

GFL



German as a foreign language

“I imagine myself in the future speaking German”.
What motivates university students in Australia to
learn German over time?

Giuseppe D’Orazzi, Heinz L. Kretzenbacher & John Hajek, Melbourne

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German has been at the centre of several recent studies on language learning motivation in Australia (e.g. D’Orazzi 2020a; Schmidt 2014) and elsewhere (e.g. Ammon 2020; Busse 2013; Riemer 2011). This study focuses on exploring motivation and changes in its component parts that students may experience when learning German at beginner level over two semesters at Australian universities. It does so by means of a three-dimensional (micro-meso-macro) framework proposed by D’Orazzi (2020a) who draws upon similar three-level models of analysis designed by the Douglas Fir Group (2016), Gayton (2018) and Gruba et al. (2016).

Quantitative and qualitative methods are utilised to analyse data collected over time by means of two online questionnaires and two rounds of interviews. This longitudinal approach allows us to trace the nature and extent of changes in students’ motivation over one year of studies and compare our outcomes with previous research on motivation in learning German at Australian universities (e.g. Schmidt 2011). The complex inter-connection of motivational components shared by research participants allows to offer an updated overview of university students’ understanding and experience of German learning.

1. Introduction

For many observers, German appears to be a useful language to learn worldwide due to the economic power of Germany and the considerable international influence of its government (see, e.g., Riemer 2011, 2016). The positive global image created around Germany as a country has strengthened over recent decades. The importance of its economy has, for instance, been reported to influence students’ decisions to learn this language and sustain their motivation along (cf. Ammon 2020; Amorati 2019; Busse 2013; Riemer 2016; Schmidt 2011). Nevertheless, Kretzenbacher (2011: 40) observes that “the teaching of German as a Foreign Language (GFL) has declined dramatically world-wide” based on a statistical overview over the period 1995 to 2010. In this context of different trends and observations, our study strives to understand in some detail what motivates students to persist over time with the learning of German at university level in Australia.

With this research on German second language acquisition, we intend also to identify not only the psychological or internal dynamics experienced by students when deciding

to learn German, but also which elements outside and beyond the classroom context trigger students' interest in learning a second language (L2) (see Crookes & Schmidt 1991). The social nature of learning an L2 has been at the centre of numerous studies which explore the social trends affecting student motivation in a particular social setting and at one point in time (see, e.g., McNamara 2011; Norton Peirce 1995; Ushioda 2009, 2017). This study considers multiple external components which shape student motivation in learning L2s and assesses their interconnection with psychological and cognitive reactions belonging to the learner's internalisation of a large amount of information such as a language system. At the same time, by paying close attention to emotions and internal reactions to the L2 learning process, it follows studies by Dewaele (2011), Dörnyei (2005, 2009b) and Ryan (2020) who recognise the importance of learners' individual differences and psychological traits when learning L2s.

The complexity of internal and external forces which concurrently operate when learning an L2 is taken into account in recent studies on complex dynamic systems which highlight the intricate and dynamic nature of L2 learning and specifically of L2 learning motivation (cf. Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008; Papi & Hiver 2020). For the purposes of our study, we adopt a three-level framework which allows us to analyse multiple variables while avoiding a positioning of our research within a complex dynamic systems approach whose theoretical nature has been identified as problematic in other research on L2 learning motivation (see, e.g., Dörnyei 2014; Ortega & Han 2017).

Previously, the Douglas Fir Group (2016), Gayton (2018) and Gruba et al. (2016) have also attempted to structure the analysis of language learning and teaching dynamics within a three-level micro-meso-macro model. These studies have in common the understanding of the micro level of analysis as the individual learning activity and cognitive mechanisms within a learning environment, while their macro level is oriented toward the broader society including ideological and institutional structures which directly and/or indirectly influence learners' perception of their learning process. However, the meso level of analysis is conceived in quite different ways: The Douglas Fir Group (2016) frame it as the level of communities and institutions; Gayton (2018) focuses on the home and school spheres of influences; Gruba et al. (2016) focus on the agency of teachers and language departments in the learning dynamics.

Our model aims to combine components of the three studies and integrate them into the analysis of the outcomes of a larger study conducted by D'Orazzi (2020a). Through

detailed statistical analysis he was able to link three levels of analysis to corresponding factors detected via a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) in the survey responses provided in 2018 by 719 students of different European languages (see appendix one). The factors identified for this study were also found to be strongly connected to each other in dynamic and multidirectional ways as shown in figure one, whereby the micro level interacts with the meso level and both micro and meso levels are embedded in the broader macro level (see also D’Orazi & Hajek 2021). Within this structure, ten categories of motivators are identified – split across the three levels, as described below.

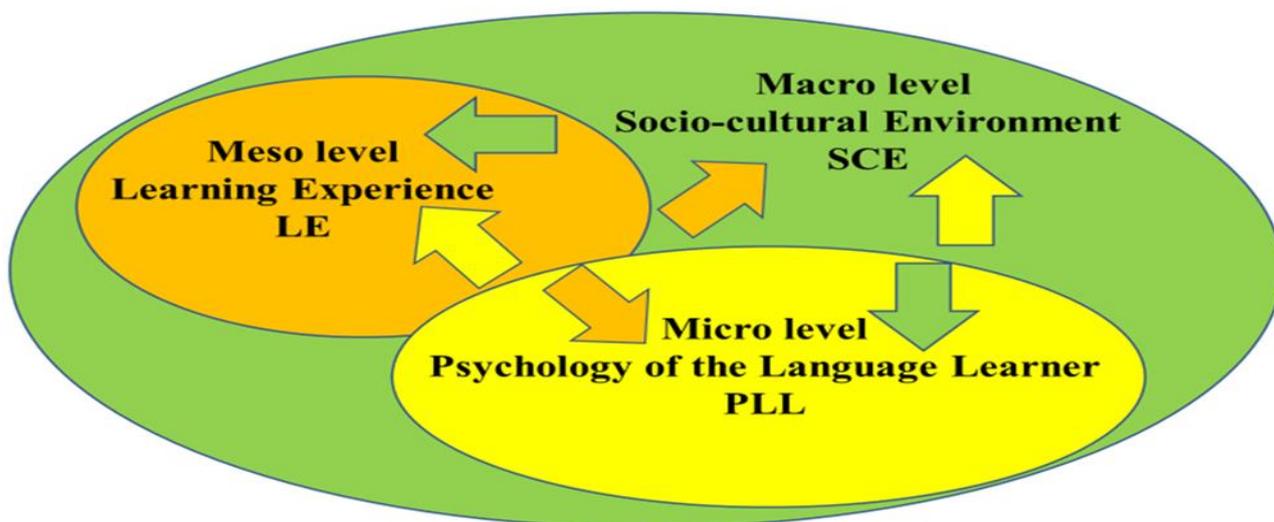


Fig. 1: A three-level model for the analysis of motivation and demotivation in learning L2s.

1.1 The micro level

Following Dörnyei (2005), the micro level is identified as ‘**the Psychology of the Language Learner**’ (PLL) since it captures learners’ internal psychological and cognitive responses to the stimuli received in a formal learning environment and in their society (see also Dörnyei 2009b; Ryan 2020). Drawing on previous research on motivation, the PLL factor is made up of four categories of motivators: ‘Intrinsic motivation’ (Deci & Ryan 1985), ‘ideal L2 self’ (Dörnyei 2009a), ‘integrative orientation’ (Gardner 2001) and ‘students’ performance’ (cf. Ryan 2020). It corresponds to what the PCA conducted in D’Orazi (2020a) identified as factor two (see appendix one for the results of the PCA).

1.2 The meso level

While a large number of studies on L2 learning motivation focus on the internalized ‘ideal L2 self’ (the image learners construct of themselves as future L2 speakers) and the ‘ought-to L2 self’ (the image as a future L2 speaker developed by people around the

learner) (Boo et al. 2015), Dörnyei (2019) states that not much attention has been given to the formal learning environment in studies on L2 learning motivation, making the ‘learning experience’ the ‘Cinderella’ of the L2 Motivational Self System (see also D’Orazzi 2022). To address this gap, our meso level of analysis includes motivators experienced by students in the classroom and university environment. The meso-level factor corresponds to factor one found with the PCA by D’Orazzi (2020a). Given its strong components’ (Dörnyei 1998) and the ‘university context’ – ‘school connection to the formal learning environment, this factor has been labelled the **‘Learning Experience’ (LE)** (see also Csizér 2020). The LE also encompasses Dörnyei’s (1998) previous constructs such as ‘teacher-specific motivational components’, ‘course-specific motivational context’ in Dörnyei (2019).

1.3 The macro level

We consider the L2 learner as a member of the society in which they live rather than an isolated individual. Following post-structuralist theories (see McNamara 2011; Norton 2013) and Ushioda’s (2009) ‘person-in-context’ construct, the macro level of analysis corresponds to factors three and four that were found via the PCA by D’Orazzi (2020a). Further statistical analysis allowed us to merge factors three and four into one single factor called the **‘Socio-cultural Environment’ (SCE)**. The SCE incorporates three categories of motivators: ‘ought-to L2 self’ (Dörnyei 2009a), ‘instrumental orientation’ (Gardner 2001) and our own category of ‘contextual components’.

This three-level model of analysis is intended to provide a structure to the data analysis and clear answers to the following research questions:

1. Which motivators within this model drive German students in their learning process at university?
2. How does learning over time contribute to changing beginner students’ motivation to continue with German?

2. Literature review of research on L2 motivation amongst university learners of German

There have been a number of studies, applying various different approaches and methodologies, in recent decades on L2 German motivation at tertiary level. In Australia, the largest study on motivation for learning German at university was conducted by Schmidt (2011). Previously Ammon (1991) and Petersen (1993) have also reported on

the state of tertiary German language education in Australia, something which has also been done more recently by Kretzenbacher (2010, 2011) and Schmidt (2015).

Schmidt (2011) bases her study on a survey of 520 beginner and intermediate students enrolled in ten Australian universities. Statistical analysis helped her uncover three main factors influencing students' motivation in learning German: "A general interest in the German language and culture paired with a joy and an appreciation of learning languages, the wish to communicate in a German-speaking country while working, studying or travelling, and German being considered as an important (business) language that could bring professional advantages" (Schmidt 2011: 110).

More recently, Martín et al.'s (2016) analysis explores the motivation of 83 learners of German as part of a study with 1,283 students of 16 different L2s at the Australian National University in Canberra. Their distinction between committed students, quitters and doubters suggests that motivated students – not exclusively German students – enjoyed their learning process, received high marks, benefitted from an encouraging environment both within their classroom and socio-cultural context.

Similarly to Schmidt (2011, 2014), Amorati (2019) highlights how the desire to travel to German-speaking countries and to know more about their culture(s) boosted the motivation of his sample of 88 Australian L2 German students at different levels of proficiency – all of whom were at the University of Melbourne. He defines the image of German among these students as "a European language of culture associated with enhanced career prospects and with a rich culture and history" (Amorati 2019: 271).

Elsewhere in the world, Busse & Williams (2010), Busse (2013) and Busse & Walter (2013) investigated university learners' motivation in studying German in the UK. Quantitative and qualitative data collected by these three researchers indicate that students were intrinsically motivated and aimed to achieve fluency in German which correlated with students' self-efficacy and also students' vision of a new competent German-speaking self. These three studies demonstrate that the 'macro-context' in a monolingual society such as the one in the UK influences students' motivation when learning German, given the commonly shared student experience of a lack of opportunities to practice German. Students also encountered some difficulties when dealing with "translation tasks, explicit grammar tuitions and writing practice: (Busse & Walter 2013: 442).

A very different context has been analysed by Okuniewski (2014), who administered a questionnaire to 121 university students learning German in Poland. She discovered that female students were slightly more motivated than male students in terms of motivational intensity, integrative orientation (specifically their intention to travel to German-speaking countries) and attitude towards the L2 learning experience. In contrast, students irrespective of their gender shared the same levels of anxiety, parents' encouragement, cultural interest and desire to learn German.

Huang et al. (2015) received 135 responses to a questionnaire administered at a college in Taiwan, where students were learning German as additional second language – after English. Quantitative analysis suggested that students were strongly motivated by the 'ought-to L2 self' which was closely connected to the instrumental use of German for students' future career prospects. Cultural interest was also a dominant motivator that emerged from their research.

Riemer recognises the international prestige that the German language enjoys in industries such as the media, education, international business, scientific and academic communication (2016: 33), but also tourism, interpreting and translation (2016: 40). In her analysis of German as a communication tool, she also highlights the important role of educational organisations, such as the *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (DAAD – German Academic Exchange Service) and the *Goethe-Institut*, as well as of German schools in disseminating German language and culture. These elements were also found by Riemer (2006) in her earlier study to be important motivators for students learning German in countries neighbouring Germany (180 participants across five countries) as well as geographically more remote countries (284 participants across five countries). In that study, Riemer offers an overview over the main motivators at different levels of schooling – not only at university level – for each of the countries studied.

Furthermore, Ammon (2020) throws light on the influential role on student motivation of the success of German-speaking countries in the world economy, confirming the outcome of previous studies such as Riemer's (2016). In addition, Ammon links the motivation of students to learn German to the presence of German-speaking communities in multiple countries, including Australia. In Australia, several studies focus on the implications of having German-speaking communities on students' motivation since they benefit from a certain level of exposure to cultural elements of German-speaking countries (Leal et al. 1991; Kretzenbacher 2010, 2011; Petersen 1993; Schmidt 2015;

Schüpbach 2008). However, one evident gap in the existing literature on L2 German motivation at university level is longitudinal research: Does motivation change over time and, if so, how? This is something we aim to address in this study.

3. Research design and methodology

Lamb et al. (2020: 13) confirm that motivation in learning an L2 is “an interdisciplinary paradigm that draws on the conceptual domains of social and educational psychology as a means of explaining language learners’ behaviours and orientations”. Accordingly, we adopted mixed methods to conduct longitudinal research over semester one (S1) and semester two (S2) in 2018, and considered different components of L2 learning motivation beyond the widely accepted psychological approach, e.g., the ‘L2 Motivational Self System’ (Dörnyei 2009a). The application of a three-level model to the design of the research tools for this study led to the inclusion of variables belonging to different disciplines such as psychology, L2 education and sociology.

Quantitative data were collected via two online questionnaires inspired by Oakes’s (2013) and Busse & Williams’s (2010) Likert scale questionnaires on motivation, and Sakai & Kikuchi’s (2009) questionnaire on demotivation. As noted in the introduction, the questionnaire encompasses ten different categories of motivators. In order to include all these categories of motivators, several additional questions have been formulated by the authors, resulting in a total of 51 items (D’Orazi, 2020a). Following Schmidt’s (2011) quantitative research, survey results are calculated using the mean of the answers given through a Likert scale, ranging from the value 1 – which corresponds to the answer ‘*strongly agree*’, to the value 5 – which refers to the answer ‘*strongly disagree*’. In addition, 24 (in S1) and 17 (in S2) multiple-choice questions were introduced to elicit demographic information from participants. Both online questionnaires also include four (in S1) and six (in S2) open-ended survey questions. Figure two shows the two questions selected for this study which exclusively focus on German students’ motivational trajectories over time.

Semester	Open-ended survey question (SQ)
Semester 1	SQ1. Please list the three main reasons why you wish to continue learning German at university in the future.
Semester 2	SQ2. Please list the main positive aspect in learning German during this semester.

Fig. 2: Open-ended survey questions appearing in the two questionnaires.

For the purposes of this article, the answers to the two questionnaires provided by 176 (in semester 1 [S1]) and 57 (in semester 2 [S2]) beginner level students of German are analysed. Detailed interviews conducted with nine (in S1) and seven (in S2) German students at the end of each semester supported the analysis of survey data. Although the second questionnaire was sent to all 176 respondents to the first questionnaire, the lower number of research participants in the second phase of this study suggests that some of them lost interest in participating in this research while others discontinued their German learning journey at university. Only 14 students replied to a question proposed at the beginning of the second questionnaire, which asked them to indicate the reasons why they did not enrol into a German subject for a second semester. Based on Schmidt's (2014) methodology, interviews were designed to comment and expand on the survey results and give students more time and space to express their motivation and attitudes towards the German learning process.

Qualitative data collected via questionnaires and interviews were at the centre of a thematic content analysis undertaken with the software *NVivo 12*, which permitted the researchers to organise students' responses based on the factors and categories of motivators detected with quantitative data analysis (see Bazeley & Jackson 2013). Answers to survey questions were quantified while interview narratives were used to integrate the analysis of survey data. Only the first main responses to SQ1 were analysed in order to guarantee consistency with the analysis of responses provided to SQ2.

Research participants were enrolled at a range of Australian universities where they could choose from a variety of languages available to them, ranging from Japanese to French and from Indonesian to Spanish. The majority were below 25 years of age (91.5% in S1 and 91.2% in S2), female (62.5% in S1 and 70.2% in S2), English native speakers (80.7% in S1 and 87.7% in S2) and domestic students (83% in S1 and 93% in S2). Among these students, 14 (in S1) and five (in S2) of them had a German-speaking country cultural heritage. A large portion of participants had chosen German as an optional/elective subject at university (59.1% in S1 and 43.9% in S2). German was a compulsory subject only for those students who chose this language as their major or minor within their degree, including the Diploma in Languages (36.3% in S1 and 54.4% in S2). In the first semester only, students were also asked to provide more details about their enrolment at university: A majority were first-year undergraduate (61.9%) and non-Arts (62.5%) students. Many students also appeared to have been exposed to L2

learning experience before starting to study German at university (85.8%) – the majority of these also declaring they had had a ‘good’ (33%) or ‘very good’ (21%) experience.

4. Findings – Motivational trajectories over one year of studies

4.1 Quantitative trajectories

In this section, we investigate the main motivators that boosted students’ interest in studying German over one year of German studies at beginner level, analysing quantitative data from the two online questionnaires described in previous sections. Mean and standard deviations for (a) the three levels of analysis and (b) the ten categories of motivators are analysed to explore which motivators stimulated students’ interest in continuing to learn German.

Despite the number of studies which indicate that German is a language learnt to aspire to lucrative jobs, a general analysis of the mean values for the three factors considered for this analysis suggests that the micro-level ‘Psychology of the Language Learner’ (PLL) factor motivated most of the research participants who *strongly agreed* (value 1 in a range of values from 1 to 5) or *agreed* (value 2) with the Likert scale items proposed in the two questionnaires mentioned above (see Fig. 3).

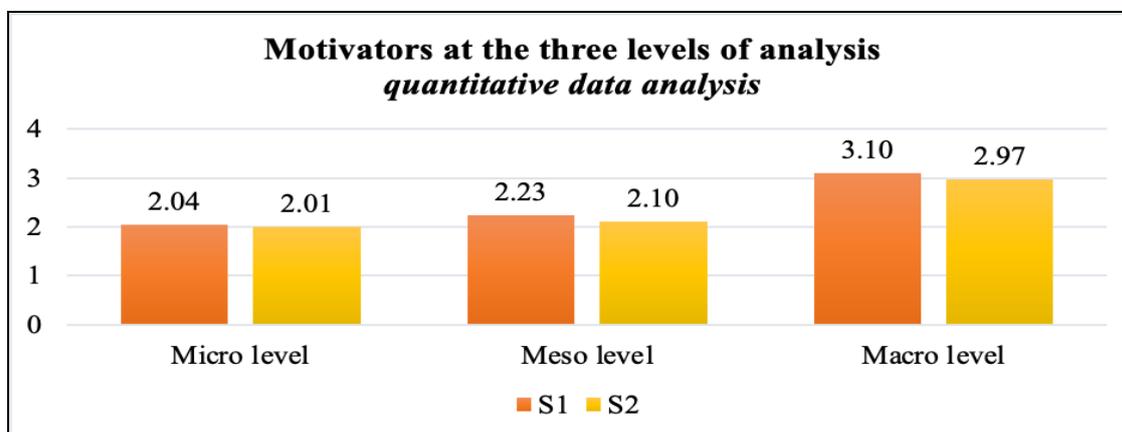


Fig. 3: Mean values for the three factors in the two semesters under consideration (number of student participants: 176 [S1], 57 [S2]).

While students’ motivation in terms of psychological and cognitive reactions to the learning process shifted only marginally during the whole year under study ($M = 2.04$ in S1 and 2.01 in S2), their motivation related to the dynamics experienced within the meso-level formal learning environment improved noticeably over time ($M = 2.23$ in S1 and 2.10 in S2 for the factor ‘Learning Experience’ – LE) as students’ classroom

exposure increased. Interestingly, the range of responses provided by students pertaining to the LE became wider in the second semester seen in the increased standard deviation value ($SD = 0,49$ in S1 and 0.62 in S2). This indicates that learning experiences varied more as students started to increase their use of German in their classes. Despite a similar positive shift, the much higher means ($M = 3.10$ in S1 and 2.97 in S2) indicate that the macro-level ‘Socio-Cultural Environment’ (SCE) factor is not particularly motivating for research participants in either semester.

More detailed factor-internal analysis confirms that ‘intrinsic motivation’ (within PLL) as well as ‘teacher-specific motivational components’ (within LE) most strongly and steadily motivated students during the whole year under study as seen in table one.

Levels	Factors & their categories of motivators	Motivation in S1		Motivation in S2	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	PLL factor	2.04	0.50	2.01	0.52
Micro level	Intrinsic motivation	1.91	0.62	1.91	0.59
	Integrative orientation	2.02	0.61	1.98	0.71
	Ideal L2 self	2.02	0.71	1.96	0.65
	Student’s performance	2.20	0.60	2.20	0.62
	LE factor	2.23	0.49	2.10	0.62
Meso level	Teacher-specific motivational components	1.93	0.51	1.93	0.74
	Course-specific motivational components	2.14	0.50	1.96	0.61
	University context	2.63	0.71	2.42	0.75
	SCE factor	3.10	0.52	2.97	0.47
Macro level	Instrumental orientation	2.26	0.54	2.29	0.56
	Contextual components	3.48	0.64	3.26	0.62
	Ought-to L2 self	3.56	0.92	3.36	0.95

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of the three factors (and ten internal categories within them) utilised in this research (number of student participants: 176 [S1], 57 [S2]) Lower means signify stronger impact of motivation factors being perceived by the cohort.

Motivation was also found to be strongly fostered by ‘integrative orientation’ (within the micro level), the ‘ideal L2 self’ (micro) and ‘course-specific motivational components’ (meso). These variables as well as most of the other variables, excluding ‘intrinsic motivation’, ‘student’s performance’, ‘teacher-specific motivational components’ and ‘instrumental orientation’, became more motivating over time. As a result, students

appear to construct a clearer image of themselves as fluent speakers of German in S2 than in S1. The motivational impact of 'student's performance' (micro) was entirely stable over time, as a relatively large portion of research participants were obtaining good results and did not find major difficulties in learning German across the two semesters under consideration.

Motivation stemming from the 'university context' (meso), 'contextual components' (macro) and the 'ought-to L2 self' (macro) also became more positive in S2 when more motivated students considered German departments policies and activities to be engaging and the social context supportive. As for the 'ought-to L2 self' (macro), very high standard deviations indicate that a rich variety of responses was provided by students, while only few students perceived that family members, friends and peers expected them to learn German.

Overall, the macro category of motivators had the highest mean values in both semesters. 'Instrumental orientation', while the most positively evaluated macro component, was not a particularly strong motivator (ranking only 7th of ten overall) for all students contrary to our expectations based on the existing literature on L2 German (e.g., Huang et al. 2015 or Okuniewski 2014). The increase in mean values for this category of motivators in S2, unique in the data sample, further indicates that learning German as a career move did not appear to drive students to continue learning this language over time.

4.2 Qualitative trajectories

Qualitative data allow us to investigate motivators experienced by students who completed survey questions one in S1 more in depth (SQ1: *Please list the three main reasons why you wish to continue learning German at university in the future*) and two in S2 (SQ2: *Please list the main positive aspect in learning German during this semester*). The same questions were raised during interviews with a selection of students at the University of Melbourne.

When comparing the most frequently recurring themes in the main responses to SQ1 and SQ2, the micro level of psychological and cognitive components (PLL) stands out as sustaining students' motivation, especially in S1 (106 mentions), but also in S2 (29 mentions, see figure four).

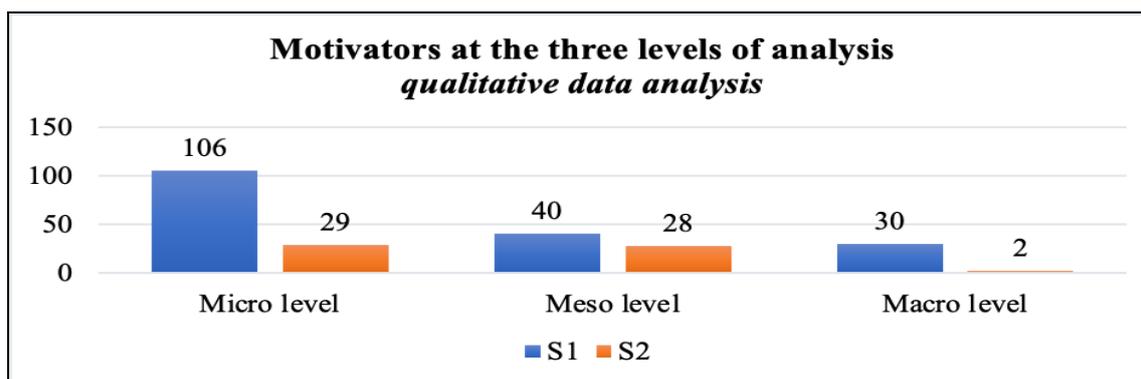


Fig. 4: Frequencies of most frequently recurring themes for the three factors in S1 and S2 (number of student participants: 176 [S1], 57 [S2]).

While the meso-level LE factor becomes more crucial over time in proportion to the smaller number of students completing the second questionnaire in S2, the macro-level SCE factor appears not to be a relevant source of motivation for a large portion of students. This last phenomenon is found to be in contrast with quantitative data analysis findings which show a slight improvement of student motivation stemming from their social environment in S2.

A more detailed analysis of most frequently recurring themes emerging from responses provided to SQ1 and SQ2 is offered in table two below. In doing so, interview data are analysed to complement and expand on the survey qualitative data although themes emerging from interview narratives have not been quantified.

<i>Levels</i>	<i>Categories of motivators</i>	<i>Motivation in S1</i>		<i>Motivation in S2</i>	
		N	%	N	%
Micro level	Intrinsic motivation	37	21%	16	27%
	Integrative orientation	21	12%	2	3%
	Ideal L2 self	19	11%	1	2%
	Student's performance	29	16%	10	17%
Meso level	Teacher-specific motivational components	9	5%	3	5%
	Course-specific motivational components	26	15%	24	41%
	University context	5	3%	1	2%
Macro level	Instrumental orientation	24	14%	2	3%
	Contextual components	6	3%	0	0%
	Ought-to L2 self	0	0%	0	0%

Table 2: An overview of the most frequently recurring themes quantified from responses given to SQ1 and SQ2.

'Intrinsic motivation' and 'course-specific motivational components' consistently motivated numerous participants over time. If the percentage of themes related to these two categories are considered, both of them became more motivating for students in S2 (21% and 15% in S1 and 27% and 41% in S2 respectively). Interview data helped understand that these two categories were often connected to each other as well as to 'teacher-specific motivational components' as emphasised by the interviewee whose pseudonym is Kevin:

"In German, I feel like the teacher wants everyone to do well. [...] My teacher speaks German a lot in the class and gets us to participate a lot, so I feel that that helps a lot to create motivation because we're actually speaking it, so I'm pretty happy with that. [...] I feel the class is pretty friendly, people communicate with each other and that helps create motivation".

The social environment created in class increased students' enjoyment over time. Research participants like Sam underlined main differences between their German course and other university subjects which were not as engaging and motivating as German:

"The teaching standards are also a lot better relative to the engineering subjects".

'Student's performance' was also considered a strong motivator in both semesters (16% and 17% respectively). Qualitative data demonstrate that a relevant number of students did not encounter particular problems in the first stages of their German language acquisition as it was the case for John:

"I'm good at language and so I don't really feel that much of a struggle".

In a similar vein, students emphasised how 'course-specific motivational components' supported them in engaging with German course content, reach their goal to obtain positive results and acquire fluency, including their abilities to become closer to the image of themselves they had envisioned before starting a German learning path. The acquisition of more language knowledge fed students' 'ideal L2 self'. As Maria states, good results were a consequence of a relatively strong capacity to acquire knowledge. She enjoyed the learning process and imagined herself in Germany in different settings doing multiple activities deeply tied to the German culture(s):

"I expected it to be more difficult, but things changed when I realised that it wasn't that difficult. [...] I got really good results [...]. Knowing how manageable it was and how much I actually enjoyed it, how quickly I was able to pick up the vocab, I could see myself living in Germany. If I can get a job there, I would love to live there."

Students like Eike constructed a strong ‘ideal L2 self’ which aimed to acquire fluency and speaking abilities necessary to live in German-speaking countries:

“German is spoken in lots of places so maybe eastern Europe or Austria, Switzerland, because German language is a tool and a hobby for me. I imagine myself in the future speaking German. [...] I want to replicate how I speak English fluently”.

In S2, fewer students declared that German was an easy language to learn. Nonetheless, students reiterated their engrained interest in learning German and achieving their goal to become fluent speakers. These dynamics often contributed to increasing students’ positive emotions and enjoyment over time as highlighted by survey participants:

“It’s a good break, a good relief. As to motivation, [...] I’m still intrigued by the German accent. I just love when I speak German. I just love listening to it. It’s just when you listen to music”.

Enjoyment and positive attitudes towards the learning experience were found to be associated with teachers’ delivery methods in the classroom environment. Teacher and course appreciation became more important in S2 despite being extensively mentioned in S1 as well. Cultural components of the curriculum increased students’ cultural understanding of German-speaking countries and people and ultimately, their motivation. In S1, Ute praised her tutors and the course organisation, including the opportunities given by her ‘university context’:

“They really really just want you to excel and really want you to love the language. [...] My German tutor showed us scenery, cities, Berlin and he told us about festivals, cultures and sites. That would definitely intrigue certain students to perhaps travel there and continue their studies [...]. I think by showing those kinds of clips it would motivate students to continue with the language studies. [...] I’m thinking to do it [an exchange program] in about one year, and the university provides some scholarships”.

Ute also demonstrates that university incentives motivated students to go to German-speaking countries and influenced their image of future multilingual individuals. In the same vein, Olivia affirmed:

“I think the university does a good job exposing us to culture in the classroom”.

This motivator became more influential when teachers organised extra-curricular activities and increased the number of cultural topics which were highly valued by students like Sarah in S2:

“My teacher organised a Stammtisch so a get-together and she sent an email to the whole cohort that we were meeting on Monday and to bring some food if you want. [...] I think the content of the class changed, this semester we focused on the grammar but also, we

looked at movies and some cultural stuff – famous sites in Germany. It's more entertaining this semester. Culture improves my motivation”.

In contrast to this, other students perceived that the amount of grammar topics increased in S2 and this motivated those students who preferred a more structured course syllabus as Sam:

“The content of German 2, I find it easier because it is more about the grammar. Grammar is a logical stuff, so I could handle a logical stuff”.

As noted when analysing quantitative data, not all student participants were particularly stimulated by ‘instrumental orientation’ during the two semesters under study. Only some students (see Table 2 above) like Olivia, for instance, overtly declared that learning German was a career move:

“For me, in Germany, there are opera contracts all year, so opera is all over the place now, so having like a proper solid year job would be pretty good. [...] I speak French, and now German and Italian after that and maybe Russian after. [...] We can eat German food, participate a lot in German events, festival. There's an influence here. [...] Lots of famous classical musicians were German”.

Olivia clearly reflects on the career benefits of learning German, but also on the influence of the socio-cultural environment in which she lives and she would like to live as a multilingual and multicultural individual. Her interest in learning German was fostered by events happening around her as demonstrated by the quote proposed above. Although very few survey participants mentioned ‘contextual components’, the context in which students were embedded was still a major motivator as explained by interviewees who benefitted from more time to describe their motivational patterns. Depending on students’ interests and areas of expertise, they received positive impulses from their surrounding society as Kevin states:

“There are a lot of German words in science. [...] There are a lot of famous scientists. Germany has an image of being very advanced scientifically and I think that influences people to be interested in the language”.

This image as a strong and reliable country was often interconnected with a desire to study in Germany based on what Eike emphasised:

“They have a great education system and free education. I plan to pursue my academic career probably in Germany”.

The role of Germany as a country was also strengthened by the multiple cultures belonging to German-speaking countries and the people representing these cultures. John received very positive influences from the environment in which he was working:

“I work in a Yiddish library. We have a German section, so I can already use a bit of German. [...] In two-years’ time, I might go to Germany, and I can already start to use it”.

Influences received by people around learners were not considered as obligations by the research participants. No themes related to the ‘ought-to L2 self’ were identified in qualitative data, which validates the high means recorded by this category while analysing quantitative data. Ute appeared to be motivated by people around her, i.e. her mother and her mother’s friends, but she did not feel pressed to learn German as she implies during her interview in S1:

“My mother has a lot of German friends who are living in Germany, and I’ve always been interested in going overseas and possibly do a master there, living there and working there. I think exposure is a real key for example, I was exposed to Germany through my mother taking me to Europe and showing me these places and the people, and even the food and the scenery. I think getting the right exposure from the right people who have positive experience could trigger interest in a language”.

Very similar dynamics in terms of the influence occurred in S2 when research participants reflected on the increase of their enjoyment given the improvement of their knowledge, as underlined by Kevin:

“You feel that the work you did in semester 1 had an impact so you feel there’s a reward. [...] I feel also learning languages is more enjoyable”.

Based on what the student John and other research participants asserted, S2 represented the right time for students to improve and refine their skills which increased their enjoyment:

“It’s fun as opposed to traditional study because I have an interest in writing. [...] Some people are really good at maths. [...] I’m good at languages and so I don’t really feel that much of a struggle”.

5. Discussion

Quantitative and qualitative data supported us in answering the two research questions formulated for this study pertaining to student motivation in learning German over time at university. Multiple motivators at the three levels of analysis proposed for this research played a role to very different extents during students’ learning process over one year of German studies. Quantitative data analysis indicates that students were particularly motivated by the micro-level ‘Psychology of the Language Learner’ factor across the two semesters under consideration despite little positive shift in motivation in the second semester compared to the other two factors which recorded bigger changes.

Students generally agreed that they enjoyed learning German and expressed a strong interest in German ‘as a European language of culture’ (Amorati 2019: 271). An improvement in mean values over time was also witnessed at the meso level which motivated a large portion of the participants who appreciated how German subjects were designed and delivered (cf. Dewaele et al. 2019). Indeed, quantitative data analysis suggests that motivation triggered by ‘teacher-specific motivational components’ appeared to be strong and steady over time, whilst motivation stemming from ‘course-specific motivational components’ improved in the second semester. Similar to the meso-level factor, quantitative data demonstrate that the macro-level ‘Socio-cultural Environment’ factor motivated an increasing number of students in S2, notwithstanding a very small increase of the mean value for the category of motivators ‘instrumental orientation’ which was found to be the only category recording a minimal decrease in motivation. High means and standard deviations over the whole year under consideration suggest that the context in which students lived was not very motivating for all survey participants in line with the results shown by Busse & Williams (2010), Busse (2013) and Busse & Walter (2013) in another English-speaking country such as the UK (cf. Ushioda 2017). While a number of students agreed that German is a useful language in terms of future career gains, this instrumental motivation was much less prominent with our respondents compared to previous studies such as Okuniewski (2014) or Huang et al. (2015). Similar to Schmidt’s (2011, 2014) findings, motivated students combined an explicit attraction to the strong German economy with (a) a deep interest in the German language and culture as noticed at both micro and macro levels of analysis (see also Riemer 2011, 2016) and (b) a desire for travelling to German-speaking countries as highlighted by Amorati (2019). The results of our data analysis support our choice to include important, yet potentially outdated, categories of motivators such as ‘integrative orientation’ and ‘instrumental orientation’. These categories continue to play a vital role in students’ motivation to learn a language spoken in countries which appeal to students’ interest and curiosity and uphold a high level of power from an economic, political and strategic perspective.

Qualitative data helped to expand on our understanding of the analysed quantitative data and to acknowledge that themes were very often connected to each other at all three levels of analysis as also reported by D’Orazzi & Hajek (2021). Similar to complex dynamic systems, student motivational trajectories were deeply and dynamically

interrelated to each other in multiple directions (cf. Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008; Ortega & Han 2017; Papi & Hiver 2020). Students' responses simultaneously included themes related to a wide range of categories of motivators. In S1, themes pertaining to students' psychological reactions to their learning experiences – the micro level – outnumbered the number of themes belonging to the other two levels of analysis. In particular, students demonstrated a vivid 'intrinsic motivation' and desire to improve their performance which developed into an image of themselves as fluent speakers of German within a number of scenarios (cf. Huang et al. 2015). A passion for the German language and culture(s) was very much linked to the new identity students were building as German speakers which, in some cases, was interwoven with an intention to enjoy German-speaking cultures and people overseas but also in local communities (see also Ammon 1991; Leal et al. 1991; Petersen 1993; Schmidt 2011, 2014). Echoing what was already discovered by Amorati (2019), research participants expressed an intrinsic interest in a language which for a minority of them represented their cultural heritage. Students' investment in improving their performance and proficiency level (see also Csizér 2020; McNamara 2011; Norton, 2013) fostered their 'ideal L2 self', corroborating similar research undertaken by Busse & Williams's (2010), Busse's (2013) and Busse & Walter's (2013). Indeed, quantitative data demonstrate the increasing importance of the 'ideal L2 self' in S2 in contrast to qualitative data results, which do not show the emergence of a large number of themes related to this category of motivators in the second phase of this research. In a similar vein, very few themes related to 'integrative orientation' were identified in students' responses to SQ2 and interview questions in S2.

Over time, motivators belonging to the micro-level 'Psychology of the Language Learner' remained strong components of students' experiences which were enriched by their willingness to communicate and their continuing enjoyment (D'Orazzi 2020b). Students still considered their 'intrinsic motivation' and their desire to improve their performance steady pillars for their motivation in their social environment and in their German courses (see also Martín et al. 2016). This was the case for the meso-level 'Learning Experience' factor which, based on qualitative data, was considered proportionally more important in S2 than in S1 in line with previous longitudinal studies on L2 motivation in Australia (see Campbell & Storch (2011) for French and Xu & Moloney (2020) for Mandarin). Survey participants and interviewees emphasised the

role of their teachers and courses in supporting them when reaching the image of themselves as fluent and competent German speakers (cf. Gardner et al. 2004). Such a dynamic validates statistical analysis. Low mean values were registered for 'teacher-specific motivational components' during both semesters and a very noticeable improvement of motivation was observed in terms of 'course-specific motivational components' in S2. Furthermore, university policies motivated students to include a German course in their study plan because it was either a requirement to complete their specific degree or available as an elective/optional subject (cf. Brown & Caruso 2016). In this vein, students desired to achieve a certain level of knowledge to receive good marks and reach high standards of performance which often were needed to apply for exchange programs in German-speaking countries (see D'Orazi 2020a).

In contrast to Okuniewski's (2014) acknowledgement that students' positive attitudes stemmed from the immediate social environment, the context in which students were learning did not appear as influential as expected for all research participants. Those students who could not enjoy a certain amount of exposure to German people and culture(s) were not found to be motivated by 'contextual components' despite a clear improvement of mean values in S2 both for this category of motivators and the 'Socio-cultural Environment' factor in general. Of course, the difference between the situations in a country neighbouring Germany such as Poland (as studied by Okuniewski 2014) and that in a geographically remote country such as Australia might go quite a way to explain the contrasting results. Motivated students upheld an image of Germany as a strong economy. 'Contextual components' belonging to the society where students lived (see also Busse & Walter 2013; Ushioda 2009) contributed to reinforcing the international status of German as a widely spoken language and the positive attitude of students towards German-speaking countries' cultures (see Okuniewski 2014). Interviewees confirmed Huang et al.'s (2015) argument that speaking German would increase students' opportunities in the job market depending on students' career ambitions. These convictions were particularly valid for those students who had German friends, acquaintances or work colleagues. People around research participants did not appear to expect them to learn German in contrast to Huang et al.'s (2015) results amongst students in Taiwan. Nonetheless, high standard deviations for the category 'ought-to L2 self' indicate that a small minority of students felt some degree of pressure from people around them, especially in S2 when mean values decreased. Furthermore,

heritage learners might have benefitted from the German-speaking community they might have been in contact with, given significant historical waves of migration from German-speaking countries as reported by Kretzenbacher (2011) and Schüpbach (2008). Overall, especially in S1, themes related to the macro level appeared to motivate a moderate number of students who were regularly exposed to German-speaking people and images from German-speaking countries (see Riemer 2016), but they appeared not to be so motivating for students living in monolingual communities following both quantitative and qualitative data analysis (cf. Ushioda 2017).

6. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative understanding of the major factors that influence university students' experiences and motivation when learning German at beginner level and it draws upon previous studies on motivation in learning German (e.g. Riemer 2011, 2016; Schmidt 2011, 2014). The data analysis presented here contributes to the exploration of what keeps students' motivation alive during their first year of German studies. In an attempt to highlight the major motivators belonging to our three levels of analysis (cf. Douglas Fir Group 2016; Gayton 2018; Gruba et al. 2016), we hope that this study supports German instructors planning their subject syllabus and delivering content to their students (see also D'Orazzi 2022). Research participants considered German more as a language of culture than a tool to boost their career prospects (see Schmidt 2011, 2014). Indeed, although a large number of students argued that Germany is a strong economic world power, they were not always motivated by 'instrumental orientation' which was less important than 'intrinsic motivation' (cf. Riemer 2011, 2016). More students focused on 'teacher- and course-specific motivational components' over time given the enjoyment that they obtained in the formal learning environment at the meso level of analysis (see D'Orazzi 2020b; Dörnyei 2019; Martín et al. 2016). As a result, they constructed a stronger image of themselves as German speakers in the second semester than in the first semester. The 'Socio-cultural Environment' was important for those students who could access different spaces where German was spoken either by native speakers or people who learnt German as their L2.

While our focus has been on factors that have positive influence on motivation, future research should also explore major demotivators which hamper students' experience

and reduce their interest in continuing to learn German at university level (cf. D'Orazzi 2020c). Together with the research on motivators, the results of such research could enable Australian universities to cater more effectively for their students of German, thereby potentially reducing the attrition or loss of students over time (cf. Kretzenbacher 2010, 2011; Nettelbeck et al. 2009). Research-based policies and practices could in turn contribute to the enhancement of language learning in Australia which is considered “valuable for a broad range of reasons, including the economic, political, societal, intercultural and interpersonal” (Weinmann et al. 2021: 69).

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Key words

German language learning, German motivation, Second language acquisition, Australian universities, three-level model of analysis

Appendix 1

Factor distribution and eigenvalue coefficients for the five-point Likert scale items included in the two questionnaires used in D’Orazi’s (2020a) research and inspired by Oakes’s (2013) and Busse & Williams’s (2010) Likert scale questionnaires on motivation, and Sakai & Kikuchi’s (2009) questionnaire on demotivation. The variables cut off by the Principal Components Analysis have been crossed out.

Structure Matrix	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3	FACTOR 4
The facilities in class are perfect to stimulate my learning.	0.681			
My teacher makes me feel comfortable during lessons.	0.675			
My teacher’s explanations are easy to understand.	0.665			
My teacher focuses on all main language abilities (speaking, reading, listening and writing).	0.615			
The material used in class is useful to learn (L2).	0.608			
I get along well with my teacher.	0.599			
The pace of lessons is appropriate for learning (L2).	0.596			
I often have the opportunity to communicate in (L2) in class.	0.585			
(L2) language content we study for the course is easy to interpret.	0.566			
The time spent in (L2) classes is enough to learn properly.	0.553			
The class size is appropriate to learn the language.	0.521			
My teacher focuses on translation.	0.453			
My university organises many activities where I can learn more on the culture of (L2)-speaking countries and practise the language.	0.448			
I like my classmates.	0.447			
Visual and audio materials (such as videos and DVDs) are used during lessons.	0.447			
The amount of hours I need to study for tests/ assessments and final exams satisfies my initial expectations.	0.443			
Cultural topics covered in lessons are interesting.	0.421			
Interactive computer based/online activities are used during lessons.				
I really enjoy learning (L2).	0.405	0.716		
I like the intellectual challenge of learning (L2).		0.684		
I find it exciting to be able to communicate in (L2).		0.661		
Being able to converse in (L2) is an important part of the person I want to become.		0.601		0.436
Learning (L2) is one of the most important aspects of my life.		0.577		
It would be great to be part of the (L2)-speaking community in my city.		0.545		

I like meeting people from (L2)-speaking countries.		0.542		
If my dreams come true, I will use (L2) effectively in the future.		0.54		0.476
I am studying (L2) because I want to improve my (L2).		0.527		
I find it easy to memorise words and expressions.		0.496		
I like to spend time in (L2)-speaking countries.		0.481		
I am getting high scores on tests and assessments, e.g. homework, class tests, mid-term assessments.		0.475		
I can imagine myself as someone who is able to use (L2) well.		0.451		
I feel comfortable when I have to speak (L2) during lessons.		0.417		
I consider learning (L2) important because the people I respect think that I should do so.			0.748	
People around me (e.g. family members, partner, friends...) believe that I ought to study (L2).			0.694	
I often have opportunities to practice (L2) with native speakers outside university.			0.562	
I learn (L2) because I want to communicate with my family members.			0.555	
If I fail to learn (L2), I will be letting other people down.			0.526	
I feel an affinity with people who live in (L2)-speaking countries.		0.451	0.522	
Speaking (L2) is very important in Australia.			0.415	
The (L2) subject was advertised during the orientation sessions before starting university.			0.409	
There is substantial government financial support (e.g. scholarships) to study (L2) at university.				
The media report good news from (L2) speaking countries.				
I'm an extroverted person.				
Knowing (L2) will help me to obtain a better job.				0.83
Studying (L2) to a high level of proficiency will allow me to earn more money.				0.802
I think (L2) will help in my future career.				0.767
The knowledge of (L2) would help me finding a job in the public service.				0.656
I think knowing (L2) will help me to become a more knowledgeable person.				0.421
I would like to become more like people from (L2)-speaking countries.				0.419
There are lots of exchange programs overseas I can access if I learn (L2).				
I wanted to learn (L2) already at secondary school although this subject was not offered.				
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.				