Motivation and emotion in the EFL learning experience of Romanian adolescent students: Two contrasting cases

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the language learning motivation of two EFL teenage students in Romania and the link between motivation and the emotional dimensions of these adolescents' learning experiences. While language learning motivation has been widely researched, its relationship with emotion in the learning experience has not been examined in depth thus far. To gain deep insight into this relationship, the present study used various qualitative methods: a written task, multiple semi-structured interviews with the students and their teachers, and prolonged lesson observation. The findings showed that the learners' motivation and emotions were closely intertwined in their learning experiences in idiosyncratic ways. Mika (pseudonym) experienced the prevalent emotion of love of English and was a highly motivated learner. In her out-of-class learning experience, her motivation was linked to her emotions towards her favorite singer. In her classroom learning experience, her motivation was shaped by her teacher's encouragement and support. Kate (pseudonym) did not reportedly experience a dominant emotion towards English and had a rather weak motivation. The absence of an expressed dominant emotion towards English was linked to her classroom learning experience before high school, namely to her teacher's lack of encouragement, which hindered her motivation. By focusing on two contrasting cases of learners, this study has foregrounded the role of the emotional aspects of the language learning experience in shaping motivation, showing how strong positive emotions enhance and sustain motivation and how the lack of such emotions hinders motivation.

Keywords: adolescent students; EFL; emotions; learning experience; motivation

1. Introduction

Motivation, defined as "a complex of processes shaping and sustaining learner involvement in learning" (Ushioda, 2001, p. 121), offers the main stimulus to start learning a language and acts as "the driving force" that moves the language learning process forward (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 65). The importance of motivation in language learning has been emphasized by numerous researchers (e.g., Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Ferrari, 2013; Ushioda, 2001; Ushioda & Chen, 2011). Ferrari (2013), for instance, investigated the factors which shaped and maintained the motivation of learners of Italian during a beginner's course and found that the learners' motivation was essentially sustained by their positive learning experience and the classroom interpersonal dynamics. Since these learners' reasons for learning Italian included "a love affair with Italy, its culture and language" (p. 122), Ferrari's study points to a relationship between emotions and motivation in the learning experience, igniting interest in a more in-depth understanding of this relationship.

Alongside motivation, emotions, defined as "short-lived, feeling-arousal-purposive-expressive phenomena that help us adapt to the opportunities and challenges we face during important life events" (Reeve, 2009, p. 301), have been shown to play a vital role in the language learning experience (see Aragão, 2011; Dewaele, 2015; Imai, 2010; Mercer, 2014; Swain, 2013). For example, Aragão (2011), in his study of the relationship between emotions, beliefs and actions in students enrolled in a language teacher education course at a Brazilian university, found that emotions are closely related to beliefs, that is, beliefs in the students' self-concept and beliefs about classmates and the teacher, and this interplay is linked to actions, to how students behave in their learning environment. Such findings highlight the importance of emotions in learners' decision to engage or not to engage in language learning.

Despite the importance of emotions in the learning experience, classroom language learning often views emotional expression as an unnecessary or nonessential aspect, which leaves learners unable to express their emotions in the foreign language, vulnerable to emotion talk and thus unprepared for the real world (Pavlenko, 2005). As learners' emotions are aspects which tend to be neglected in the foreign language classroom and which are not only present but also crucial in students' in-class and out-of-class experiences, this study aims to gain richer insight into the emotional dimension of students' language learning experience.

The need for research to investigate the relationship between emotions and motivation has been repeatedly pointed out (e.g., Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) and Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014) note that emotion has a motivating force since

it produces an impetus to act. Drawing on work on emotion in positive psychology (see Fredrickson, 2001, 2003, 2006), the authors describe positive emotions as broadening an individual's perspective and negative emotions as narrowing an individual's focus. While negative emotions such as anxiety have been the focus of much language learning research (e.g., Gkonou, 2011, 2015; Gkonou, Daubney, & Dewaele, 2017; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), there have not been many studies on positive emotions in the language learning experience. This study will reveal more insight into the role of positive emotions in the learning experience.

Given the link between emotions and motivation in the language learning experience and the fact that adolescence is characterized by emotional turmoil as learners are challenged to (re)construct themselves and find their identity as well as appropriate ways of expressing these new selves (Legutke, 2012), this study aims to investigate how motivation is shaped by emotions in adolescents' foreign language learning experience.

2. Literature review

Since emotions and motivation are viewed as being socially mediated, the literature review will present sociocultural theory and a view of emotions and motivation within this theoretical framework. It will focus on motivation as conceptualized from a self system perspective (Dörnyei, 2009; Lamb, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012), the relationship between emotions and the self system (Miyahara, 2014), and EFL motivation as situated within the Romanian context (Taylor, 2010, 2013).

Sociocultural theory is a theory of mind, of higher mental functions which are mediated by culturally constructed artifacts and social relationships (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The language learner is thus seen as a "person-in-context" (Ushioda, 2009). The person-in-context relational approach to motivation places an emphasis on a mutual relationship between people and context. Not only does the context shape the person, but the person also shapes their context through their role as a "self-reflective intentional agent" (Ushioda, 2009, p. 218). As Ushioda (2007) notes, "sociocultural theory seems to offer a particularly rich and valuable framework that can accommodate current perspectives on motivation, and that can illuminate . . . the interaction between individual and social forces" (p. 15).

Emotion has been included by authors such as Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) to expand sociocultural theory. They argue that an understanding of students' *perezhivanie*, defined as "lived or emotional experience" (p. 49), can lead to a transformative classroom environment through engaging, meaningful learning. Interpersonal relationships in the classroom are shown to constitute a fundamental part of students' perezhivanie. The crucial role of social relationships in the construction of emotions has also been emphasized by Imai (2010). In his study of EFL language

learners' emotions in collaborative work, Imai found that "emotions . . . are socially constructed through people's intersubjective encounters" (p. 283).

In addition to emotion, motivation is another aspect of interest in this study since motivation "moves a person to make certain choices, to engage in action, to expend effort and persist in action" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 3). Motivation has been conceptualized from an L2 self system perspective by Dörnyei (2009). The L2 motivational self system has three components: the ideal L2 self, which represents "the person we would like to become" (p. 29), the ought-to L2 self, which refers to "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes" (p. 29), and the L2 learning experience, which refers to "situated . . . motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (p. 29). Imagery is the crucial element of possible selves theory (Dörnyei, 2009). As Dörnyei explains, mental imagery, the image of a desired future, plays an important role since it has motivating power. Imagery is thus a valuable asset, and the relationship between mental images and emotions can provide students with powerful motivation to learn (Arnold, 1999). The present study looks at motivation through the lens of Dörnyei's (2009) L2 motivational self system.

There is a growing body of research on motivation as framed within Dörnyei's L2 self system. Among such research are Lamb's (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012) studies, which highlight the link between future L2 selves, autonomy/agency and motivation in an EFL context. In his research with junior high school students and older teenagers in Indonesia, Lamb found that more motivated learners had more internalized, vivid, elaborated and clearly shaped visions of their future L2 selves. The studies reported pointed out that ideal L2 selves had a stronger motivational power in the long term than ought-to L2 selves. Learners with strong ideal L2 selves saw the possibilities available to them through knowledge of English, while students with strong ought-to L2 selves were more concerned with the possible negative consequences of not mastering English. Despite the rich insight gained into motivation, the above-mentioned studies do not reveal insights into the emotions experienced by learners and their relationship with motivation in the language learning experience.

As for emotions and future selves, Miyahara's (2014) study is among the few to examine this relationship. Drawing on Dörnyei's (2009) concept of the ideal L2 self, Miyahara investigates how learners construct their identity through visions of their future selves participating in the community of English users and how emotions are engaged in this process. The findings suggest that positive emotions enable students to become proactive learners and exhibit flexibility in responding to their social environment. While the study reveals that emotions and the experiential are intertwined in the transformative and developmental

process which constitutes learners' ideal L2 self, the role of emotions in students' language learning experiences and the link between emotion and the future L2 self are not explored in depth. Miyahara's study points to a research gap that the present study is attempting to fill.

While motivation has been investigated in various EFL contexts (see Lamb's above-mentioned studies), adolescents' motivation to learn English as a foreign language in Romania has not been widely explored. Among the few researchers who have investigated motivation within the Romanian context is Taylor (2010, 2013). Taylor (2013) reports on the qualitative results of two mixed-method studies conducted with teenagers, with ages ranging between 14 and 19, who were studying in several secondary schools. The findings of the semi-structured interviews revealed a relationship between the students' motivation and the teacher's motivation: The pupils stated that their motivation to learn English depended on their teacher's motivation. In her study of 1,045 adolescents learning EFL in five secondary schools, Taylor (2010) found that the teachers were the main motivators in the students' classrooms: Teachers' awareness of the students' interests and passions, of what made them feel "themselves" in and outside the classroom, was linked to the teenagers' meaningful engagement in learning. While the present study also investigates adolescents' motivation, it adds the emotional dimension of their English learning experience, exploring its relationship with motivation. The study has been guided by the following research questions:

1. Is language learning motivation linked to the emotional dimension of adolescent students' EFL learning experience?
2. If so, what kind of emotions is motivation linked to and in what ways is motivation shaped by emotions in teenagers' EFL learning experience?

3. Research methods

The methodological approach used in the present research is a multiple case study. Since the study aimed at providing a rich description and at using multiple data sources and methods, the case study approach was deemed suitable. Although the case is at the core of such studies, the goal is "to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (Duff, 2014, p. 237).

3.1. Research context and participants

The focus of the study was on two female teenagers learning English as a foreign language in a state high school in a town located in the Southern part of Romania. In addition to regular classes, there are four bilingual classes offered at this

high school: English, French, German and Spanish. The participating learners' background information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Participants' background information

Participant	Pseudonym	Age	Foreign languages known	Grade / type of class
1	Mika	18	English, French, Spanish, Italian	Eleventh / English bilingual[1]
2	Kate	16	English, French	Tenth / philology[2]

3.2. Data collection

In the present study, a range of data sources were used: a written task, semi-structured student and teacher interviews and lesson observations. Such measures were applied to allow for the triangulation of methods and data sources as well as for deep engagement.

3.2.1. The written language learning history task

The language learning history is the written task completed by the participants. This task was included in the study since language learning histories "can provide valuable information about who the learners are," which "can be instrumental in understanding a number of language learning issues, including motivation, affect . . ." (Murray, 2009, p. 48). Language learners' perspectives on their learning experiences are viewed as being particularly important since the language learner is "a crucial witness of his or her own learning process" (Dewaele, 2005, p. 369). The language learning history task was intended to offer a holistic picture of the participants' language learning experience while at the same time providing an opportunity to explore the most salient aspects of the students' learning experience during the first interview. The learners who agreed to participate in the study received the written task by email and, once they completed it, they sent it to the researcher. The language learning history task was written in English.

Before data collection, the author wrote her own language learning history as an EFL learner in Romania. The history was not written with specific

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[1] The English bilingual class is the only course in the Romanian education system where students are divided into two groups in the English class, each group working with a different teacher. In the English bilingual class, students have five integrated skills English classes a week and a sixth class, taught in English, whose focus is on Anglo-American culture and civilization. Bilingual students also have all the other subjects that pupils in regular classes have, taught in Romanian.

[2] The philology class is a humanities-focused class: The focus is on the Romanian language and literature and foreign languages (two compulsory foreign languages). The learners have three integrated skills English classes a week.

guidelines in mind. By reading it once completed, the author noticed that the narrative revealed vivid memories of people, experiences, and events. Several guiding questions emerged from the researcher's written language learning history. These questions were used in the instructions as guidelines although the students were encouraged to write in as much detail as possible (see Appendix for a full list of the instructions and guidelines of the written task).

3.2.2. Interviews

Three semi-structured interviews with each participating student were conducted throughout the school semester. I chose semi-structured interviews to help me maintain the focus on the research topic, and at the same time to give me the freedom to address issues emerging during the interviews. The questions of the first interview guide arose from the reading of the literature. The first interview was conducted between the end of February and the first half of March 2014. The main areas explored in the first interview were: the language learning history, feelings towards learning English, autonomy, contextual factors and motivation (for the full interview guide, see Pavelescu, 2017). The second interview was conducted in April and May, and the third interview took place in June 2014.

The second and third interviews were mainly focused on the lesson observations, being conducted to gain a more in-depth understanding of the participants' classroom behavior and richer insight into their learning experience. They contained questions which focused on the types of activities the students did in the classroom, on how they felt about these activities and on how the students participated in these activities during the lessons. The questions were designed by carefully reading the lesson observation notes. Moreover, the third interview also contained questions related to the students' reasons for learning English at the end of the semester to see if there were any changes in their motivation to learn English at the end of the semester compared to the beginning of the semester. The third interview also included questions on what the students had liked and disliked about learning English that semester to elicit their emotions towards their in-class learning experience that semester. All the interviews with the participating students were conducted in English, but the interviewees were made aware that they could resort to their native language at any time. The decision to conduct the interviews in English was based on the belief that the participating students should benefit from the research project not only through an increased self-awareness that they as language learners might gain but also by having more opportunities for out-of-class speaking practice in a context where such opportunities are limited. Such a pragmatic and ethical consideration was thus viewed as being particularly important in a study which involved foreign language learners.

In addition to the learners, teachers are also viewed as significant witnesses to the students' English learning. Since the student interviews are based on self-reports, the teacher interviews were intended to be used to gain richer insight into the pupils' English-related emotions and motivation by adding another perspective. The teacher interviews were guided by three key questions, whose focus was on a description of the participants as English learners, what they liked in the English class and what motivated them in learning English. One interview was conducted to provide information about Mika and one about Kate. The interviews with the teachers were conducted in Romanian. Pseudonyms were employed: Mrs. Mitchell is the pseudonym used for Mika's teacher, while Mrs. Vaughn is the pseudonym used for Kate's teacher. Both were experienced EFL teachers whose teaching experience was 28 and 24 years, respectively. In the recruitment of participants, the teachers were approached first. With their help, I recruited the participating learners by going to these teachers' classrooms and talking to their students.

3.2.3. Lesson observations

The lesson observations focused on the learners' classroom behavior: How they participated in the English lessons and how they interacted with their classmates and teacher. Lesson observations were used as it was believed that "the classroom becomes a focal point where the creativity unleashed by . . . adolescence can inspire learning, but where also the ambiguities and the turbulence of these phases can render learning quite difficult or even problematic" (Legutke, 2012, p. 112). The relational dynamics between the participating learners and their teacher and between the participants and their classmates, or what Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) refer to as group dynamics in the language classroom, was viewed as important since, as a community of practice, the classroom can "empower language learner agency by reinforcing pupil identities as current or future L2 speakers" (Lamb, 2013, p. 41). The participating students were observed during 14 lessons between February and June 2014 (during the second school semester). The lesson observations were open and unstructured. Their focus was on what the participating students were doing during the lessons (description) and on the researcher's immediate interpretation of the students' behavior. Therefore, the observation sheet consisted of two columns: "What the S is doing" and "Comments."

3.3. Data analysis

The qualitative analysis software NVivo 10 was employed to code the data. Furthermore, the procedure of inter-rater coding was carried out. The Kappa unweighted

average for all codes and sources used was 0.78, revealing an acceptable level of agreement between the two coders.

The data were coded keeping the sociocultural theory in mind: Close attention was paid to how emotions and motivation were shaped by social relationships and artifacts in the learners' sociocultural context. In addition, the coding was also data-driven: No theoretical construct was imposed on the data (see Ratner, 2013), and the coding was done "in a way that is faithful to the words spoken," "grounding all conclusions in coded responses" (Ratner, 2013, p. 315).

Codes were grouped under categories. The first category, *Core Positive Emotions*, was comprised of the main codes Love and Liking (for a full list of codes, see Pavelescu, 2017). It was based on the researcher's interpretation of what was central for each learner in terms of English language learning emotions. One of the subcodes of the main code Love was Love: Motivation, which showed the link between this positive emotion and motivation in the learning experience. The following extract from an interview with Mika is an example of a text segment coded at the Love-Motivation code (I – interviewer, M – Mika): "I: OK. What are your reasons for learning English? Why, why do you learn English? M: "Ahm …[3] I love, I love English, actually." The distinction between Love and Liking was made according to the criterion of whether or not the emotion was related to contextual factors. Love was used to mark instances where the verbal expression of this strong positive emotion was not tied to specific contextual factors but, rather, referred to more general accounts which place love at the center of learners' experiences. Liking was used in cases where love was linked to contextual factors. The Liking code had several subcodes, such as Liking: Classroom, Liking: Culture-related Aspects of English, and Liking: English Use Outside the Classroom.

The second category was *Projections* and consisted of codes such as Future Goals. This category was essentially based on the analysis of the ways the participating learners talked about their future. Future Goals was further divided into subcodes, such as Future Goals: Interaction Foreigners, Future Goals: Career, Future Goals: University, and the like. The following is an example of a segment of text which is part of Future Goals: University:

> *I want to study there* [in the UK] *because it has "countless" educational institutions with great reviews, every single international student had the opportunity to study there and the diploma from that university is good for CV when you want to find a well-paid job.* (Kate's language learning history)

The third category, *Willingness to Communicate* (WTC),[4] a term borrowed from the literature (see Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Kang, 2005; Yashima,

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[3] Unspaced elipses like this one indicate pauses.
[4] This concept was one of the main aspects investigated by the author in a larger study (see Pavelescu, 2017).

2012), is composed of codes such as English Use Outside the Classroom, Speaking, Shyness and Motivation. These codes were further divided into other codes. For instance, Motivation was divided into subcodes such as Motivation: Determination and Motivation: People. In turn, these subcodes were divided into sub-subcodes. For example, Motivation: People had subcodes such as Motivation: General School Teacher and Motivation: High School Teacher. The following excerpt from an interview with Kate is an example of Motivation: General School Teacher:

> I: In your language learning history you said that before high school you didn't really feel that you were learning English. Can you tell me more about that? Why did you feel that way?
> K: Because before high school our teacher always tell us, told us that we are stupid, we don't know nothing, but she never learned us English.

While some of the main codes that comprise the categories such as Future Goals, Speaking and English Use Outside the Classroom are self-explanatory, others are not straightforward and were selected based on connections made between the different pieces of data from the different sources through immersion in the data. Such links could be made only through numerous readings of the data and an in-depth reflection on them. For instance, for Willingness to Communicate, it was observed that learners' willingness to communicate in English was closely intertwined with motivation. The Motivation code was thus included in the Willingness to Communicate category.

Certain segments of text, which had several interpretations, were coded at more than one code so as not to restrict their meanings. For instance, the following segment of text, which was part of Mika's written language learning history, was coded at four codes (Liking, Imagination, Future Goals and Motivation): "I imagined myself and Michael having a deep conversation where I used to tell him that someday I'd be a good English speaker and he does not need to learn Romanian to keep our relationship going."

4. Results

In describing the findings, all the data sources will be used: the written language learning history task, the student interviews, the teacher interviews and the lesson observations. Mika experienced the prevalent emotion of love of English, which was closely linked to her emotions towards her role model and which enhanced her motivation to study English. As for Kate, she did not reportedly experience a prevalent emotion towards English, and her motivation appeared to be hindered by the lack of an expressed dominant emotion towards English.

4.1. Mika's prevalent emotion towards English, love, and its link to motivation

Mika's account revealed that her motivation to learn English was closely linked to her dominant positive emotion towards English, love, which was reportedly more intense than her prevalent emotion towards her native language:

> I: . . . What are your reasons for learning English? Why, why do you learn English?
> M: Ahm … I love, I love English, actually. (First interview)
> I: . . . Why are you learning English? What are your reasons for learning English, besides the fact that it is a school subject?
> M: Well, I, I don't have reasons or any new reasons to learn English because it is going to help me somehow. I like, I learn English and I'm learning English because I feel that way.
> I: You feel like …
> M: I feel that I like it more than I like my native language, seriously. (Third interview)

Moreover, Mika reported that she could express her feelings more easily in English than in her native language, Romanian. Her love for the English language emerged when she was about nine years old by listening to one of Michael Jackson's songs, *Remember the Time*. She had vivid memories of the day when she had first heard the song:

> I was at home, I was with my mother, and I remember Michael had long hair, and I said: "Mum, is that a man or a woman?" And said: "Is a man, is the king of pop, is Michael Jackson." And it really amazed me. "Wow, is Michael Jackson!" . . . It was a song broadcasted on MTV. (First interview)

Mika stated that he had made such a strong impression on her that she became a Michael Jackson fan that day. Throughout Mika's account, it is implied that it was her love for Michael Jackson and his music that mediated her love of English and her motivation:

> What I have not said so far is where I got the motivation to learn English from. Well, it's all thanks to Michael Jackson. (Language learning history)
> I think it's called pure love. I, I can never love somebody like, like I love him. (First interview)
> I imagined myself and Michael having a deep conversation where I used to tell him that someday I'd be a good English speaker and he does not need to learn Romanian to keep our relationship going. (Language learning history)
> I: . . . And I thought it was also very interesting when you mentioned that you, you used to imagine yourself having a conversation
> M: Yes.
> I: with him [Michael Jackson].

> M: *Yes. And I would say: "Michael, I promise that I will learn English and I will talk to you in English and you don't need to know Romanian to speak to me."*
>   . . .
> M: *I really wanted to, to have a conversation with him, like, you know, tell him why I love him, tell him what role, what major role he plays in my life.* (First interview)

The constant interweaving of her emotions towards the singer and her love of English as well as her motivation to learn the language was evident in Mika's account. The classroom activities that she liked most that semester and during the previous high school years were related to Michael Jackson. Mika remembered that her favorite English lesson in high school had been a speaking activity during which one of her classmates had asked her what Michael Jackson meant to her. She stated: "So I . . . I never thought what does Michael actually mean to me, but that was a really interesting question. Like . . . What could he mean to me? Like everything" (First interview).

Another instance showing how Mika's love of English was mediated by her emotional attachment to her favorite singer was revealed in her statement that her favorite text during the semester had been about Michael Jackson. Her liking of the text was linked to her feelings for the singer since Mika reportedly felt as if the text had been written especially for her. Her desire to make the singer proud of her seemed to have had a great motivational force in her English learning process: "I am sure he [Michael Jackson] has done a great work with me and all I want is to make him proud" (Language learning history).

The fact that Mika's motivation to learn English was shaped by her positive emotions for the singer was also evident in her English-related experiences outside the classroom. She reported an encounter with other Michael Jackson fans from various countries while traveling abroad, which was perceived as a positive experience as it allowed her the opportunity to talk about her role model. Mika vividly remembered the experience of meeting other Michael Jackson fans at a party that had been organized in Italy on 29 August, the day Michael Jackson was born:

> M: *There were many people from different parts of the world. I really became friends, friend with some Italian girls.*
>   . . .
> M: *They, they were speaking English as well. We also keep in touch even, even now.*
>   . . .
> M: *There were some … ladies, I think, from America, and one of them was from England.*
> I: *Yes?*
> M: *And the other one from Germany, I don't think so, I don't, I don't remember very well.*
> I: *Did you have the opportunity to interact with them as well in English?*
> M: *Yes, yes. Because we have, we had the, the mm same thing to talk about. And that was Michael.* (First interview)

Her emotions towards Michael Jackson were also known and pointed out by her high school teacher, who mentioned Mika's admiration for the celebrity figure. The teacher remembered that she initially felt that, for Mika, the passion for Michael Jackson represented a means of escape from her family problems:

> *At a given moment in the ninth grade, I had the feeling that the passion for Michael Jackson meant rejection, an escape from the environment in which she has grown up and from the hard times that she has had to go through. I think that is what it was in the beginning . . .* (Interview with Mrs. Mitchell)

Earlier in her interview account, Mrs. Mitchell had revealed something about Mika's family background, namely that her parents got separated when Mika was a child, and how she had been emotionally affected by the event. The teacher had added that Mika's mother worked abroad at the time of the interview, being the breadwinner in the family, and that Mika had been raised by her grandmother. This account illuminated something that Mika had written in her language learning narrative: "He [Michael Jackson] has been my . . . protector through everything I have been through." The description of the singer as her protector confirmed the teacher's opinion that Mika's passion for Michael Jackson had constituted a refuge at a difficult time in her life.

The fact that her parents' divorce emotionally affected Mika to a great extent was also confirmed by a classroom episode captured during one of the lesson observations. Mika suddenly contributed to a speaking activity, picture-based and Cambridge type, while another student was talking. The pictures were of newlyweds going on their honeymoon and of students graduating from college. When one of Mika's classmates said that she believed that the wedding was a more important event than university graduation and that she would remember the wedding most, Mika asked her: "But what if you get divorced, if you end up divorcing your husband? Would you still remember marriage most?" (Lesson observation 9).

In the interview, Mika was asked why she had suddenly decided to participate in the speaking activity after having been quiet initially. She suggested that she had felt a strong impetus to express her opinion as it diverged from her classmate's:

> M: *I don't know. I felt like I had to do something about that because, in my opinion, the other picture with the students graduating from school.*
> I: *Yes.*
> M: *Was the most memorable event in someone's life.*
> I: *Mhm.*
> M: *And they're like, no, dreamers, wow, getting married is everything one can do in life and that is, you know, so happy and, but I didn't think so, and I don't think so. And I asked her: "What if you end up getting a divorce?"*
> I: *Yes.*

M: *"Would it still be memorable?" The divorce would be* [laughs] *memorable, but what about the, you know, wedding?* (Third interview)

Mika's sudden, strong urge to contribute to the speaking activity, her emotional outburst, can be explained by her personal history, namely by her family background.

A belief that Mika's family environment had affected her both emotionally and socially was expressed by her teacher during the interview. Mika's teacher stated that Mika had a strong desire for achievement in order to overcome her social condition, which, in the teacher's opinion, motivated her the most in learning English:

Her desire to make a future for herself although she knows very well that she will not have much material support from her parents and that probably motivates her more than in the case of a kid with both parents, with normal material possibilities, not necessarily extraordinary, to become accomplished, to fight by herself in order to overcome her condition. (Interview with Mrs. Mitchell)

At school, Mika began to learn English in the fifth grade. The episode Mika told in her language learning history revealed how her motivation to learn English was enhanced when she got the highest mark in her class on a test paper, and the teacher rewarded her with "tons of nice words." Mika reportedly experienced intense happiness and became determined to continue to study English. That crucial moment in her English language learning experience in the classroom and its powerful impact on her motivation were emphasized by the following comment: "I said to myself 'I need to do it. I must do it. I can't stop here'" (Language learning history). The role of the teacher she had before high school in her motivation to learn English was further stressed:

M: *Because I think the, the teacher played a major role in my motivation in learning English because she had so much faith in me.*
        . . .
I: *So, your fifth grade teacher.*
M: *My fifth grade teacher, yeah.*
        . . .
M: *She said: "You could do it, you can do it, you must do it."* (First interview)

Her account shows that the positive emotions of pride and happiness in having obtained the highest mark in the class and the teacher's praise and encouragement had played a very important role in Mika's motivation to learn English in the classroom before high school.

The prevalent positive emotion experienced towards English also appeared to have shaped Mika's vision of herself in ten years' time and her mental image of Britain: She imagined herself living in the UK or the US in the future

and described England as "a dream place where one can spend their entire life in" (First interview). She had a clearly shaped vision of herself working as the manager of a cruise ship. Her strong motivation, her determination to succeed in her English learning process was captured in the following comment: "If you want to do something, you can do something, and nobody can stand in your way. So, I'm going to do this [learn English]" (Third interview).

4.2. Kate's lack of an expressed prevalent emotion towards English and its link to motivation

As far as Kate is concerned, there was a lack of an expressed prevalent emotion towards English in her account. Moreover, in her teacher's interview comments, there was an absence of references to a dominant emotion towards English. There was nothing in the teacher's account that pointed to a specific prevalent emotion experienced by Kate towards English. Furthermore, the teacher could not remember a specific lesson that Kate particularly enjoyed in her English classroom during high school, which further stresses the lack of a prevalent positive emotion experienced by Kate towards English.

Although she started studying English when she was 11 years old, in an intensive English class, Kate felt that she had not learnt any English before high school because of her teacher:

> *I started to learn English five years ago, but before college* [high school] *I hadn't learnt English for real at school, because of my teacher who wasn't keen to teach us any low level of knowledge in English, so when I went to college* [high school] *I had to do meditations* [take private tutoring classes] *every week to recover the English skills that I had never heard of them till then.* (Language learning history)

Her interview account revealed how her teacher used to discourage and offend Kate and her classmates, calling them "stupid" and telling them that they did not know anything. Kate implied that it did not bother her that they did not do anything at school with regard to English but that it was so hard in high school that she needed to take private tutoring lessons. Kate's account suggests that her interactions with her teacher before high school played a very important role in her emotions and attitude towards English and her English learning experience since her teacher seemed to have inhibited Kate's self-esteem as a learner. The fact that this low self-esteem followed her in high school was suggested by her high school teacher (T) in her description of Kate:

> T: *She is withdrawn, but, still, she participates in class when she is called upon, but she doesn't take the initiative in participating very often.*

I: *Yes.*
T: *She waits to be invited to participate* (Interview with Mrs. Vaughn).

Kate reported that her English teacher before high school had been her form master, and she was using all class time during the English classes, that is four classes a week, to talk about the students' discipline-related problems. English appears to have been absent from Kate's school life before high school. This absence of English in her classroom also seemed to be linked to an absence of agency as far as English was concerned since her self-reports revealed no attempts to learn English outside school during that time.

The powerful negative impact of the teacher she had before high school on her emotions towards English and her learning process was emphasized later in Kate's account: She stated that lack of encouragement, for instance from teachers and relatives (her grandmother), constituted the main obstacle in her English learning. Her comment implied that such a lack of encouragement hindered her motivation in learning English. Moreover, Kate reported that the learning process was difficult, a perception which also seemed to have been linked to the teacher Kate had had before high school.

A lack of confidence related to the English teacher she had had before high school also seemed to manifest itself in Kate's language learning experiences outside the classroom. One of Kate's most vivid memories regarding her English learning experiences outside the classroom, the first time she talked to native speakers of English, had not been a positive experience. When asked how she felt during that communicative situation, Kate reported: "I, I feel shy and I can't say nothing . . ." (First interview). Moreover, her Skype communication in English with her father was not reported as being a positive out-of-class learning experience but rather as an anxiety-provoking experience:

I: *. . . In your language learning history, you say that your father has played an important role in your learning process.*
K: *Yeah.*
I: *And you also say that he usually talks to you in English.*
K: *Yeah.*
I: *For you to practice.*
        . . .
K: *Yeah. And we, we usually talk on Skype.*
I: *On Skype?*
K: *Yeah. And there he try to... talk to me in English.*
        . . .
K: *Not all the time he ... reuseste* [succeeds]*.*
I: *He succeeds.*
K: *To, to...*

I: *To make you speak?*
K: *Yeah.*
        . . .
K: *But she, he, but he try to.*
I: *. . . So . . . why are there times when you don't want to speak to him in English?*
        . . .
K: *When I don't know the words or I'm not sure about something.* (First interview)

Kate's nervousness, her lack of self-confidence also emerged in the English classroom, during the lessons observations. For instance, during a picture-based speaking activity which focused on different forms of entertainment, Kate's speech involved pauses and hesitations when the teacher called on her to talk about the pictures (Lesson observation 11).

Kate's father worked as a doctor in the UK, and Kate saw herself at her father's at university. She essentially viewed English as providing her with access to a university in England, which seemed to have been her main reason for studying English. Although she said that there were numerous universities with excellent reviews in the UK, she did not have a clear image of herself studying at a particular university:

> *I want to study there because it has "countless" educational institutions with great reviews, every single international student had the opportunity to study there and the diploma from that university is good for CV when you want to find a well-paid job.* (Language learning history)

Kate did not seem to have her own, personal, internalized vision for the future with regard to English. Rather, she had a more general, widespread vision of finding a well-paid job faster after having obtained a diploma from a university in the UK and adding that diploma to her CV. This was stressed later in her account: She stated that she saw English as still playing a role in her life in ten years' time because her future employer would require knowledge of a foreign language. She expressed her belief that knowing a foreign language was necessary at the workplace, placing emphasis on the pragmatic benefits of knowing English. Kate reported that she had not pictured herself living in the UK after graduating from university, her main reason being that her mother did not want to live there.

There seemed to be fluctuations in Kate's motivation to learn that school year compared to the previous year. Kate's lower motivation during the year when the study was conducted was implied by the teacher's comments that Kate was less enthusiastic about learning English compared with the previous school year. In the ninth grade, Kate seemed to be mainly motivated by her desire to participate in English contests such as the Olympiad:

T: . . . *although last year she really wanted to ... prove that she knows, that she ... She wanted to participate in the Olympiad. She insisted very much that I help her to prepare for the Olympiad. I helped her, she went to the Olympiad, but she didn't ... I don't remember, she didn't win a prize or something. But she wanted to participate.* (Interview with Mrs. Vaughn)

T: . . . *This year, I don't know, she hasn't manifested herself much, but last year, yes, she enjoyed participating much more. She really put her hand up all the time.*

I: *Yes.*

T: *At least during the second semester she had driven me crazy, at a certain point she wanted to participate all the time. And now, I don't know, she has changed a little compared to last year.*

. . .

I: *Yes. Was it last year that she participated in the Olympiad?*

T: *Mhm.* (Interview with Mrs. Vaughn)

Kate's low motivation that school year was further emphasized by the teacher in her comments that, although Kate was going to take the Cambridge exam the following year, she had not practiced enough for the exam. In the teacher's own words:

T: . . . *I've heard her saying that she intends to take the Cambridge exam next year, that she would like to take the Cambridge exam. But ... for example this year it doesn't seem to me that she has practiced enough for her to ... be able to take it. I mean, the Cambridge exam involves hard work and a lot of effort channeled in a certain direction. I mean, you need to know very well how to do those exercises typical for Cambridge.*

I: *Yes.*

. . .

T: *And I haven't seen her going in that direction.* (Interview with Mrs. Vaughn)

As can be seen from these accounts, there was a close interplay between these two adolescent learners' motivation to learn English and their prevalent emotion, or lack of an expressed dominant emotion towards English in their language learning experiences. Mika reportedly experienced a strong positive emotion towards English, love, which was closely linked to her emotions towards her favorite celebrity figure and which enhanced and maintained her motivation in her English language learning experience. Furthermore, her motivation was linked to the teacher she had had before high school and strongly shaped her vision of her future L2 self. As for Kate, her account revealed the lack of an expressed dominant emotion towards English, essentially linked to the teacher she had had before high school, and the presence of a weaker motivation in her English learning experience and a less internalized English-related vision of herself in the future.

5. Discussion

In response to the research questions, which asked if there is a relationship between emotion and motivation in the teenagers' EFL learning experience, the present study has found that the learners' motivation to learn English and their emotions towards English were closely interconnected. Emotion shaped motivation in complex, idiosyncratic ways. Mika's dominant positive emotion towards English was love. This strong positive emotion supported her motivation in her learning experience in the long term. Her case has shown that love constructs and brings vividness to imagery of interactions with speakers of the target language, which in turn exerts a motivational force in the language learning experience. Such findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the connection between emotion, imagery and motivation in the learning experience. In contrast, Kate's case has revealed that the lack of a prevalent positive emotion towards the language studied can hinder motivation. Exploring the relationship between emotions and motivation has enabled a more in-depth understanding of teenagers' motivational and emotional dimensions of their language learning experience within their sociocultural context.

The relationship between the ideal L2 self, imagery, emotion and motivation clearly emerged from Mika's data. Her vision of her ideal L2 self, that of becoming a good learner and speaker of English, appears to have been powerfully shaped by the mental projections of herself communicating with her role model, Michael Jackson. Her account reveals the motivational force of the desire to talk to her favorite singer, the powerful role of imagination and emotion in reducing the discrepancy between Mika's initial English-related self and her wished-for English-using self. It was the interlocutor in an imaginary communicative interaction, her emotions towards him and the desire to express these emotions that seemed to have played a crucial role in her strong positive emotion towards English, love, and her reported preference for English for emotional expression. Mika's case shows that "imagination is a powerful route with which to influence emotions," which "are central to energizing a reduction of the discrepancies between students' present and future selves" (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012, p. 200). Mika's ideal L2 self, her vision of an L2 self engaged in communication with her role model, thus enhanced her prevalent positive emotion, love of English, which in turn fueled her motivation to learn the language. This converges with Miyahara's (2014) study, which has shown that positive emotions enable students to become proactive in their language learning experience and that emotional experiences are part of students' ideal L2 selves.

For Mika, the L2, English, may have also been a language of detachment from a painful experience (Pavlenko, 2005), namely from her parents' divorce. In

other words, English empowered her to construct a more detached self, to detach herself from an emotionally difficult experience since her imaginary interactions with Michael Jackson involved the use of another language, English. Such findings support Wilson's (2013) argument that the foreign language can act as a mask. This view of the foreign language as a refuge from a painful event could also explain Mika's preference for English when it comes to emotional expression. Such an interpretation seems to find support in the fact that Mika never mentioned her parents' separation and talked very little about them. In addition, English was also the language linked to the imaginary intimacy between Mika and her favorite singer. This learner's case converges with Pavlenko's (2005) argument that languages of power and desire are vested with particular emotional values. These findings emerging from Mika's case also reinforce Fredrickson's (2001) argument that positive emotions such as love build not only intellectual resources but also psychological resources in the form of improved well-being over time.

The complex interaction between the ought-to L2 self and contextual factors in the language learning experience was pointed out by the findings in Kate's case. For this learner, the ought-to L2 self was also strongly shaped by the motivation to meet parental and societal expectations. Kate's ought-to L2 self, studying at a university in Britain, was shaped by the sense that she ought to meet her parents' expectations but also broader expectations, such as English teachers' or employers' expectations of students to get a university degree in an English-speaking country. A rather strong ought-to L2 self clearly emerged in Kate's English learning. Her comment that she would not be able to study in the UK if she did not know English suggests a fear of negative outcomes, in particular inability to go to university abroad if she did not know English well enough. This ought-to self may also be linked to meeting her parents' expectations, to the pressure for her to do well in English in order to be a successful university student in England since failure would mean disappointing her parents. It emphasizes her parents' role in shaping her future goals. Kate's case partially converges with Gkonou's (2015) findings. While it supports Gkonou's argument that noticing a gap between self-perceived competence and the accomplishment of future goals can accentuate language learners' fear of failure, it does not seem to be in line with the author's finding that the awareness of such a gap motivates learners to act to narrow the gap.

The findings from Mika's and Kate's cases have revealed that highly motivated learners such as Mika have a more internalized and vivid vision of their future L2 selves, while less motivated learners such as Kate lack an internalized image of future L2 selves. Such results confirm Lamb's (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012) finding that that ideal L2 selves have a stronger motivational power in the long term than ought-to L2 selves.

Another factor in the participating students' motivation to learn English is related to the relationship between them and their teachers. The findings have shown that Mika's classroom interactions with her English teacher before high school and the support provided by the teacher gave rise to positive emotions such as pride and happiness, which nurtured her motivation. The data in Mika's case converge with Mahn and John-Steiner's (2002) findings that caring support can enhance students' confidence and promote learning. In contrast, Kate's case has shown that teachers can also hinder the emergence of positive emotions, which in turn weakens motivation in the language learning experience. The findings from Mika's and Kate's cases confirm the existence of a relationship between students' motivation and their teachers' motivation, which was also found in Taylor's (2010; 2013) research. The motivation of the teacher Mika had before high school seemed to be manifested in this teacher's interest in her students and in the encouragement she offered in the classroom, which enhanced Mika's motivation and supported her learning. In contrast, the lack of motivation of the teacher Kate had before high school appeared to have manifested itself in this teacher's lack of encouragement and learning support in her relationship with her students, which hindered Kate's self-esteem and motivation to learn English.

6. Limitations and recommendations for future research

Given that no research is without limitations, the present study is not an exception. One of its limitations is that, since it was conducted over a school semester, it was not possible to capture numerous changes in motivation in the participants' English learning experience. For instance, fluctuations in motivation at the end of the school year compared to the beginning of the school year were not possible to record. Longitudinal case studies should thus be conducted for the dynamism of learners' motivation to be more fully captured. Such studies could offer insight into fluctuations in motivation from one semester to another or from one school year to another.

Another limitation is that, in the present study, the participants were in humanities-oriented classrooms, which implies an affinity towards subjects such as foreign languages. Future research should consider including participants who are in classrooms with various specializations and who experience a wider range of emotions towards the foreign language studied. Moreover, only female students participated. Research has shown that there are gender differences in language learning motivation. For instance, it has been found that British male secondary school pupils tend not to choose to study languages they associate with emotions (see Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002). Future studies

should thus include both male and female teenage learners when investigating emotions and motivation in their language learning experience.

7. Implications

The present study has important implications for language learning and teaching. It stresses the need for teachers to view their adolescent learners not only as rational beings but also as complex emotional beings whose positive emotions towards the language studied need to be enhanced and cultivated for their motivation to be fueled in their language learning experience. The findings imply that Romanian teenagers like their teachers to treat them "like real people" (Taylor, 2013, p. 53). Learners should thus be provided with as many opportunities as possible for their agency to emerge as they internalize knowledge and extend it to contexts that matter to them in the outside world (Lantolf, 2013). As has been noted, "the quite extensive individual engagement with English outside school is not perceived in terms of learning at all, but rather as English finding its way to teenagers' repertoires as if automatically and without conscious effort" (Pitkänen-Huhta & Nikula, 2013, p. 118).

Treating language learners as real people and thus recognizing not only their cognitive but also their emotional side can be achieved through the use of humanistic activities, which "deal with enhancing self-esteem, becoming aware of one's strengths, seeing the good in others, gaining insights into oneself, developing closer and more satisfying relationships, becoming conscious of one's feelings and values and having a positive outlook on life" (Moskowitz, 1999, p. 178). Such activities are likely to make students feel good about themselves both as individuals and language learners and thus enhance positive emotions, motivation and engagement in the language learning experience.

By creating opportunities for learners to share their hopes and dreams, teachers can enhance love in the language classroom (Barcelos & Coelho, 2016) and, with it, imagery and motivation. As Dörnyei (2009) points out, teachers should include classroom activities that "can . . . serve as potent ideal self reminders" (p. 37). Given the finding that imagery has motivating power in the learning experience, teachers should offer guidance for the imagery component of their students' possible L2 selves to be developed. Just like athletes use guided imagery during their training in sports performance (Dörnyei, 2009, 2014), language learners need guidance in the classroom for the imagery component of their possible L2 selves to have motivational power. Teachers should thus design classroom activities intended to help learners generate, strengthen and maintain such a vision of possible L2 selves in order to enhance their students' motivation in the learning experience. As has been argued, "by invoking the imagination and using the power of

positive emotion, teachers can provoke learners to respond to the dissonance found within their possible selves" (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012, p. 211).

8. Conclusion

This study explored the interplay between language learning emotions and motivation in Romanian adolescents, namely the ways in which motivation is shaped by the emotional dimensions of adolescent students' English language learning experience. Love of English was the dominant emotion which emerged in one of the participating students' learning experience. The intense positive emotion of love was powerfully shaped by imagery and fueled motivation to learn English in the long term. In contrast, no prevalent positive emotion was found in the other student's case. Moreover, the data revealed a weaker motivation in the case of the learner who did not reportedly experience a dominant emotion towards English. The study has shown that strong positive emotions such as love can shape motivation in powerful, idiosyncratic and meaningful ways in teenage students' language learning experience. Intense positive emotions are thus invaluable resources that adolescent students can draw on to nurture their motivation in the long term in their language learning experience.

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APPENDIX

Instruction sheet for the language learning history task

Write your own story about your English learning experiences from the moment you began learning English until now. Focus on what you consider to be more important and try to give as many details as possible. When reflecting upon your experiences, make sure you include answers to the following questions:

   When and where did you start learning English?
   How have you learned English?
   What is your most vivid memory regarding your English learning experiences?
   What opportunities have you had to use English until now?
   Who played a particularly important role in your English learning process? In what way(s)?

Keep in mind that your language learning history should look like a story (the story of your English learning experiences) rather than answers to a questionnaire.