

**Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Education and Psychology**

Doctoral Dissertation Summary



**EFL learning through extramural English
activities in the Hungarian secondary education
context: A mixed-methods study**

Doctoral School of Education

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DOI: 10.15476/ELTE.2022.098

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Budapest, 2022

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1. Introduction

Traditionally, research investigating second language acquisition has been classroom-centred; however, recently there has been a growing interest and research in the field of language pedagogy and applied linguistics in everything happening outside the classroom, too. One of the reasons for this is that owing to English language media (films, film series, songs, video games, news, etc.) becoming widely accessible to a wider audience, EFL learners can now be exposed to the English language outside the classroom as well, thus they are surrounded by a wide array of authentic content without having to travel or relocate to a target language country. What is more, as Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller (2013) underscore, young learners and teenagers are prosumers (both producers and consumers) of L2, usually English language content (Lam, 2000; Thorne et al., 2009; Yi, 2008). This means that learners are often required to compose texts, consume content and communicate with others in their digital environment, and this communication often occurs through the English language. As a result, leisure time activities may be closely associated with a possible L2 development (Sundqvist, 2009) and, therefore, may be considered an important resource for EFL learning as well as EFL teaching and this also necessitates the investigation of learners' leisure time interests.

Research in different countries and regions, such as Scandinavia (Pirainen-Marsh & Tainio, 2009; Simensen, 2010; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016), Belgium (Kuppens, 2010), Germany (Grau, 2009), and in Hungary (Józsa & Imre, 2013) has shown that there is a positive relationship between primary and secondary school students' L2 English proficiency and English out-of-school activities, or in other words *extramural English activities* (henceforth EE).

In addition, as learners mainly but not exclusively engage in EE activities with the purpose of being entertained, EE activities may also be closely associated with L2

learning motivation as learners may develop a positive attitude towards the English language and wish to make more effort to acquire it. Since individual differences, such as L2 learning motivation, play a crucial role in second language acquisition and determine the ultimate success of L2 acquisition (Dörnyei, 2005), there is a great deal of research (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Mercer et al., 2012, Pawlak, 2012) on the relationship between classroom based L2 learning and the different individual differences. Yet, even though previous research has found that in the short run, classroom based L2 learning may prove more effective than out-of-school L2 learning contexts (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010), extramural L2 learning may provide learners with L2 learning opportunities in the long run, too. Nevertheless, the impact of extramural contexts on individual differences is a relatively under-researched field within second language acquisition, let alone in the Hungarian context (cf. Lajtai, 2018).

A large-scale, nationwide survey carried out by Öveges and Csizér (2018) in Hungary investigated Hungarian secondary school foreign language teachers' perceptions about Hungarian secondary school students' foreign language learning motivation and compared these results with Hungarian secondary school students' self-reported foreign language learning motivation. The results of this major large-scale study show that secondary school students' motivation ($M=3.84$) was higher on a five-point Likert scale than their foreign language learning motivation perceived by foreign language teachers ($M=3.46$). It also becomes apparent from the data that students engage in EE activities ($M=3.71$). The study, however, as it was not the main aim of it, does not investigate whether there is a connection between engagement in EE and foreign language learning motivation and whether the former may have an impact on the latter.

As Lajtai (2018) points out, the contradiction between teachers' and students' answers may be the result of students' attitudes towards classroom-based foreign

language learning and foreign language learning in an EE environment. Based on this, it is hypothesized that the discrepancy between students' and teachers' perceptions lies in the different foreign language contexts as classroom-based instruction may be less interesting for learners than the English they encounter outside school, which Henry (2013) calls *authenticity gap*.

The rationale, therefore, in carrying out this research project is to fill this gap in the literature and investigate Hungarian secondary school students' extramural interests and the potential impact of these activities on students' individual learner differences. In the light of these, the present doctoral dissertation may be considered unique in the Hungarian context as research investigating the niche outlined above is virtually non-existent. Accordingly, the outcomes of this research project may contribute to a better understanding of Hungarian secondary school students' extramural interests and individual learner differences.

2. Theoretical background

There are several major issues in second language acquisition (SLA) and two key issues are: what external conditions to which learners are exposed aid L2 learning (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010) and how these conditions interact with individual differences (ID) in learners (Dörnyei, 2005). The former issue is centred on second language input conditions and the effect of these conditions on the second language learning process. One of these conditions is the explicit context (e.g., classroom), where learners are exposed to explicit grammatical rules or equivalents of vocabulary items of a given second language. On the other hand, in the implicit extramural context, learners are exposed to L2 input but there is a lack of exposure to explicit grammatical rules or vocabulary explanations. As for the second issue, the interaction of individual differences

with the implicit and explicit contexts, it focuses on individual differences in a classroom setting and in the extramural context.

As for the first issue, previous research has found that in the short run, explicit teaching contexts are more effective than implicit learning contexts (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010). Nevertheless, Grey et al. (2015) point out that these findings are not surprising as explicit conditions normally yield more comprehensible L2 input than implicit conditions (Ellis et al., 2009; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Sanz, 2005), i.e., in a classroom, learners may be exposed to comprehensible input, a kind of input which is relatively close to and is only somewhat above the current level of proficiency of the learner (Krashen, 1982, 2009) more frequently than in a non-classroom setting. It is important to underline, however, that this may create the somewhat misguided belief that implicit exposure conditions are less important. On the contrary, implicit exposure conditions, such as EE activities where learners can encounter a particular L2, and English in this case, are equally important because they provide meaningful contextualized opportunities for encountering the given L2. Consequently, for effective L2 learning, implicit and explicit exposure contexts should be combined (Nunan & Richards, 2015; Richards, 2015). It is equally important, therefore, to investigate how second language acquisition takes place in the extramural L2 learning context.

As for the second issue, only little research investigates learners' individual differences in the implicit, extramural context (cf. Lajtai, 2018). As the sense of enjoyment is an important aspect of EE activities, learners tend to derive satisfaction from the engagement in EE activities (Arnold, 2009; Chik & Breidbach, 2011; Lamb, 2004; Purushotma, 2005); therefore, as previously explained, L2 learning motivation and motivated language learning behaviour are important aspects of extramural English activities. Not only L2 learning motivation, however, but also additional closely related

components to motivation, such as L2 anxiety, cultural interest, friendship orientation and intercultural contact, perceived importance of the English language and willingness to communicate in an L2 are variables to have a potential impact on learners' L2 learning motivation in the extramural context.

3. Research methods

After reviewing the context of EFL learning through EE activities as well as the relevant literature and in line with the main aims of this doctoral dissertation, the following research questions (RQs) were formulated:

- RQ1** What extramural English activities do Hungarian secondary school EFL learners engage in?
- RQ2** What are Hungarian secondary school students' perceptions of extramural English activities in EFL learning?
- RQ3** What are Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions of extramural English activities in EFL learning?
- RQ4** How do extramural English activities affect Hungarian secondary school EFL learners' various individual learner differences?
 - RQ4.1** What characterizes Hungarian secondary school students' L2 learning motivation?
 - RQ4.2** What characterizes Hungarian secondary school students' L2 anxiety?
 - RQ4.3** What characterizes Hungarian secondary school students' L2 willingness to communicate?
- RQ5** What are Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of EFL students' various individual differences?

RQ6 What impact do the various EE activities and various individual differences have on Hungarian secondary school students' in-school motivated learning behaviour and extramural motivated language use?

As EFL learning through EE activities is a rather complex phenomenon to investigate, a mixed-methods research design was adopted because as Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out, such research design enables the researcher to examine a phenomenon from multiple perspectives. This view is supported by Dörnyei (2007), who claims a mixed-methods research design is “ideal for the analysis of complex issues” (p. 36). In addition, even though the above six main research questions could be answered through using solely the qualitative research paradigm, as Dörnyei (2007) asserts, it is impossible to generalise the findings of a research project which only uses the qualitative research paradigm. Furthermore, the findings of a qualitative study are not suitable for comparison with the findings of other quantitative, let alone qualitative studies.

Another reason for choosing the mixed-methods research paradigm was the fact that it includes both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The former being suitable for the exploratory nature of this research project and based on the “tabula rasa” approach enables the researcher to map a previously unknown domain, Hungarian secondary school EE interests. This approach means that the researcher aims to investigate a phenomenon without any (or as few as possible) preconceptions allowing for a real investigative approach where data emerges on its own, thus explaining the phenomenon (Richards & Morse, 2013), which can later enable the researcher to develop theories and generate hypotheses; thus the data collected through qualitative methods can later serve as a basis for further qualitative or quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2018).

Finally, another reason for mixing methods was to ensure data triangulation, which in social sciences means and at the same time guarantees a deeper understanding of the issue investigated. According to Cohen et al. (2018), data triangulation is an “attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint” (p. 265). This was achieved through combining data sources: both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to investigate Hungarian secondary school students’ EE interests.

4. Results

The present doctoral dissertation research adopted a mixed methodology, which meant that both qualitative and quantitative methods were combined in order to map the context of EFL learning through EE activities at the secondary education level in Hungary. Another important feature of the research was that the different research phases (Study One, Study Two and Study Three) informed each other, i.e., the results of the different phases were not only related to each other but all research instruments were designed and prepared based on the results of the studies preceding them within the framework of this project. The results of the present doctoral dissertation aim to fill an important research gap by adding findings to the very little such research in Hungary (cf. Lajtai, 2018), in this way contributing to a better understanding of EFL learning through EE activities.

The main aim of the research was, on the one hand, to map Hungarian secondary school students' EE interests, and, on the other hand, to examine the impact of these EE activities on the different foreign language learning individual variables. The exploration of these relationships was carried out through the use of different statistical methods (inferential statistics). In the following sections, the main findings of this research project are presented for each research question.

RQ1 What extramural English activities do Hungarian secondary school EFL learners engage in?

Hungarian secondary school students' EE interests were examined using both qualitative and quantitative methods. As the author of this dissertation did not have any insights into the EE interests of secondary school students, it seemed straightforward to try to gain insight into them through qualitative methods, more precisely semi-structured interviews. The findings of the qualitative interview study showed that students pursue a number of EE activities in their free time time, namely (1) travelling abroad and using English, (2) watching TV, movies and series in English, (3) watching videos in English, (4) listening to music in English, (5) reading blogs in English, (6) using social media in English, (7) reading books in English, (9) reading and checking news in English, (10) playing video games in English, (11) exposure to native speakers of English or speakers with different L1s than that of the participants, (12) doing sports while communicating in English. It is striking that learners use English as a means in several cases, such as visiting different websites or watching videos for non-language learning purposes. In addition, when they consume EE content, such as series and movies, they mainly do so for their own entertainment. This, of course, does not prevent, but rather promotes, foreign language learning while using the language (Bialystok, 1981) through incidental learning (Schmidt, 1993, 1995, 2001). Based on the quantitative results of Study Two, the most favoured EE activities include (1) reading books, (2) reading posts on Instagram, (3) playing video games, (4) chatting with others, (5) reading websites, (6) watching movies, (7) reading blogs, (8) reading Twitter posts, (9) watching films and series in English, (10) watching tutorial videos, (11) watching vloggers on YouTube, (12) listening to music, (13)

reading posts on Facebook, (14) watching gamers on Twitch, (15) reading magazines, (16) watching TikTok videos, (17) reading newspapers, (18) reading news in English. Based on these findings, it may be concluded that students seem to prefer EE activities that they can do on their smart devices and typically require a shorter attention span (e.g., listening to music, watching videos).

Similarly to the findings of previous research (cf. Grau, 2009; Józsa & Imre, 2013), gender differences in students' preferences were also identified. Video games, for instance, seem to be more popular among boys, but the qualitative results also included, of course, female participants who identified themselves as "gamers". In contrast, both qualitative and quantitative results show that TikTok and beauty and makeup videos on YouTube are more popular among girls.

The results also show that in many cases, where available, students use English subtitles instead of Hungarian subtitles when consuming audiovisual EE content. This can also contribute to incidental learning and increase L2 awareness, as learners, in addition to hearing L2 input, have the opportunity to visually see it, too.

RQ2 What are Hungarian secondary school students' perceptions of extramural English activities in EFL learning?

RQ3 What are Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions of extramural English activities in EFL learning?

In the case of perceptions about in-school EFL learning and extramural EFL learning, the conclusion may be drawn that both students and teachers find it useful to learn languages from both in-school and EE activities. The data also showed that EE activities were considered more useful by both groups than school-based EFL lessons. However, based

on the answers of the teachers, it can be said that they consider in-school English lessons to be significantly more useful for EFL learning than the students, which is not surprising, as the teachers are methodologically prepared and trained for education, so they actually know what is needed for effective EFL learning. Additionally, as it is underlined in the literature, there is a consensus among both teachers and researchers that effective L2 learning involves the combination of both classroom-based L2 instruction and out-of-school exposure to the particular L2 (Nunan & Richards, 2015; Richards, 2015). As for the differences between EFL teachers' and students' perceptions about the benefits of EE activities, presumably, as Henry (2013) points out, students find EE activities more interesting and thus more useful than school English lessons.

RQ4 How do extramural English activities affect Hungarian secondary school EFL learners' various individual learner differences?

Since in the present doctoral research several individual learner differences were included along with numerous related variables affecting individual differences, this section presents findings based on the sub-research questions of RQ4.

RQ4.1 What characterizes Hungarian secondary school students' L2 learning motivation?

When examining the L2 language learning motivation of Hungarian secondary school EFL learners, Dörnyei's (2005) Motivational Self System was chosen as a theoretical framework for the present research project. This choice was motivated by the fact that this theory has been one of the most recent theories and it has also been tested in various

contexts, including in Hungary. In addition, the three components of the theory have been proven to adequately describe the Hungarian EFL learning context. As a consequence, these components and the impact of EE activities on these variables was investigated.

In the case of the Ideal L2 Self, it was found that several EE activities, namely (1) watching films and series, (2) reading online, (3) paper-based reading, and (4) watching online videos on YouTube have an impact on it. In contrast, the Ought-To L2 Self was affected only by one EE activity, (1) watching YouTube videos, while in the case of Language Learning Experience, positive cause-effect relationships between said variable and different EE activities, such as (1) watching films and series and (2) listening to music were identified in several cases. These results are, in some respects, consistent with the results of previous research which found that the Ideal L2 Self and the Language Learning Experience are the main predictors of L2 learning motivated behaviour in the Hungarian context, while the Ought-To L2 Self was found to be a less significant factor (Dörnyei et al., 2006; Kormos & Csizér, 2008). The results of the present research also show that EE activities have an impact on the former two variables and much less on the latter, which again indicates that the Ought-To L2 Self is of less significance in the Hungarian context.

Based on previous research as well as the literature, the impact of EE activities on additional predictors of L2 learning motivation was also investigated. The results show that intercultural orientation is affected by a number of EE activities (reading online, paper-based reading, watching YouTube videos, chatting with others and watching films and series), while the perceived importance of the English language was only affected by only two EE activities (online reading and listening to music); however, in the case of both variables, EE activities had a somewhat strong explanatory power (29% and 16% respectively). Thus, it may be concluded that L2 learning motivation and its further

related variables, such as intercultural motivation and the perceived importance of the English language, are highly affected by EE activities.

RQ4.2 What characterizes Hungarian secondary school students' L2 speaking anxiety?

As opposed to motivation, in the case of anxiety, a slightly weaker relationship between EE activities and students' in-school and extramural anxiety was identified. Albeit with a relatively weak explanatory power, three EE activities (watching YouTube videos, chatting and TikTok) do affect Hungarian secondary school students' self-perceived level of anxiety. An interesting result is that all activities but one (TikTok) have a positive effect on foreign language anxiety, meaning that the more one does such activities, the less anxiety they experience; yet in the case of TikTok a negative effect was identified, i.e., those who use TikTok a lot experience more L2 speaking anxiety, which might be related to TikTok being more of a loner EE activity.

RQ4.3 What characterizes Hungarian secondary school students' L2 willingness to communicate?

There are four EE activities (reading online, watching films and series, paper-based reading and video games) that affect in-school and extramural WTC; however, the impact is only marginal here, too. Interestingly, in the case of the WTC, both in-school and extramural WTC are more affected by passive EE activities, and playing video games is the only EE activity out of the four which really requires players to speak and communicate with others when gaming online.

RQ5 What are Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of EFL students' various individual differences?

A comparison of the results of the student and teacher questionnaires also revealed that in many cases, EFL teachers do not necessarily perceive EFL learners' L2 learning motivation, WTC and anxiety adequately as in the case of anxiety, for instance, teachers rated students' anxiety levels higher than students' self-reported anxiety levels actually were. In addition, in the case of L2 learning motivation, it may be concluded that EFL teachers rated EFL learners' in-school motivated learning behaviour higher than the results obtained from the student questionnaire. These results are in contrast with those of Öveges and Csizér (2018), where the results of their nation-wide study showed that EFL teachers consider students less motivated than students consider themselves. These results suggest that it would be much more worthwhile for EFL teachers to cater more for learners' individual differences in order to reduce anxiety and increase students' motivation in lessons by incorporating their EE interests in EFL lessons much more frequently and to a greater extent.

RQ6 What impact do the various EE activities and individual differences have on Hungarian secondary school students' in-school motivated learning behaviour and extramural motivated language use?

Several EE activities have an impact on both in-school motivated language learning behaviour and extramural motivated language use. In-school motivated learning behaviour is explained by four EE activities (chatting, listening to music, YouTube, films

and series) with an explanatory power of only 14%. All these activities are frequently used in an EFL classroom and could, therefore, be predictors of in-school motivated learning behaviour. On the other hand, extramural motivated language use is affected by several EE activities, too. These five EE activities, namely online reading, films and series, chatting, listening to music, video games, predict extramural motivated language use with an explanatory power of 42%. This means that the more learners engage in these EE activities, the more motivated they become to use the English language and consequently to learn English.

Both in-school motivated language learning behaviour and extramural motivated language use are affected by a number of individual learner differences. In the case of in-school motivated language learning behaviour, with an explanatory power of 46%, partly in line with the results of previous research (Busse & Williams, 2010; Dörnyei et al., 2006; Eid, 2008; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Kormos et al., 2011; Lamb, 2012), Language Learning Experience and perceptions about in-school EFL learning turned out to be the main predictors in this study. However, as opposed to the results of previous research, the Ideal L2 Self was found to have no impact on in-school motivated language learning behaviour. This requires further research to investigate what other variables could affect motivated language learning behaviour instead.

As for extramural motivated language use, several variables, a total of nine (Ideal L2 Self, Language Learning Experience, Intercultural orientation, the perceived importance of the English language, extramural EFL learning beliefs, English subtitle use, extramural L2 anxiety, extramural WTC, learners' willingness to include their own Extramural English interests into EFL lessons), explain it and the explanatory power is also very high (75%). These results are consistent with the results of Lajtai (2018) as well as previous research. It seems that intercultural orientation and beliefs and perceptions

about extramural EFL learning largely determine extramural motivated language use. It would also be important to further investigate the impact of these variables on motivated learning behaviour as well as extramural motivated language use.

5. Pedagogical and theoretical implications

The findings of this dissertation include implications for both researchers and language teaching professionals. The results of the study show that EE activities have a positive effect on various individual learner variables (e.g., motivation); therefore, it is worthwhile to incorporate EE activities in L2 teaching as they have the potential to make the teaching and learning process more efficient by making attempts to abridge the authenticity gap proposed by Henry (2013). Another important pedagogical implication of the research project is that by involving students' EE interests in EFL lessons, examples could be set to them on how they can improve their L2 skills in the future, too, therefore learner autonomy and life-long learning could also be fostered. These skills along with self-regulation are important skills in the 21st century and one of the important aims of foreign language teachers should be the nurture of these skills, too. It is, therefore, important to draw the attention of language teachers to the importance and benefits of mapping their own students' EE interests as this, provided that it is successful, may increase learners' L2 learning motivation, reduce their L2 anxiety and increase their L2 willingness to communicate. However, a kind of openness and genuine interest on the part of foreign language teachers is also important for this. As for theoretical implications, EE activities could be involved more in L2 motivation research as they may have an impact on learners' L2 learning motivation in other L2 learning contexts than that of secondary education, too.

6. Directions for further research

The present research project investigated EFL learning through EE activities and the potential impact of EE activities on the different individual learner differences in the Hungarian secondary education context. As a next step, a larger-scale representative quantitative study could investigate and map Hungarian secondary school students' EE interests and investigate the relationship between their EE interests and individual learner differences; this way findings of such a study could be extrapolated for the whole population of Hungarian secondary school students. Besides, other contexts could also be investigated, namely Hungarian primary school students' EE interests and individual learner differences could also be mapped along with Hungarian adult EFL learners' EE interests and individual differences. Furthermore, other individual learner variables, such as cognitive styles or learning strategies and the impact of EE on these variables could be investigated. Certain findings of this research project, such as the positive relationship between the frequent use of TikTok and anxiety, could also be investigated qualitatively in order to obtain more in-depth insights into why the relationship is reversed. Finally, based on the findings of this doctoral dissertation, recommendation, practical tips and good practices could be compiled from experienced EFL teachers who already incorporate EE in their teaching.

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- Asztalos, R., Bánhegyi, M., Fajt, B., Pál, Á., Szénich, A. (2021). Hallgatói visszajelzések a kényszertávoktatásra való átállásról és a digitális módszertani megújulásról az egyetemi szaknyelvoktatásban: egy kérdőíves felmérés tanulságai [Student feedback on the transition to emergency distance learning and digital methodological innovation in university foreign language education: Results of a questionnaire survey]. *Iskolakultúra*, 31(6), 84–100.
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