

The language learning motivation of dyslexic students: A mixed methods investigation

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The aim of the study

- The aim of the study was to investigate the language learning motivation of dyslexic students in Hungary.
- A mixed methods study was designed:
 1. qualitative phase: insiders' views of the issues and problems related to L2 motivation.
 2. nationwide quantitative investigation on dyslexic students' motivational dispositions.

Background to the study

- The Motivational Self-System Theory (Dörnyei, 2005): Ideal L2 self, Ought-to L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience.
- Ideal L2 Self, which is one's ideal self-image expressing the wish to become a competent L2 speaker.
- The Ought-to L2 Self contains attributes that one believes one ought to possess (i.e. various duties, obligations, or responsibilities) in order to avoid possible negative outcomes
- L2 Learning Experience covers situation specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience

Research questions: The qualitative phase

- What attitudes do students with dyslexia display towards the foreign languages they study?
- What goals do students with dyslexia have in foreign language learning?
- What characterizes the motivated behavior of students with dyslexia?
- How do students with dyslexia see themselves as language learners?
- What role does the milieu play in the language learning of dyslexic students?

Research questions: The quantitative phase

- Research questions used in the qualitative phase were applied in the quantitative project as well.
- Additional dimensions were added to the investigation:
- What are the main differences between dyslexic and non-dyslexic language learners in terms of their attitudinal and motivational dispositions and their motivated learning behavior?
- What are the main language-related differences between learners of English and German?

Research method: The qualitative phase

- Long interviews with 15 dyslexic students, who volunteered for participation. A varied sample was achieved in order to have as different experiences covered as possible.
- 60 000 words of data
- Interview questions were based on Dörnyei (2005)
- Motivated learning behavior: language choice and effort
- Motivational characteristics: language attitudes, learning goals, group-related attitudes, students' language learning selves.

Sample: The qualitative phase

	Pseudo name	Gender	Age	L2	L3	L4	Participants' age at diagnosis
1.	Antal	boy	22	English	German		14
2.	Barbara	girl	18	German	English		6
3.	Csilla	girl	28	English	Russian	German	27
4.	Dénes	boy	20	German	English		8
5.	Eszter	girl	25	English	Russian		23
6.	Ferenc	boy	27	English	Greek		26
7.	Gábor	boy	14	English	Spanish		10
8.	Helga	girl	16	English	Italian		13
9.	Ilona	girl	15	English	Hebrew	Spanish	12
10.	József	boy	15	English	Russian		7
11.	Konrád	boy	17	English	German		7
12.	Lajos	boy	18	English	German		13
13.	Miklós	boy	16	German	English		10
14.	Norbert	boy	19	English	Serbian		12
15.	Péter	boy	16	English			13

Research method: The quantitative phase

- A piloted and standardized questionnaire was used.
- A nationwide study involving both dyslexic and non-dyslexic learners in their final years of primary school education (13-14 years old).
- The latent dimensions were based on Dörnyei (2005); Dörnyei, Csizér and Németh (2006) and Ryan (2006).

The quantitative sample

- The sample: 1182 students. 184 dyslexic learners (112 studying English and 72 German) and 998 non-dyslexic learners (681 studying English and 317 German).
- Year 8 students from both mainstream schools and schools that catered for students with LDs.
- 37.1% from Budapest, the capital of Hungary, 43.6% for towns and cities and 7.3% from villages.
- Both in the qualitative and quantitative phase dyslexic students held an official certificate about their dyslexia.

Categories of analysis: The qualitative phase

- Motivational orientation, that is, what goals students wish to reach by studying the given foreign language:
 - international posture i.e. studying the language because students want to be able to participate in international communication (based on Dörnyei (2005).
 - instrumental motivation, that is, studying the foreign language to pass exams, receive better jobs Clément & Kruidenier, 1983; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006).
 - cultural orientation, which includes students' reasons to study the language in order to understand the cultural products (films, magazines, TV programmes) of the L2 community ... (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006).

Categories of analysis cont.: The qualitative phase

- Attitudes to L2 and L3 – like and dislike of first foreign language (Gardner, 2006; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006).
- Motivated behavior- effort and persistence in language learning
- Self-perceptions: students' views of themselves as language learners and their attributions of successes and failures (based on Dörnyei (2005)).

The latent dimensions in the questionnaire

Ideal L2 self (5 items). Sample item: I like to think of myself as someone who will be able to speak English.

Motivated learning behavior (8 items). Sample item: I am willing to work hard at learning English.

Language learning experience (5 items). Sample item: I enjoy the English lessons.

Parental encouragement (4 items): My parents encourage me to study English (German).

The global role of the language (4 items). Sample item: Studying English will help me to understand people from all over the world.

Language learning attitudes (4 items): Sample Item: I really like learning English (German).

Teacher's role (6 items): Sample item: My English teacher pays equal attention to all students.

Language learning difficulties (7 items). Sample item: It is difficult for me to decide how to pronounce an English word.

Anxiety (6 items): I feel anxious when I have to talk to a native speaker.

Self-perception (4 items). Sample item: I am diligent in language learning.

The qualitative results: Language attitudes I.

Participant	Positive attitudes toward FLs (Number of comments)			Negative attitudes toward FLs (Number of comments)		
	English	German	Other	English	German	Other
A	5	1	0	0	0	0
B	1	0	0	1	1	0
C	0	0	0	2	1	0
D	3	0	0	0	1	0
E	1	0	3	1	0	0
F	0	0	0	4	0	1
G	0	0	3	4	0	0
H	0	0	3	5	0	0
I	2	0	2	1	0	0
J	0	1	1	1	0	0
K	5	0	0	0	0	0
L	2	0	0	1	1	1
M	3	0	0	2	4	0
N	1	0	0	0	0	0
P	4	0	0	3	0	0
Total	27	2	12	25	8	2

The qualitative results: Language attitudes II.

- Positive attitudes: sounds nice, beautiful
- “I really like the way English sounds. It has a certain kind of melody. I also like the way English texts are structured. In sum, to my Hungarian ears it sounds nice” (A 178).

The qualitative results: Language attitudes III.

- Negative attitudes: difficult, it is a must.
- Source of negative attitudes:
- The constant sense of failure,
- When I was not yet diagnosed, I was crying a lot that my God, I was going to fail in English, and I did not even like learning it. I did not like English at all. (I1282).
- Teacher:
- I hated English for four years. ... But I think it was because of the teacher. At that time I did not want to say a word in English. Then I had a tutor for a year. And with her I really liked it. But then I went back to the English class at school and then I hated the whole stuff again. (B306-310)

The quantitative findings: The attitudinal dispositions

Scale	Sample	Mean	St. dev.	F for dyslexia	F for language	F for interaction
Language learning attitudes	Dys - E	3.32	1.05	0.01	6.84*	0.39
	Dys - G	3.15	1.10			
	Non-dys - E	3.36	0.96			
	Non-dys - G	3.10	1.03			

Motivational orientations: The interview data

- Instrumental: language exams, further studies, work. "Take my father's case. I can see that without speaking a foreign language, one cannot get a job" (J1409).
- Global English: „without speaking English you are nobody" (C548)
- Cultural interest: films and TV

Motivational orientations: The questionnaire data

- No clear instrumental dimension emerged in the study.
- The cultural orientation scale was not reliable.

Scales	Sample	Mean	St. dev.	F for Dyslexia	F for language	F for interaction
International posture	Dys - E	4.20	76	9.22*	124.99**	0.46
	Dys - G	3.49	94			
	Non-dys - E	4.34	64			
	Non-dys - G	3.71	81			

Language learning selves I.

- Positive self-image: Only four students have positive self-perceptions: good aptitude and hard work.
- Negative self-perception: lack of effort/aptitude. Only one student mentioned dyslexia as a potential source of failure.

Language learning selves II.

- It is very strange that it is quite difficult for me to learn foreign languages. Three things contribute to my difficulties. First, I am lazy, and that's entirely my fault. Second, I am dyslexic. Third, my foreign language learning aptitude is very low, just like my mother's. She is not dyslexic. She has very good writing and reading skills but no foreign language aptitude. She has been learning English for six years, but could not get anywhere with it. (I1329)

Language learning selves III.

- The Ought-to self dimension was not reliable enough to be used in the analysis.

Scales	Sample	Mean	St. dev.	F for dyslexia	F for language	F for interaction
Ideal L2 self	Dys - E	3.66	1.14	51.65**	68.59**	0.38
	Dys - G	2.99	1.00			
	Non-dys - E	4.16	83			
	Non-dys - G	3.58	95			

The role of milieu: The interview study

- With the exception of one participant, all the other interviewees received extensive help from their families.
- Four participants had language teachers in their families, who assisted them in various ways: ranging from intensive and regular private tutoring to occasional help and visits to the target language country.
- Siblings who studied the same language and parents who were proficient in L2 also helped.
- Two of the interviewees mentioned that knowing that learning languages is difficult for them, they chose the L2 on the basis of who can help in the family.
- The support of the students' milieu seems to be a highly important factor in the language learning process of students with dyslexia.

The role of milieu: The questionnaire data

Scales	Sample	Mean	St. dev.	F for dyslexia	F for language	F for interaction
Parental encouragement	Dys - E	4.11	1.07	8.28*	44.55**	1.10
	Dys - G	3.51	1.05			
	Non-dys - E	4.25	84			
	Non-dys - G	3.82	99			

Motivated learning behavior

- Effort: dyslexic learners know that they need to invest a lot of effort to succeed

I: What do you attribute your success to?

„To the lot of very hard-work, and a lot of studying“ (I1019).

- Many learners give up because they feel their efforts are wasted.

„I am not good at languages, so I do not really try hard“ (F854).

Motivated learning behavior

Scales	Sample	Mean	St. dev.	F for dyslexia	F for language	F for interaction
Motivated learning behavior	Dys - E	3.50	1.00	22.22**	32.29**	0.3
	Dys - G	3.08	1.04			
	Non-dys - E	3.82	80			
	Non-dys - G	3.43	88			

What dimensions affect motivated learning behavior?

Sample	Significant contributors to the equation in the regression analyses
Dyslexic - English	Ideal L2 self; Self perception; Language learning experience
Dyslexic - German	Language learning attitudes; Ideal L2 self; Self perception; Anxiety
Non-dyslexic - English	Ideal L2 self; Self perception; Anxiety; Parental role
Non-dyslexic - German	Ideal L2 self; Language learning attitudes; Parental role; Self perception

Conclusion I.

- Dyslexic language learners display significantly less positive motivational characteristics than their non-dyslexic peers.
- This difference is apparent in language learning self-concepts, attitudes and motivated behavior.
- The low level of motivation is likely to be caused by dyslexic students' difficulties in language learning.
- Language learners with dyslexia might easily get caught in a vicious circle since due to their problems in language learning, they might lose their motivation, which then might lead to experiencing further failures.

Conclusion II.

- The interviews show that Hungarian dyslexic students seem to have a strong Ought-to L2 self as the participants mainly have instrumental goals with the L2 such as passing language proficiency exams and enhancing their employment opportunities.
- The results of the questionnaire data indicate that regardless of which language the surveyed Hungarian students studied and whether they had a diagnosis of dyslexia, the most important direct predictor of how much effort they were willing to invest in language learning was their image of themselves as language learners.
- Many of the interview participants could not foresee that they will become competent and successful users of the L2 in the future.

Conclusion III.

- Many of our interviewees experienced serious problems in language learning, as a result of which a number of students had negative self-concept and either negative or mixed attitudes towards language learning.
- For these participants the discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves was often so large that they gave up language learning or did not invest sufficient energy into it.
- Our interview data indicate that only with family support and serious effort can students with dyslexia experience success in language learning, which is an essential pre-requisite for a positive evaluation of one's actual self and coping potential.
- The questionnaire findings show that dyslexic students also seem to be in a disadvantageous position because they receive less support from their parents.

Pedagogical implications

- Teachers should also use a wide range of motivational strategies with LD students since these students need considerable effort and persistence, and the time they spend with language learning in their academic and private life is longer than in the case of non-LD learners.
- Teachers should create learning situations and use language teaching materials that foster students' experience of success, however small it might be. Experience of success is a pre-requisite for improving the generally low self-esteem of students with LD and also enhances language learning attitudes, which are important in influencing motivated behaviour.

