

**Balázs Fajt**

Budapest Business School University of Applied Sciences  
Faculty of Finance and Accountancy  
Department of Languages for Finance and Management

## **Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions of their students' individual differences: A validation study**

<https://doi.org/10.48040/PL.2022.2.9>

*Besides classroom-based EFL lessons, EFL learners have a plethora of opportunities to learn the language by engaging in out-of-school or in other words extramural English activities. As learners pursue these activities for entertainment purposes, extramural English activities may be closely associated with L2 learning motivation. In addition to motivation, several other individual learner differences, namely L2 anxiety and L2 willingness to communicate are also important in both the school-based and the extramural learning contexts, as motivating and stress-free environments may lead to a decrease in learners' level of L2 anxiety and an increase in the level of their L2 willingness to communicate. Using the quantitative research paradigm, the present pilot study aimed to investigate Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions of their students' individual learner differences as well as extramural EFL learning. The preliminary results show that participants demonstrate an overall positive attitude towards extramural EFL learning and considered their students to be relatively motivated to learn English, to be willing to speak English in EFL classes. Finally, participants' responses also show that they do not perceive their students anxious in EFL classes.*

Keywords: *extramural English activities, individual learner differences, quantitative study, secondary school EFL teachers, validation study*

### **Introduction**

Recently, researchers have become increasingly interested in what is going on outside the classroom in informal second language (L2) learning contexts (Benson, 2011; Murray, 2017; Nunan–Richards, 2015; Reinders–Benson, 2017; Richards, 2015). There are several terms describing out-of-school (EFL) learning; however, one of the most recent terms is extramural English (EE), which according to Sundqvist (2009) refers to all leisure time activities that students do in their spare time. However, there is little research in the Hungarian context, especially with regard to the relationship between extramural English activities and individual learner differences (e.g. L2 learning motivation, L2 anxiety, L2 willingness to communicate, etc.) (cf. Fajt, 2021a; Fajt, 2021b; Józsa–Imre, 2013; Lajtai, 2020). There is even less research on EFL teachers' perceptions about EFL learners' individual learner differences (cf. Öveges–Csizér, 2018).

The aim of the present study is to present a small-scale validation study which examines the perceptions of Hungarian EFL teachers about their EFL learners' individual differences. In the first part of the study, the term extramural English activities is defined, and then individual learner differences, namely L2 learning motivation, L2 anxiety and L2 willingness to communicate (WTC), are addressed. This is followed by the detailed presentation of the research design including the participants of the research, the research instrument and the validation process. This section also provides an account of the data collection process and methods of data analysis. Finally, in the second half of the study, the preliminary results of the research are reported.

## **Extramural English activities**

As previously mentioned, the term *extramural English* was introduced by Sundqvist (2009) in her doctoral dissertation. I have already defined extramural English (EE) activities in another paper (see Fajt, 2021b), therefore, only a brief overview is provided here. The term is a compound combining “extra” and “mural” referring to all the (English) activities taking place outside the walls of the school and more specifically the EFL classroom. In this respect, EE activities may include any leisure time activities which require a certain command of English. Popular EE activities may include watching films and series, playing video games, listening to music, using social media and so on. It is also important to note that engagement in EE activities is voluntary, i.e. initiated by the learner themselves. This is an important feature of EE activities because EFL teachers may make their students watch films after school, yet this is not considered an EE activity (Sundqvist, 2009), because of the lack of the voluntary aspect of the engagement.

## **Individual learner differences**

### ***L2 learning motivation***

As mentioned earlier, extramural English activities are basically pursued by learners as a hobby, so such activities may be closely related to L2 learning motivation. One of the most widely used L2 learning motivational theories is Dörnyei’s (2005) Motivational Self-System Theory. Drawing on theories from psychology (Markus–Nurius, 1986), the theory describes motivation to learn a foreign language along three main components. From the three components, two of them are found on the “self-level”, namely the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self; the third, and last component is an external factor, the Language Learning Environment, which is not found at the “self-level”.

In Dörnyei’s (2005) model, the Ideal L2 Self is related to the future and refers to the learner’s future image of themselves. This concerns whether the language learner can imagine that he or she will be a successful language learner in the future, and whether he or she will be a competent EFL speaker, whether he or she can imagine that he or she is going to study in an English language higher education programme. In contrast, the Ought-to L2 Self focuses on the present and refers to what the language learner thinks others, such as teachers, parents and peers expect them to do, that is whether parents and teachers expect the learner to prepare for the EFL lessons, to obtain a foreign language exam certificate, etc. Finally, the Language Learning Environment includes language learning experiences, so this applies to everything related to the EFL lesson the learner has at school (e.g. how much learners enjoy EFL lessons, etc.).

Finding which of the components of the Motivational Self-System Theory best describe students’ motivation in a given L2 learning context (e.g. in class) is typically done by quantitatively examining the effect of them on learners’ motivated language learning behavior. This is a scale aiming to describe how much effort learners put into learning English at school. Based on the results of previous research, the Ideal L2 Self and the Language Learning Environment are the main predictors of motivated language learning behavior in the Hungarian context (Csizér–Kormos, 2009; Kormos–Csizér, 2008) and the Ought-to L2 Self is much less of a factor affecting learners’ motivation (Csizér–Lukács, 2010). As the two self-level variables (Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self) and the Language Learning Environment are more likely to be measured by collecting quantitative data from students (not teachers), the present study only included a scale called “*motivated language learning behavior*” (cf. Research instrument) as EFL teachers may be able to have a perception of this in their EFL classes.

### ***L2 anxiety***

The second commonly examined individual variable strongly related to L2 learning motivation is L2 anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) define L2 anxiety as follows: “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning processes” (Horwitz, 1986:128). To put it more simply, a language learner can experience anxiety in a language for a number of reasons, such as having to speak in front of their classmates, making mistakes in English, and so on. Previous studies examining this model found that anxiety has either a positive (facilitating anxiety) or a negative (debilitating anxiety) impact on L2 learning. Most empirical research including two meta-analyses (Teimouri–Goetze–Plonsky, 2019; Zhang, 2019) show that anxiety has a negative effect on L2 learning and L2 performance (debilitating anxiety). A meta-analysis is a comprehensive analysis of the results of several studies carried out for similar purposes investigating a particular issue or phenomenon (e.g. L2 learning motivation). Its main advantage is that it takes into account all available data, therefore, it has greater statistical power than that of individual studies. Consequently, the reliability of a meta-analysis is extremely high (Gopalakrishnan–Ganeshkumar, 2013).

### ***L2 willingness to communicate***

Another individual learner variable related to L2 learning motivation is L2 willingness to communicate (WTC), which MacIntyre et al. (1998) define as “a readiness to enter into the discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (MacIntyre et al., 1998:547). This refers to the extent to which the language learner is willing to engage in a conversation with others or in this case with fellow students or the EFL teacher in the classroom. As for empirical research, previous research has found that WTC negatively correlates with L2 anxiety (MacIntyre, 1999).

### **Methods**

This research is the third instalment of a larger research project and was preceded by two studies investigating Hungarian secondary school students’ extramural English activities. One of these studies was a qualitative pilot study (Fajt, 2021a), the other pilot study was a quantitative pilot study (Fajt, 2021b). As opposed to the previous pilot studies, the aim of the present small-scale study is to validate a research instrument collecting quantitative data on Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers’ perceptions on Hungarian secondary school students’ individual learner differences.

The quantitative research paradigm was adopted in this study because the research design and the scales, modified though, were adopted from one of my previous studies (cf. Fajt, 2021b). The choice of the quantitative research paradigm was motivated by that fact that by using statistical analyses, the data collected later with the help of this research instrument (“*the EFL teacher questionnaire*”) could be compared and contrasted with the data collected through the questionnaire validated in the preceding study of mine investigating secondary school students’ perceptions (the EFL student questionnaire, see Fajt, 2021b).

This pilot study sought answers to the following research questions:

- RQ1** What are Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers’ perceptions about the incorporation of Hungarian secondary school students’ extramural English interests into EFL lessons at school?
- RQ2** What are Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers’ perceptions about Hungarian secondary school students’ in-school L2 learning motivation, anxiety and willingness to communicate?

## **Participants**

In the scope of the present research project, Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions were investigated. The participants of the study were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling methods, that is. EFL teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire and then they were asked to share it with their colleagues. The total number of participants was 30 and the gender distribution of participants was as follows: 23.3% (n=7) male and 76.7% (n=23) female. The average age of participants was 44.6 (SD=9.57) and the average years of teaching experience was 18.97 (SD=11.27).

## **Research instrument**

As opposed to the preceding quantitative research instrument (Fajt, 2021b), in the case of which the literature had to be consulted, here only the scales from the previous study were used and reworded in a way that only the point of view of statements was changed. For instance, in the student questionnaire (Fajt, 2021b) the following item was used: "*If I use the English language outside school a lot, I will be able to speak better English.*". In the present study, this was turned into "*If students use the English language outside school a lot, they will be able to speak better English.*". This was motivated by the fact that the data collected this way could be compared using inferential statistical procedures. In addition, the language of the questionnaire was Hungarian as the mother tongue of the participants was also Hungarian and similarly to the previous study (Fajt, 2021b).

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. In the first section, participants' beliefs about their students' in-school and extramural learning were investigated. Additionally, participants' willingness to incorporate their students' extramural English interests into EFL classes was also investigated, along with participants' perceptions about the extent to which their students incorporate their own extramural English interests into EFL lessons at school. Finally, participants' views on their students' individual learner differences were also investigated. The data were collected by using statements in the case of which participants were to indicate to what extent they agreed with them. This was achieved by using a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (I do not agree at all) to 5 (I completely agree). The scales used in this study were as follows:

- (1) Extramural learning beliefs (4 items) (adopted from Lajtai, 2020)  
Sample item: "*If students use the English language outside school a lot, they will be able to speak better English.*"
- (2) In-school EFL learning beliefs (4 items) (adopted from Lajtai, 2020)  
Sample item: "*If students pay attention in EFL classes, their English will be better.*"
- (3) Learners' inclusion of their EE interests into EFL lessons (5 items)  
Sample item: "*Students use English words or phrases which they learned from video games.*"
- (4) Inclusion of learners' EE interests into EFL lessons (5 items)  
Sample item: "*We tend to watch videos and scenes from English-language films and series in English as a Foreign Language classes at school.*"
- (5) Willingness to map learners' EE interests (5 items)  
Sample item: "*I tend to ask my students what kind of movies and series they watch in their free time.*"
- (6) EFL students' in-school motivated learning behaviour (4 items) (adopted from Csizér and Dörnyei, 2005)  
Sample item: "*Students spend much time preparing for English as a Foreign Language classes.*"

- (7) EFL students' L2 anxiety in the classroom (4 items) (adopted from Tóth, 2008)  
Sample item: "Students feel awkward when they have to speak English in front of their classmates in class."
- (8) EFL students' WTC in the EFL classroom (5 items) (adopted from Nagy, 2005)  
Sample item: "Students like talking to their classmates in English in EFL classes."

The last section of the research instrument gathered data on the background of the participants (gender, age, number of years teaching English, etc.).

As part of the validation process, content validity was ensured by asking professionals to read through the items and compare and contrast them with items in the previous study (Fajt, 2021b). This was important to ensure that the data collected in the future could be compared by using statistical procedures. The final version of the research instrument used in this pilot study will be provided upon request.

### ***Data collection and data analysis***

The present pilot questionnaire was implemented online using Google Forms and it was active for a week; it took approximately 10 minutes for participants to complete. As this is a pilot study, there was no need for a larger sample size, therefore, only 30 Hungarian secondary school EFL teachers filled it in in spring 2021. The obtained data were coded and were then entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 27.0. Then, in order to ensure the internal consistency of scales, the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficients were computed for all scales. This was followed by factor analysis to ensure that there were not any further latent dimensions within the scales. Finally, preliminary results were obtained by using descriptive statistical measures which meant that mean scores (M) and standard deviations (SD) were computed for the scales in the study.

### **Preliminary results and discussion**

This section provides insights into the preliminary result of the research. First the reliability of scales is checked, followed by factor analysis. Then the mean scores (M) along with their standard deviations (SD) are presented.

#### ***The reliability of the scales***

As a very first step, the reliability of the internal consistency of the scales was checked. This was achieved by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficients (Table 1).

Table 1. Reliability coefficients of the scales

<b>Scales</b>	<b>Number of items</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>
1. Extramural learning beliefs	4	0.865
2. In-school EFL learning beliefs	4	0.799
3. Learners' inclusion of their EE interests into EFL lessons	5	0.775
4. Inclusion of learners' EE interests into EFL lessons	5	0.745
5. Willingness to map learners' EE interests	5	0.903
6. EFL students' in-school motivated learning behaviour	4	0.885
7. EFL students' L2 anxiety in the classroom	4	0.744
8. EFL students' WTC in the EFL classroom	5	0.823

Table 1 shows that all scales are reliable as their Cronbach' alpha coefficients reach the .7 minimum threshold indicated in the literature (Dörnyei–Taguchi, 2010).

### *EFL teachers' views*

The means of EFL teachers' responses with the standard deviations of the means are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of EFL teachers' responses

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Extramural learning beliefs	4.84	.29
In-school learning beliefs	4.28	.57
Learners' inclusion of their EE interests into EFL lessons	4.17	.67
Willingness to map learners' EE interests	4.04	.92
Inclusion of learners' EE interests into EFL lessons	3.86	.66
EFL students' WTC in the EFL classroom	3.59	.70
EFL students' in-school motivated learning behaviour	3.49	.79
EFL students' L2 anxiety in the classroom	2.87	.85

It is clear from the averages of EFL teachers' responses that they believe EFL lessons at school are important, but in addition to these, extramural English activities also play an important role in EFL learning. It may be concluded that teachers believe that a successful language learner is someone who devotes a certain proportion of their free time to extramural English activities as well. Furthermore, EFL teachers also believe that students tend to use words or phrases learned from extramural English activities in EFL lessons at school. The averages of responses also show that EFL teachers make an effort to map their students' extramural English activities, which is obviously related to the fact that they think that regular engagement in extramural English activities can be a useful resource for EFL learning; therefore, EFL teachers make an effort to involve learners' extramural English interests into EFL lessons. As for students' individual differences, teachers believe that students are relatively motivated in class and are relatively willing to speak English, and in connection with this, EFL teachers also believe that students are not anxious in class.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of the present study was to validate a research instrument used in a larger research project. Based on the results of the validation process, it may be concluded that all scales are reliable and unidimensional. In addition to validation, this paper gave an account of some of the preliminary results of the study. Based on the results, it may be concluded that Hungarian EFL teachers believe that in addition to EFL lessons at school, it is also important for students to engage in extramural English activities, as this also contributes to the development of their EFL skills. Furthermore, teachers believe that students are relatively motivated at school to learn English, and are willing to speak English, and are less anxious when it comes to using English in EFL classes.

Of course, as the present study is a pilot study, it is not suitable for drawing far-reaching conclusions based on its results due to the very small sample size. Nevertheless, the results, in their current form, may provide useful insights into the opinions and perceptions of Hungarian EFL teachers. The validated scales can also be used for large-scale investigations, which could provide further insights into the differences between the perceptions of EFL teachers about their students' and EFL students about their own individual differences and extramural EFL learning.

Furthermore, as Cseppentő (2021) points out, there are fewer and fewer students applying for university foreign language programmes of not frequently taught foreign, such as German and Romance languages, therefore, it would be worthwhile investigating the perceptions and views of secondary school teachers teaching, for instance, German as a Foreign Language or any other foreign languages.

## References

- Benson, P. (2011): *Teaching researching autonomy in language learning* (2nd ed.). Pearson: London. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315833767>
- Cseppentő, K. (2021): Nyelvszakválasztási hallgatói preferenciák változása a bolognai rendszer tükrében [Changes in students' language choice preferences in light of the Bologna system]. *Porta Lingua*. 2021/1. 99-107. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48040/PL.2021.8>
- Csizér, K. – Dörnyei, Z. (2005): The internal structure of language learning motivation and its relationship with language choice and learning effort. *Modern Language Journal*. 89/1. 19-36.
- Csizér, K. – Kormos, J. (2009): Learning experiences, selves and motivated learning behavior: A comparative analysis of structural models for Hungarian secondary and university learners of English. In: Dörnyei, Z. – Ushioda, E. (eds.) (2009): *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. Multilingual Matters: Bristol. 98-119. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293-006>
- Csizér, K. – Lukács, G. (2010): The comparative analysis of motivation, attitudes and selves: The case of English and German in Hungary. *System*. 38/1. 1-13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2009.12.001>
- Dörnyei, Z. – Taguchi, T. (2010): *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing* (2nd ed.). Routledge: London. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203864739>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005): *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum: London.
- Fajt, B. (2021a): Az iskolán kívüli idegen nyelvű nyelvtanulói érdeklődési körök feltérképezése egy pilot kutatás bemutatása [Exploring language learners' extramural English interests: A pilot study]. In: Juhász, E. – Kozma, T. – Tóth, P. (eds.) (2021): *Társadalmi innováció és tanulás a digitális korban*. Magyar Nevelés- és Oktatókutatók Egyesülete (HERA): Budapest-Debrecen. 356-364.
- Fajt, B. (2021b): Hungarian secondary school students' extramural English interests: the development and the validation of a questionnaire. *Working Papers in Language Pedagogy*. 16. 36-53
- Gopalakrishnan, S. – Ganeshkumar, P. (2013): Systematic reviews and meta-analysis: understanding the best evidence in primary healthcare. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*. 2. 9-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4103/2249-4863.109934>
- Horwitz, E. K. – Horwitz, M. B. – Cope, J. (1986): Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*. 70/2. 125-132.
- Józsa, K. – Imre, I. A. (2013): Az iskolán kívüli angol nyelvű tevékenységek összefüggése a nyelvtudással és a nyelvtanulási motivációval [The relationship between out-of-school English language activities and language proficiency and language learning motivation]. *Iskolakultúra*. 23/1. 38-51.
- Kormos, J. – Csizér, K. (2008): Age-related differences in the motivation of learning English as a foreign language: Attitudes, selves, and motivated learning behaviour. *Language Learning*. 58/2. 327-355. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2008.00443.x>
- Lajtai, Á. (2020): Hungarian EFL learners' extramural contact with English. In Geld, R. – Krevelj, S. L. (eds.) (2020): *UZRT 2018: Empirical studies in applied linguistics*. FF Press: Zagreb. 128-149.
- MacIntyre, P. D. – Babin, P. A. – Clément, R. (1999): Willingness to communicate: Antecedents & consequences. *Communication Quarterly*. 47/2. 215-229. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379909370135>
- MacIntyre, P. D. – Dörnyei, Z. – Clément, R. – Noels, K. A. (1998): Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*. 82/4. 545-562. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb05543.x>
- Markus, H. – Nurius, P. (1986): Possible selves. *American Psychologist*. 41/9. 954-969.
- Murray, G. (2017): Autonomy in the time of complexity: Lessons from beyond the classroom. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*. 8/2. 116-134.
- Nagy, B. C. (2005): Az egyéni kommunikációs jellemzők szerepe haladó szintű nyelvtanulók esetében [The role of individual communicational variables in advanced EFL learning]. *Magyar Pedagógia*. 105/1. 5-27.
- Nunan, D. – Richards, J. C. (2015): *Language learning beyond the classroom*. Routledge: New York.

- Öveges, E. – Csizér, K. (2018): *Vizsgálat a köznevelésben folyó idegennyelv-oktatás kereteiről és hatékonyságáról [An investigation into the framework and efficiency of foreign language teaching in Hungarian public education]*. Retrieved from [http://www.oktatas.hu/pub\\_bin/dload/sajtoszoba/nyelvoktatas\\_kutatasi\\_jele\\_ntes\\_2018.pdf](http://www.oktatas.hu/pub_bin/dload/sajtoszoba/nyelvoktatas_kutatasi_jele_ntes_2018.pdf)
- Reinders, H. – Benson, P. (2017): Research agenda: Language learning beyond the classroom. *Language Teaching*. 50/4. 561-578. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000192>
- Richards, J. C. (2015): The changing face of language learning: Learning beyond the classroom. *RELC Journal*. 46/1. 5-22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688214561621>
- Sundqvist, P. (2009): *Extramural English matters: out-of-school English and its impact on Swedish ninth graders' oral proficiency and vocabulary* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Karlstad University: Sweden.
- Teimouri, Y. – Goetze, J. – Plonsky, L. (2019): Second language anxiety and achievement: A meta-analysis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 41. 363-387. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263118000311>
- Tóth, Zs. (2008): A foreign language anxiety scale for Hungarian learners of English. *Working Papers in Language Pedagogy*. 2. 55-78.
- Zhang, X. (2019): Foreign language anxiety and foreign language performance: A meta-analysis. *The Modern Language Journal*. 103/4. 763-781. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12590>