

**An ecological perspective on the motivational trajectories of  
high school students learning English  
in rural areas in Vietnam**

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## Abstract

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This study explores the motivational trajectories of four students learning English at a rural high school in Southern Vietnam. It draws on a person-in-context relational view of motivation (Ushioda, 2009) as the overarching theoretical framework and uses ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1993) as an analytical tool to develop insights into the ways motivation is implicated in a multiplicity of settings and social relationships. Specifically, it aims to identify motivational affordances for these students, the synergistic effects across settings on their language learning motivation, and their motivational trajectories within and across settings and relationships.

The study utilises a qualitative case study design, relying primarily on interviews from social practice perspectives and observations. The data collection, spanning approximately one and a half years, comprised two main phases, one on-site and one off-site. In the first phase, data were gathered in different settings, including the school, the participants' homes as a site for private tuition, and other more informal public spaces such as food stores. In the second phase, Skype interviews and Facebook exchanges were the main means of data collection.

The findings suggest that while language affordances were evident in both formal and informal learning settings, students developed diverse individual motivational trajectories. Their motivational constructions resulted from a synergy of environmental and idiosyncratic elements pertinent to their own language learning conditions, social relationships, and personal appraisals of such affordances and learning opportunities. These relationships and students' agentive use of resources were shaped and reshaped by their interactions with significant others within and across settings. Sociocultural features related to the school systems, local and national education policies, family traditions, cultural values, and future prospects also have synergistic impacts on their L2 motivation.

The present study illustrates the value of interpreting the situated and dynamic nature of L2 motivation using an ecological paradigm. It also points to the need to adopt a set of data collection methods, tools, and data sources that diverge from more conventional means to explore L2 motivation. The study offers a fresh theoretical and methodological approach for future research geared towards lifewide adaptive perspectives on English language teaching and learning.



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