: Reflect on your expectations when you started the course. Have those expectations been met, and what are your next steps in learning Italian?

Prompt 3: Thinking about the learning environment, would you have preferred a face-to-face classroom experience? How did the online Zoom format support or challenge your learning, and do you think it influenced your progress?

Prompt 4: Was there any point during the course when you felt unmotivated or thought about stopping? What do you think caused those feelings, if any?