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Exploring the motivation of women studying in a multilevel ESOL class in England

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Identifying students' reasons for learning a language is useful for every teacher who aims to help students achieve their goals. In addition, understanding how their language learning motivation is maintained through the class and to what extent this continues away from the classroom are equally important, especially in noncompulsory adult ESOL. Following Ushioda's (2016) call for a small lens approach, one class of female, adult ESOL learners was studied to discover factors influencing their language learning motivation whilst attending a multilevel class in England. Data was collected over a period of 8 weeks through classroom observations, motigraphs, and interviews. Dorney's L2 motivational self-system theory (2009) was employed as a means of analysis and the findings appear to suggest that the learning experience and ought-to second language (L2) self have the largest impact on the participants' motivation in this context. The study concludes with pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research in this often overlooked field of enquiry.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In England, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes are available for anyone over the age of 16 for whom English is not their first language. In contrast with English as a foreign language (EFL), ESOL students are making a permanent home in England rather than visiting

for a short time. These students may have migrated from a range of countries for an array of reasons including seeking asylum, or rejoining family members who have already settled in the United Kingdom. ESOL classes are usually multicultural and multilingual and can manifest a wide range of ages and educational backgrounds (Higton et al., 2019, p. 58). As of 2013, 70% of ESOL courses were accessed by women (Foster & Bolton, 2017) and a recent government report revealed that 87% of ESOL courses in England are attended by women who are not seeking employment (Higton et al., 2019).

ESOL classes are offered by various types of organisations both in the public and voluntary sector, often in community settings or colleges. The class I visited for this study was offered by a local city council and delivered in a public library. Although open to all, by the third term (when I arrived) the male students were no longer attending. This was a multilevel class comprised of three levels (elementary to intermediate), attended by students living locally. I had known the teacher for almost a decade through past teaching roles elsewhere. We had met for coffee one day when she recounted her difficulties juggling three levels in one class as they were not progressing as she had expected. This was a general ESOL class where success was measured by students passing Skills for Life exams and moving up the levels each year. She was unsure about the reasons adult learners would join such a class, their levels of motivation during the class, and how motivated they were to continue their language practice outside of class. I therefore proposed a small-scale project to explore these uncertainties. We agreed I would visit the class at the start of the summer term to observe the students' in-class strategies for language learning and conduct interviews to further explore their reasons for studying and levels of motivation.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Language learning motivation

When searching for a definition of the motivation required to learn a foreign language, a wide range of theories emerge. As Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggest, it is "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes towards learning the language" (cited in Noels, 2001, p. 43). Therefore, if all three elements are present, a learner has a higher chance of achieving their desired level.

Viewing language learners as more than just students, but people with complicated lives, helps us to understand their motivation for learning and how this may change over time. This is essential when researching adult learners, especially in the UK ESOL context, as they are living in a new culture, often not of their own choosing. They have past experiences needing to be considered; these are adults with broad histories or *life capital* (Consoli, 2021) which can be a resource they rely on in class. Categorising all ESOL students as the same or having similar motivation for learning is risky because it ignores their individual experiences and needs. As Mercer (2011, p. 4) advocates, studies that take this person-in-context approach (Ushioda, 2009) will provide a better insight into the different realities within a given classroom. This was further argued by Ushioda (2016, p. 567) in her call for a small lens approach to language learning motivation research which encourages an in-depth investigation of a small group of people.

Therefore, generalisability may not be attainable here but that may be ignoring the overarching aim of studying people and their language learning motivation. The more positivist approaches which dominate the literature are at risk of falling short of discovering the complex realities of these learners that a small-scale, qualitative case study approach could provide.

2.2 | L2 motivational self-system theory (L2MSS)

Dörnyei's L2MSS theory (2009) is arguably one of the most influential frameworks of language learning motivation. This theory expanded Markus and Nurius's (1986) concept of possible selves, separating it into *ought-to* and *ideal L2 selves* whilst also integrating Noels's (2001) conceptualisation of motivation with the psychology of identity, self-regulation, and self-discrepancy theory.

These two categories of possible future selves are separated by who or what has shaped their conception. The *ought-to L2 self* represents the characteristics that the learner believes they should possess, perhaps influenced by their local community or family. The *ideal L2 self* represents the characteristics learners hope to possess such as a successful career (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 13). In addition, there is the third category of *L2 learning experience* which, contrary to the other two elements, is interested in the learner's relationship with the language in the present. More accurately than labelling someone as having one motivation, if Dörnyei's theory is applied a more holistic view of learners can arise.

We must note, however, how this theory was formed and the contexts in which it has subsequently been tested. In Hungarian middle schools in 2006, Dörnyei and Csizér surveyed over 13,000 children learning foreign languages (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006). Integrativeness was found to be the key component in their language learning motivation, which was linked to instrumentality and their attitudes towards L2 speakers and the L2 community. From these results, the three elements of the L2MSS theory emerged. The link with L2 native speakers and their culture was a surprising element of the results, as the Hungarian children did not have contact with people from those countries.

In the following decade, the theory was tested in a range of EFL contexts such as Chile (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013), Indonesia (Lamb, 2012), and Saudi Arabia (Moskovsky, Assulaimani, Racheva, & Harkins, 2016). In each of these studies, students were learning a language in their homelands with very little access to L2 speakers. Covering a range of countries and cultures, the main factors that influenced the correlation between the theory and achievement in these studies were students' geographical location (Lamb, 2012), social class (Kormos et al., 2013), and their level of English at the start of the study (Moskovsky et al., 2016)—that is, their learning experience. The learning experience influenced the participants' ability to clearly visualise and plan their future (*ideal L2 self*), which then influenced their achievement and motivation. Particularly from Lamb's (2012) work, it was clear that their learning experience had the largest effect on their motivation as their ability to plan for an *ideal L2 self* was also influenced.

2.3 | Motivation in adult ES(O)L

All the research mentioned thus far has been confined to the EFL context, mainly concerning teenagers or university students, which may be referred to as *elite multilingualism* (Ushioda, 2020). Therefore, this needs be contrasted with the experiences of adult ESOL students learning in English-dominant countries, who may experience vastly different challenges to their learning experience such as social exclusion, poverty, and discrimination (Ushioda, 2020, p. 62).

Since the turn of the century, there have been studies relating to the initial motivation of adults in the British context (Cooke, 2006; Matulionienė & Pundziuvienė, 2015; Rice, Udagawa, Thomson, & McGregor, 2008), garnering mixed results which seem dependent on the purpose of the course and the learners' level of English. This has been replicated in the U.S. context by

Warriner (2016), where the students' motivation was again influenced by the purpose of the course, in this instance to find employment.

As Cooke (2006), noted in her study of adult ESOL, the needs and stage of life of the students cannot be ignored by the teacher. Furthermore, research by Norton (2013), which focussed on migrant women in Canada, illustrated how much of an impact both their public and private identities had on their language learning motivation. Their positionality within their family and responsibilities as mothers, having all had children before arriving in Canada, influenced their relationship with both English and their first language (L1). Their learning experience was therefore not limited to the classroom but was present in every aspect of their lives, including a desire for a professional career.

The study reported on in this article aims to build on the research often referred to as *grassroots multilingualism* (Han, 2013), where learners face barriers which are absent in the EFL context. As highlighted by recent reviews of research into language learning motivation (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015; Ushioda, 2020), the majority of studies that have tested the theories of motivation in language learning have concentrated on the "elites" and used a quantitative approach. This study aims to explore the language learning motivation in an adult ESOL class using the L2MSS as an analytical framework to investigate how well this theory works in a "grassroots" context alongside a qualitative approach. Therefore, this research intends to fill both a knowledge gap and a theoretical gap whilst helping the teacher to learn more about the needs of her students.

The research aimed to obtain answers to the following questions:

RQ1: Why do adults join a multilevel ESOL class and what are the factors affecting their L2 motivation?

RQ2: How motivated are these students to learn English during their class?

RQ3: How motivated are these students to use English outside of the class?

3 | METHODOLOGY

A multi-method qualitative approach was utilised, incorporating classroom observations, self-plotted graphs for measuring language learning motivation, photographs, and semi-structured interviews.

The first three class visits occurred in May 2019 during class time. On the first two visits I conducted observations whilst the students completed motivation graphs (or motigraphs) tracking their motivation through the classes. Until now, motigraphs have mainly been used to plot motivation over a week or months or retrospectively whilst reflecting on a course of study (Chan, Dörnyei, & Henry, 2014; Selçuk & Erten, 2017). However, I wanted to discover whether they could be used across a lesson, in this instance over two and a half hours. The graph (Figure 1) was blank except for numbers 0, 5, and 10 on the *y*-axis to measure motivation levels and time on the *x*-axis. The number range on the *y*-axis was chosen for two reasons. First, zero represented no motivation at all so negative numbers were not appropriate or necessary. Second, the open spaces between the numbers illustrated the nonscientific nature of the chart. The levels did not need to be exact as they were not going to be quantified; instead, they were there to give an overall view of the participants' motivation and how it fluctuated or remained stable.
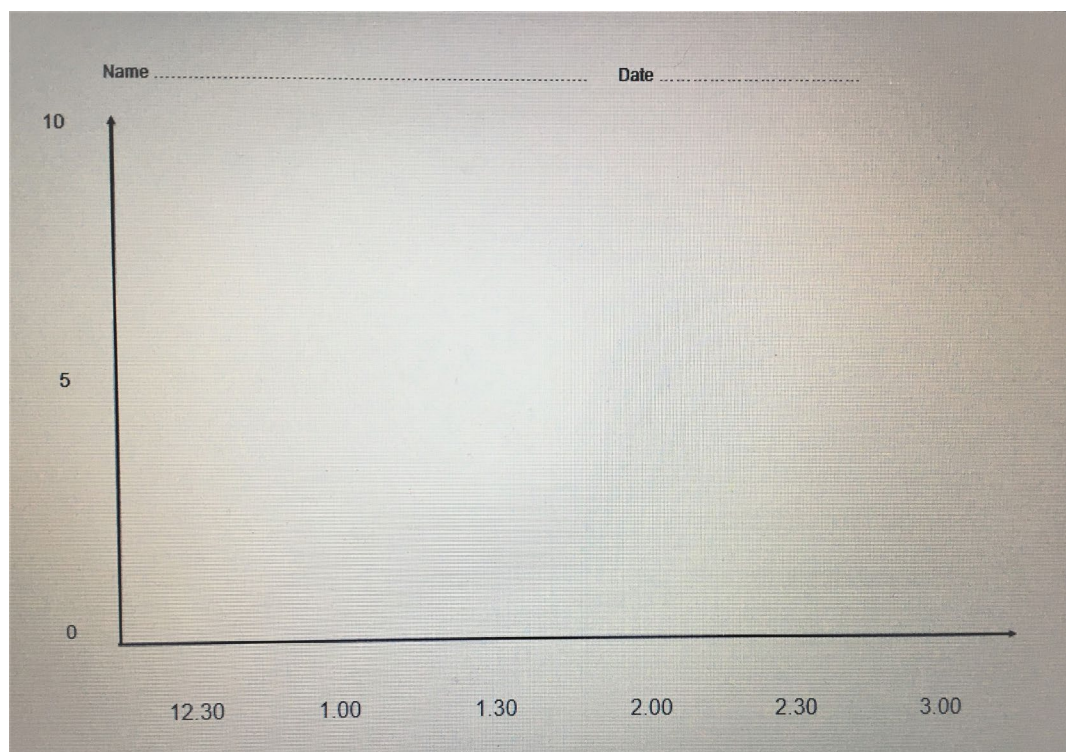
FIGURE 1 Motigraph template

The focus of the observations was the interactions between the teacher and the students and between the students themselves. Handwritten notes were added to a fieldwork diary along with photographs of the learning environment.

On the third visit, I conducted individual semi-structured student interviews, using the motigraphs as stimulated recall devices. As the classes finished at 3 pm, all the participants had to leave early or promptly to collect their children from school or creche; I was therefore unable to interview them immediately after class. The individual student interviews occurred a week later, which was another reason why a prompt, such as the motigraph, was required. The first teacher interview was conducted on 2nd May immediately after my first visit to the class, as she usually stayed in the building into the evening. A final visit was on 20th June where I organised a student focus group during class and a final, individual teacher interview after class. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by myself.

Inspired by the work of Harvey (2015), I included an element of multivocality to add to the rigour and transparency of my research (Tracy, 2010, p. 844), first by sharing the teacher interview transcripts with the teacher to check. Second, I produced vignettes for each student to check that I had understood their motivational concerns and strategies accurately during the interviews. Lastly, using the themes that emerged through interview analysis, I chaired a focus group of three student participants to discuss and further explore the learning strategies and levels of motivation apparent in the class. Again, this was semi-structured, using the dominant themes as topics to discuss.

The *small lens* approach (Ushioda, 2016) was taken to collect data because the overarching aim of this approach is "the desirability of a more sharply focused or contextualized

angle of inquiry" (2016, p. 6). By concentrating on a small number of participants in a specific learning environment, this approach is designed for qualitative studies into L2 motivation. Applying this approach to the research reported here, the focus is students' self-regulation of their language learning (Ushioda, 2016, p. 10), particularly how they deal with the challenges of a multilevel class environment in addition to navigating their daily lives in a new country.

The students in this class were chosen because the majority would be able to answer interview questions in English, as determined by their teacher. I was also assured that there were no safeguarding issues with any of these students and they were not deemed to be vulnerable. This was the only information I received about the participants before visiting the class, so no prior biases or expectations were developed. Written informed consent was collected at the start. Each participant was given an information leaflet which was explained to the students by both myself and the teacher, and participants were given the opportunity to ask questions. Participation was voluntary with participants able to leave the study at any point until the data were anonymised. No details were collected that could identify any of the participants to assure confidentiality and all names were changed.

The class in focus here was attended by students of three levels all with the typical spikey profiles of adult language learners—that is, their levels were not uniform across the four skills. The classroom itself was modern and well-equipped. There was an interactive whiteboard, students' computers around the edge of the room, and four large tables in the centre. Despite having only small windows at the back of the room, it was a bright and welcoming place to study.

Eight students completed motigraphs over the two lessons when I was present. From those, five students (Table 1) consented to be interviewed individually, in addition to the teacher. The students were all female, aged in their 30s and spoke English as either their second or third language (Table 1), which was also true for Tara who only appeared in the focus group interview. The levels I will refer to in this article are the ESOL levels used by the teacher and students in focus here and range from elementary to intermediate.

Attendance was very low during each of my visits. Of the 13 students still enrolled in the course, I only saw a maximum of 7 students on any one occasion and all the male students were either absent or were no longer enrolled. In total, 16 students had enrolled in September 2018 for the academic year, two of whom had never attended and one had withdrawn for reasons unknown. The teacher explained that the reasons for absence were work commitments, childcare responsibilities, and sickness.

TABLE 1 Interview participants

Participant	Country of Origin	Languages Spoken	Time in the UK	ESOL Level
Baljit	India	Punjabi	2 years	Entry 2 (Elementary)
Salima	Afghanistan	Farsi	8 years	Entry 3 (Pre-intermediate)
Marie	Burundi	Swahili and French	17 years	Level 1 (Intermediate)
Asma	Syria	Arabic	3 years	Level 1 (Intermediate)
Delal	Kurdistan	Kurdish	8 years	Entry 2 (Elementary)
Tara	Kurdistan	Kurdish	Unknown	Level 1 (Intermediate)

4 | FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The follow section will detail the analysis of my observations, the student and teacher interviews, and examples of the motigraphs produced. The research questions will be answered using the L2MSS theoretical framework, explaining factors affecting their motivation (RQ1), their in-class motivation (RQ2), and their use of English outside of the classroom (RQ3) across the three main theoretical categories. These will be subdivided into the themes which arose from the teacher and student interviews to add to the holistic nature of the analysis.

4.1 | L2 learning experience

4.1.1 | Prior language learning

The experience of learning English before enrolling on the ESOL course varied. Participants described learning some English in their home country before moving to England and studying in different ESOL courses before joining this class. All the participants had arrived in the United Kingdom seeking asylum, having fled war or persecution, or to join family members; they had not learned English at home with the purpose of moving to the United Kingdom or interacting with British people. Of the five who were interviewed individually, four spoke about returning to ESOL classes after maternity leave. Devoid of family support in this country, as women they were expected to stay at home to look after the children until they were old enough for childcare funding, as Salima explained:

> When I was pregnant, I stay at home, I forget English, that's why I need interpreter. That's why… before, it's two years, it's very big gap, 2016 to 2019 I stopped English, 2 years stopped and that's the problem, my English down, down, down. (Salima)

At school in Afghanistan, English had been her favourite subject and she had enrolled in an ESOL course at a local college as soon as she was able. However, without access to childcare or the opportunity to study at home, she acknowledged that her language level had been adversely affected.

In contrast, Baljit had been in the United Kingdom for a short time period (2 years) and had not learned English in India before migrating. A year after arriving, her teenage children joined her in Britain and enrolled at a local secondary school. This meant that, in contrast to her classmates, Baljit had not had a break from study and this was the start of her language learning experience.

4.1.2 | In-class strategies

During class, students either worked individually or in small groups, which resulted in the students' having a raised awareness of the levels they were working at and how they could support each other. This was explored in the interviews with the assistance of the motigraphs—for example, with Salima when I asked her to explain the decrease in her motivation at 1.30 pm (Figure 2):

Salima: When we do a new word and when I understand, I am happy … and I want to do more words, more grammar and to learn. When I don't understand, I get confused, I get tired…
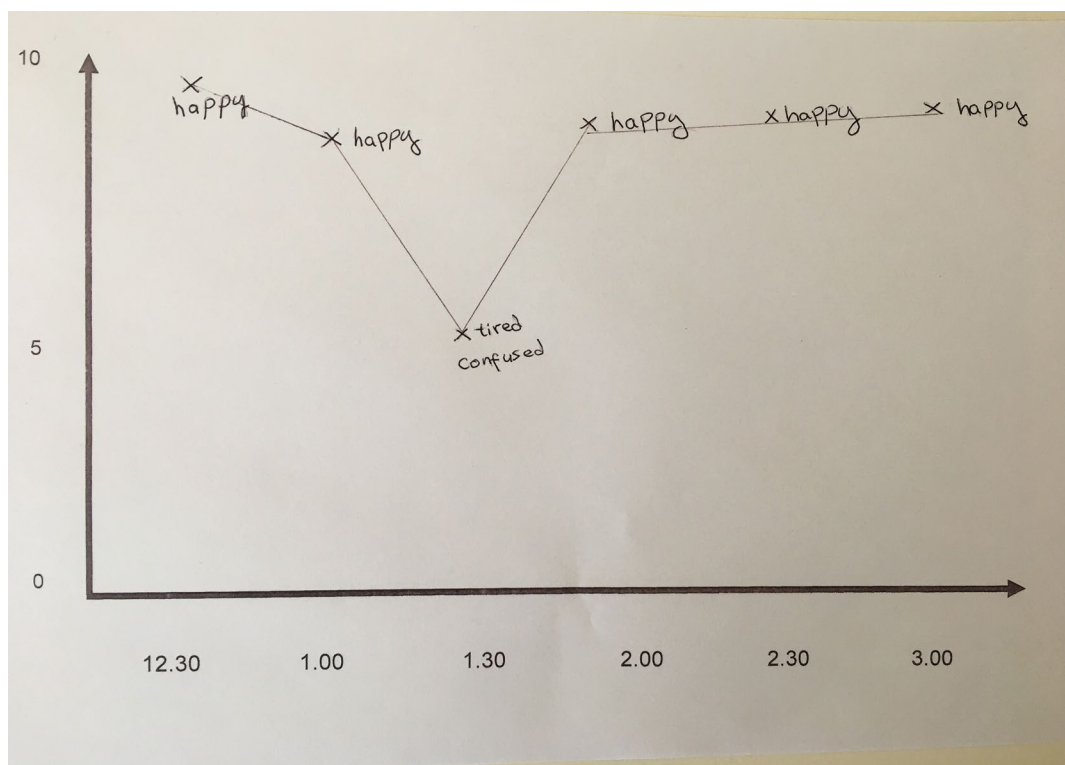
FIGURE 2 Motigraph Salima

K: So, if you are confused.

Salima: Yeah.

K: Do you ask for help?

Salima: Yeah. I want to ask from my partner, to help me, maybe my partner understand, maybe if my partner not understand I ask my teacher to understand and if I understand I get happy. (Salima interview)

This was something I observed during the classes: students did not request the teacher's assistance if they found something difficult during a task, they asked each other and awaited their teacher's return. As the teacher was constantly moving between the groups, the students did not have to wait long until they could check their work with her or ask for the next task.

In addition, there also seemed to be an awareness that, although they had been placed together by levels, they all had different strengths and no group was ever completely homogenous, as Delal explained:

We try sometimes, if some of the friends they are hard to understand because of their level of English you have to try using body language to help make everybody understand and sometimes we are in a group but we have to make sure we are all the same level and if one of us is not, we have to make sure we all understand. ... If not, that's when we can call the teacher for help. (Delal interview)

There was an apparent feeling of camaraderie amongst the students, all understanding their role in the class was to help their classmates whilst also being responsible for their own learning. In addition, there was acknowledgement of the level of work the teacher did to facilitate this type of learning, as mentioned by Asma in her interview and then again by others in the focus group:

K: And for you [Marie] do you enjoy being in a mixed level class or would you prefer to be in just one level?

Marie: I think so both is OK, it's alright, yeah … but sometimes, what I can say, one group sometimes is good because of the teacher. It's just one teacher and she have to go everywhere around, she really works hard.

Tara: She is good, yeah.

Marie: She works hard, teach three group and different levels, yeah … we are really happy but sometimes we feel sorry because she is really everywhere. (focus group)

This feeling of gratitude towards the teacher possibly had a positive effect on the levels of autonomy displayed by the students during class time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the teacher herself described the situation as "manic," constantly striving to keep track of the different tasks and worksheets the students completed at different levels. She explained, "you do need a plan, you need a good plan when you're dealing with these groups" (teacher interview) and often that plan had to be altered, depending on which students were present.

However, the stress the teacher described did not impact on the learners as negative washback and was neither expressed by the students nor observed in the classroom. The teacher acknowledged that although she was planning two or three lessons for each class, the result was "you do feel like you're catering for them more on an individual level" (teacher interview) and so meeting their individual needs. The students were grateful to be treated as adults with their complex lives and needs acknowledged, even if this meant progressing at a slower pace than they would do in a single-level class.

4.1.3 | Language use at home

The relationship the students had with English changed when they finished their classes and returned home. None of the participants regularly spoke English at home and ESOL homework was not prioritised. The notion that by living in a country a person will learn the language through immersion seems to be refuted in this situation, as there was a lack of both desire and opportunity to speak English outside the classroom. Asma expressed a fear of forgetting Arabic and others were scared that their children would only speak English, as conveyed by the three students in the focus group, as Tara described:

> When we go home, we don't speak English but children speak together English but we try them to not losing their mother tongue, you know? With Kurdish [people] I always speak our language and I haven't any English friends. At home we always speak Kurdish. We easily forget what we learn. (Tara, focus group)

This desire to maintain their L1 whilst in Britain seemed to be affecting both their English and that of their children. Asma described how her son speaks to her in a mix of Arabic and English,

often code-switching in mid-sentence. In the focus group, they discussed the gradual loss of their L1 as a negative effect of having to use English in everyday life:

Tara: We use English in the shops, with school teachers, every day this is why we lose small points of our language. Not too much.
Marie: Not too much, yeah. I talk to my mum "This one free," she says "What is 'free'?" [laughs]
K: You're mixing the two languages?
All: Yeah. [laugh]
Marie: Mixing together. Sometimes we're busy, we mix up, I mix up Swahili and English especially those words *busy*, free, those small, small words. I think some of them now understand what you mean because you always use those words. (focus group)

Marie had been in the United Kingdom for the longest time of the group (Table 1) and had taken breaks from ESOL classes to have four children. The loss of her L1 seemed more prevalent than for the other students who had not been in the country as long.

4.1.4 | Tiredness

The final theme in this section was tiredness, seemingly caused by outside factors such as work and Ramadan fasting rather than the class itself. When asked about her decline in motivation at 1.30 pm (Figure 3), for Asma it was not because she was struggling with the classwork like Salima (Figure 2) but for religious reasons:

I am tired here [1.30 pm] because I am fasting ... I need some water, but I didn't because I am fasting, but after break I am happy because I relaxed for 15 minutes, that's fine. (Asma interview)

Studying in a country with a different culture or national religion can present extra difficulties or barriers to learning for ESOL students. Maintaining traditions whilst following the cultural norms of their new home can be challenging, but in the case of Asma seemingly still achievable when motivated to learn.

Finally, the benefits of class break time were expressed by almost all the participants, for a variety of reasons. For the Level 1 students, it was a chance to speak freely on any topic of their choosing and for others it was a time to rest as they had not eaten. Baljit had worked a night shift and was both sleep-deprived and hungry so the break was a chance to eat some fruit and rest. Despite this tiredness, they continued to regularly attend the class and fully participate, dutifully following the class rules.

4.2 | Ought-to L2 self

4.2.1 | Motherhood

All the participants mentioned their children in relation to language learning without any prompting, which led me to believe that this was an important factor shaping their motivation. Although the participants expressed a reluctance to speak English at home as explained above,
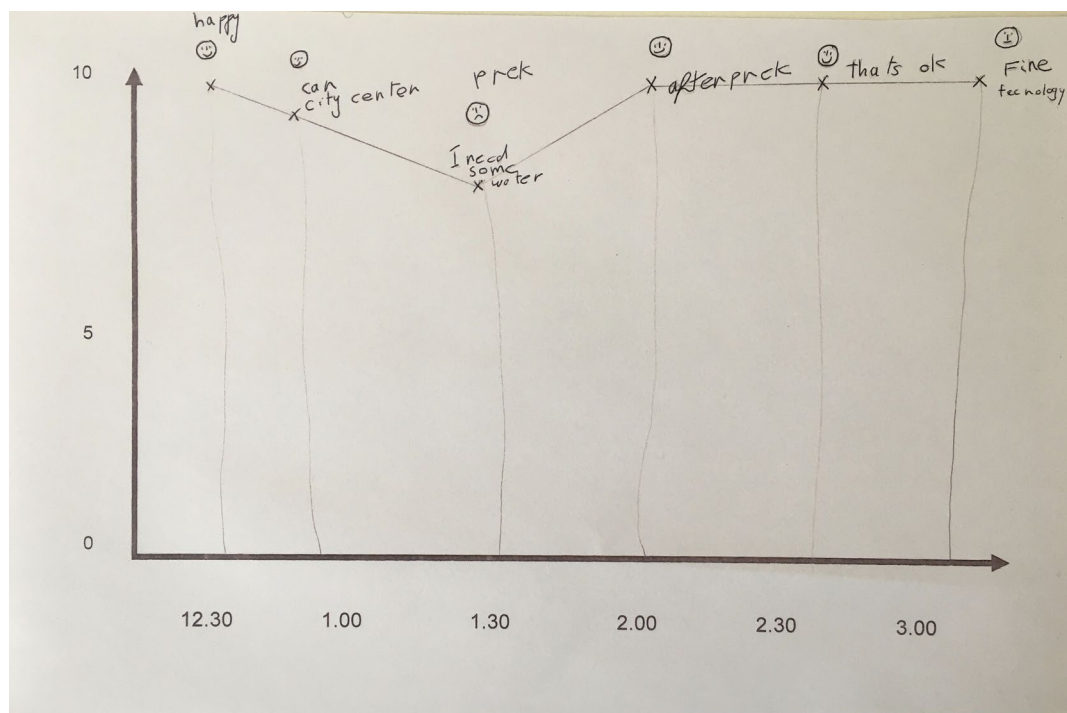
FIGURE 3 Asma Motigraph

one of the main external pressures to learn or improve their level of English seemed to come directly from the students' own children. This was illustrated when I asked Asma whether she spoke English at home:

Asma: At my home, no, Arabic [laughs]

K: Just Arabic?

Asma: Just Arabic yeah but my sons now speak English at my home, yeah.

K: How old are they?

Asma: Year 6 and year 4 and my daughter I put her in a creche, age 2 years now, speak English. I ask her in Arabic "You want to sleep?" she says "No, English, speak with me English!"

K: Oh! Wow.

Asma: Yesterday she says she saw a banana on the table, she say to me "Banana! Banana!" not *muz*, in Arabic *muz*, in English *banana*. She tell me "I want banana, banana!" [laughs] speak English from crèche. (Asma interview)

Their role as mothers, which was a theme for all the students I interviewed, was one of the reasons they joined the ESOL class. Their children are learning English at school and nursery and insist on their mother speaking the same language as everyone else in their lives.

This was further expressed through the participants' wish to be a good parent, being able to aid their children with schoolwork and exams, as Marie explained in her interview:

For me, I really spend most of my time with my kids, my children yeah. Homework and erm ... just trying to support them because they are learning. I did have a very

big challenge because my daughter, she is in year 6 and she was preparing her 11 Plus. That was really hard for me and it was hard work but she did it and she made it. (Marie interview)

Similarly, another student described helping her daughter through the SAT exams. Helping their children to realise their academic potential seemed to be more important than their own achievements in the ESOL class, as discussed in the next theme.

4.2.2 | ESOL exams

The theme of exams was far more prevalent in the teacher's interview than in any of the student interviews. For the teacher, the complexity of preparing three levels of students for three different exams (Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening) came across in her interview as one of her main concerns:

So you sort of think, oh it's nearly half term and 6 weeks left but you don't, you think panic, how on earth can I get these students through these exams. (Teacher interview)

The students themselves seemed to have a more pragmatic attitude towards achievement and did not feel the same pressure. Exams were not mentioned in the classes I observed, except when the teacher occasionally referred to future practice tests. The need for a certificate was mentioned by Baljit in her interview and so I explored this theme further in the focus group.

The students in the focus group had a good grasp of the levels they were studying at and of their likely achievements that year and felt the teacher was supporting them. The huge difference between the entry levels and Level 1 was evident, perhaps because the three levels were together and open to comparison. Tara, for example, had completed Entry 3 exams on a previous course and was now working at Level 1. She explained how the change in levels was shaping her confidence:

The course different, everything is different. Very high level and I think we stay there [laughs] for all my life I stay there! I can't pass it. [laughs] (Tara, focus group)

The students knew they should pass exams at some point in the future but there was no urgency to achieve anything specific. This *ought-to L2 self* was being guided by the teacher, encouraging them to achieve at their own pace, in order to move along the ESOL levels. The students I observed did not directly ask to take the exams but anyone who passed a practice test was encouraged to do the real exam.

In my final visit to the class I assisted the teacher with preparation for the Level 1 speaking exam and observed how keen the students were to not only take the test but perform well. Even those who were not taking the exam were still attending at this point, working on other skills to improve their English.

4.3 | Ideal L2 self

4.3.1 | Independence

The internal desire for the participants to be able to live their lives without help from others was described through the theme of independence. Using English outside of the classroom in their daily lives without an interpreter was important for the participants, as Salima explained:

> Because I live in England, this is important to learn and I want to do my problem myself ...when I go to hospital, to GP, I need to do by myself, yeah. When I make appointment, now, before I couldn't do that but now I can do that, (Salima interview)

Although she is already achieving aspects of independence, she still does not have enough confidence to go to every appointment on her own and, for example, relied on an interpreter when she saw a midwife.

In addition, Asma talked about learning to drive in the United Kingdom, something she had not had the opportunity to do at home in Syria. Her ESOL course had provided her with enough English to take driving lessons and the theory test in English. She had enough confidence to bring aspects of this topic into her classwork—for example, during a discussion on technology she spoke about GPS devices.

These plans for independence seemed to describe an *ideal L2 self* that was achievable for all the participants soon, perhaps even being achieved in the present.

4.3.2 | Future career

For each of the participants, the idea of a future career that they could choose rather than a job that they had to do was quite far detached from their everyday thinking. For some participants it was a theme that I asked them about directly as a possible reason for learning English. Their parental responsibilities, coupled with a lack of ESOL qualifications, meant this was not a motivational force. However, they were all able to think of a career they might like to pursue but these were not clearly set-out plans, even for those who had a professional qualification:

Marie: I have my diploma in Health and Social Care, which is a really long time I did that. The problem is, it's really busy work and it's not going to allow me to ... my children you know, I really want them to have a good level, grades. It is really hard for me to mix up work and four children.
K: Yeah.
Marie: But I'm hoping in the future to be something. (Marie interview)

Baljit was the only one of the six who was employed, working night shifts at a local warehouse. At home in India she had worked as a seamstress, and although she was unable to continue this work whilst in Britain her work ethic had not diminished. She could see how learning English could improve her job prospects but was realistic about what her circumstances would allow:

Baljit: Very, very busy. Two day coming very hard but I like it [the class] because ... I ...my ... good speak good English, good English because I need better job, yeah ...

K: What type of job would you like?

Baljit: Like teacher [laughs] but I am no good English. [laughs] I like the er [pause] you know store ... store assistant? (Baljit interview)

None of the students expressed plans for living an ideal life with the career of their choice. They seemed to view English as a link to a possible career or an opportunity to gain employment once their children had grown up. As adults in their thirties, they were dealing with the issues of everyday life as immigrants whilst learning a new language and helping their children. Lowering their own expectations when it came to a future career appeared to be the norm in this situation, according to these participants.

5 | DISCUSSION

This study investigated the language learning motivation of women learning English in a multilevel class in England. The focus was on their reasons for learning and their motivation to use English in and out of the classroom, using the L2MSS as a theoretical framework for analysis. For the students in focus here, their learning experience in the present was far more important than a future they could not yet plan. In addition, their responsibilities as parents provided an *ought-to L2 self*, which was having both a positive and negative effect on their learning. The answers to the research questions will be discussed further here, beginning with their in-class motivation.

5.1 | Motivation in the classroom (RQ2)

In class, the self-awareness of the participants, coupled with an understanding of their classmates and the teacher's dedication to their learning, had created an atmosphere of support. They helped others enthusiastically, working in small groups to explain language points and practise together.

The students were confident that the teacher understood their individual needs, both in and out of the classroom, and they were treated with respect, as adult learners. This finding supports Cooke (2006) who found that students who were not treated in such a way were likely to become demotivated. The teacher's dedication to the class, preparing two or three different lessons to cover the different levels, served to increase the students' motivation to both attend and work hard in class. The students expressed their appreciation for her, acknowledging the challenging job she had as a multilevel class teacher.

Using the break time to converse, friendships were established through the sharing of ideas and opinions. There was an awareness of them all being mothers, in their thirties, with similar responsibilities despite coming from different countries and cultural backgrounds. Nobody was excluded; they looked after each other and celebrated achievements.

5.2 | Language learning motivation in everyday life (RQ3)

Away from the classroom was a different scenario, as levels of engagement with the language often decreased. The students saw the benefit of improving their levels of English for their daily

lives but there was a hesitancy to practise, drawing similarities with the migrant mothers in Norton (2013).

The participants did not have English friends and did not meet their classmates outside class time. The one student who was employed (Baljit) rarely spoke English at work as it was not required. Their opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom seemed to be confined to speaking to their children and short interactions in shops or with the doctor. It was not clear whether this restriction was self-imposed by a lack of confidence to meet local people or whether they preferred to spend their time with people from their home countries.

Furthermore, many of the participants expressed fear, either of forgetting their first language or of their children not learning their L1 and its culture, confirming the study by Mathews-Aydinli (2008, p. 205). Living in the present, the participants were able to compartmentalise their lives and the languages they used. Despite appearing highly motivated in class (Figures 2 and 3), this did not continue at home. The effect of this, coupled with tiredness, seemed to result in a slow pace of learning; as Tara admitted, "we easily forget what we learn."

5.3 | Possible future selves (RQ1)

The motivation for these participants to learn the language was the ability to use English when required in their daily lives. Some students were able to complete tasks without a translator and the idea of an independent L2 future self was already being achieved.

The external demands to learn English seemed to stem from their children and, less prevalently, the ESOL exam system into which they had unknowingly enrolled. Despite speaking their L1 at home and teaching their children about their heritage, their children were seemingly rebelling against this by refusing to speak their parents' language. Even a child as young as two was telling her mother to speak English (Asma). The participants explained that their motivation to learn English was to help their children with schoolwork, yet this clashed with their desire for their children to speak their L1. They were in the class for their children. Whether this was to please them by being able to communicate in English or so they could help their children with schoolwork, or both, these were clear motivational factors.

This can be compared to the usual *ought-to L2 self*, expressed by more traditional language learning motivation studies in the EFL context, where parents are pressuring the children to learn English, such as in the study by Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009). For these female ESOL students, the parent–child relationship seems to be reversed with pressure coming from the opposite direction. Often, when parents pressurise their children, there can be feelings of resentment which transfer over to the relationship with the language. My participants did not express this emotion, but rather fear of losing their L1 as it was being erased by English.

In the L2MSS, Dörnyei suggested a list of five subcategories of learning experience—school context, syllabus and the teaching materials, learning tasks, one's peers, and one's teacher (2019, p. 25). I would like to propose an addition to this list for the adult language learning context. Following the findings of this study, I believe *language use at home* could be included as a sixth element. Language learning does not start and finish in the classroom, especially for those living in an L2 environment, and this is not restricted to England; there are displaced adults all over the world learning the language of their new home.

6 | CONCLUSION

Overall, the learners in this study were highly motivated in the classroom, rarely relying on the teacher to complete tasks, and always willing to help their classmates. The mix of levels did not seem to impede their ability to achieve in the long term but rather it moved at a suitable pace. However, the ability to prioritise language learning outside class, alongside conceptualising an *ideal L2 self*, may continue to be difficult until their children have matured. The course expectations of students passing exams and progressing through the ESOL levels does not match the students' motivations. Exams are not the priority for learners in this context and may even serve as demotivation. An alternative measure of progression, matched to the immediate goals and socioemotional needs of the learners is required here, such as individual learning plans written by the students with their teachers, instead of an external exam board.

Whilst we await such a change, a strategy for teachers in this situation could be to provide supported opportunities to practise English outside of class, such as class trips, voluntary work placements, and access to other part-time courses that also provide childcare. If possible, a talk from a past student who was in a similar situation and is now realising their dreams, could be a source of inspiration and motivation for this type of group. If students can visualise a future where they are bilingual, having retained their L1 and its culture, they may be more open to using English in their daily lives.

7 | THE AUTHOR

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