



Awakening Youngsters to Foreign Languages and their Motivational Disposition

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To the prominence of motivation theory in language learning literature, attendant research has remained constrained to its cross-sectional implications for learning achievement. This study, however, examined whether exposure to foreign languages at an early age may determine children's future motivation for learning such languages in an instructed context. A two-scale questionnaire was specifically designed to study (i) the quality and amount of such exposure in the formative years of 321 primary school pupils and (ii) its bearing on their motivational disposition. Results suggested that systematic exposure to foreign languages had a significant positive bearing on their motivational orientations. Much of this significance appeared with the educational background of the family, yet factors such as the area of residence and the quality of preschool education were equally important. In view of these results, stakeholders may invest in the exposure concept within a child-pedagogically-friendly framework (e.g., the awakening-to-languages approach) to develop motivation from the ground up.

Malgré l'abondance d'études sur la motivation dans le domaine de l'apprentissage des langues, la recherche associée est restée limitée à ses implications transversales pour la réussite de l'apprentissage. Cette étude visait cependant à examiner si l'exposition à des langues étrangères à un âge précoce peut déterminer la motivation future des enfants à apprendre ces langues dans un contexte enseigné. Un questionnaire à deux échelles a été spécifiquement conçu pour étudier (i) la qualité et la quantité d'une telle exposition au cours des années de formation de 321 élèves du primaire et (ii) son influence sur leur disposition motivationnelle. Les résultats suggèrent que l'exposition systématique aux langues étrangères a eu une incidence positive significative sur leurs orientations motivationnelles. Une grande partie de cette importance est apparue avec le niveau d'éducation de la famille, mais des facteurs tels que le lieu de résidence et la qualité de l'éducation préscolaire étaient tout aussi importants. En référence à ces résultats, les professionnels axés sur l'éducation des langues peuvent investir dans le concept d'exposition dans un cadre pédagogique adapté aux enfants (par exemple, l'approche d'éveil aux langues) pour développer la motivation dès les premiers stades.

Keywords: early childhood, foreign languages, motivation, exposure, awakening to languages

Introduction

Interest in English as a foreign language (EFL) has been gaining ground in the early years of education worldwide. This sector of education already caught the attention of applied linguists some decades ago, although such interest wavered at times. More recently, however, it has turned into a *Cinderella area* of research, as evidenced by the mounting socio-political pressure to learn foreign languages from an early age (Coelho et al., 2018; Copland et al., 2014; Kuo & Anderson, 2010; Silva & Lourenço, 2023). Growing awareness of the benefits of such experience for youngsters has been documented, not only academically but also in terms of personality growth. From a scholastic angle, early-years foreign language learning (FLL)



helps children improve a matrix of sub-skills attendant to problem-solving, comprehension, and communication. From an educational perspective, it comes with gains for children at a particularly vibrant developmental stage of their lives, thus shaping their attitudes toward more understanding of, curiosity about, and receptiveness to cultural diversity.

According to de Botton (2010), these two ends coach on two major philosophical approaches in ECE: a positivist teacher-led approach championing literacy and numeracy and a socio-cultural, child-directed approach premised on the concept of growth rather than accretion. Pre-primary curricula fall somewhere between the two strata, all depending on the epistemological orientations of the designer as well as the agenda of the stakeholders. Despite the dominance of the teacher-led legacy due to social pressure to acquire languages at ever-earlier ages, the child-directed approach has been gaining eminence among academics and practitioners in their effort to explore and implement ideas related to learner agency. Most notably, the Asian context was not an exception given the bulk of studies attendant to this research pool (Lin, 2013; Meisani et al., 2020; Zein & Butler, 2022).

Among such academic efforts geared to the child-directed approach is the theoretical framework of *Awakening to Languages*, pioneered by Hawkins (1984), adopted by the Council of Europe, and adapted to the pedagogical mainstream of plurilingual education policy. The particularity of this approach is to operationalize the construct of exposure in a principled and researchable way, so much so that exposure to foreign languages may account for several benefits in terms of learnability and personality building. Youngsters' motivation for FLL is far from viewed as a direct outcome of external factors, e.g., tasks, teaching method, and social class, but rather as a long self-regulated process fed by the presence/absence of negative/positive factors (Dörnyei, 2005) that would later determine one's motivational temperament. In this purview, the present study was designed to examine whether early exposure to EFL may play a consequential role in one's motivational disposition to learn it later in an instructed context.

Two considerations make this study distinct from other research works. On the one hand, it accentuates a great focus on the affective side of the language learning experience among children from a developmental perspective, at variance with the mainstream cross-sectional perspective dominating motivation theory. It views systematic exposure to foreign languages as a sustainable means to nurture their motivational disposition. Such intrinsic resources would later increase their level of responsiveness in the instructed FLL experience. On the other hand, in its reliance on the child-friendly pedagogy of *awakening to languages*, the study adds an interesting research offshoot to this emerging literature that, despite its contributions in varied areas of learnability and personality building (Silva & Lourenço, 2023), has not yet reported anything attendant to the area of motivation.

Background

Motivation for FLL

The concept of motivation has been explored in various disciplines, such as organizational psychology, economics, and education. It has also captivated the attention of applied linguists, hence producing rich literature accentuated by main approaches that do not cease to inspire extant scholarship and FLL pedagogy. Gardner (1985), drawing on the Canadian socio-cultural context, advanced a groundbreaking model which paved the way for research associating motivation with the study of foreign languages (FLS). Its major tenet is that motivation for learning a second language (L2) is chiefly determined by one's prior attitudes, which vacillate between two dimensions: an affective dimension concerned with the willingness to empathize with the target language community and a utilitarian dimension associated with formal benefits (e.g., career opportunities, business development, and academic achievement). That dichotomy was psychometrically operationalized into the influential Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 1985), which lent itself to various educational contexts. Echoes of Gardner's model in mainstream FLL research

still reverberate despite criticism concerned with expanding it rather than questioning its theoretical consistency.

With the abundance of motivation-related research in FLL, two influential paradigms seemed to dominate the field, all focusing on the situation-specific as well as the cognitive aspects of motivation. Among the featured models that addressed the situated part is Dörnyei's (2000) view of motivation as a dynamic process that evolves in a three-phase cycle of generation, maintenance, and retrospection. Hence, situation-specific motives (i.e., task, teacher, learner group, etc.) may override one's attitudinal disposition toward a foreign language. Equally, a cognitive approach to motivation has garnered considerable appeal among researchers in tandem with the theoretical advances linked to cognitive psychology, such as the self-determination theory, which made its way into FLL research (Noels et al., 2001). Noels et al., (2001) argued that one's intrinsic and extrinsic orientations are determined by the prevailing reward system of a given learning context (e.g., monetary and material rewards in a formal school setting entail extrinsic motives).

It is crucial to note that FL motivation research has expanded into other areas, such as highlighting the importance of the individual's agency in managing his/her motivational disposition. Several motivation-focused researchers have increasingly subscribed to the idea that motivation is the outgrowth of a self-regulated process. Ushioda (2003) refers to motivational self-regulation skills as a set of internal monitoring, filtering, and processing mechanisms that outline the course and extent of learners' motivational evolution. Herewith, unlike those unable to regulate their motivation, individuals with some control over their self-regulation skills can maintain their motivation in the face of trying and/or distracting variables. Also concurring with the idea that motivation emanates from within, Dörnyei (2005) refers to an *L2 motivational self-system* that controls our motivational mechanisms, particularly the individual's representation of what s/he *might* become, what s/he *would like to* become, and what s/he is *afraid of* becoming. It is within this self-framework that learners make sense of their learning by giving meaning and direction to their hopes (*L2 ideal self*), maintaining their goals, and resisting threats through a set of preset responsibilities (*L2 ought-to self*).

It transpires from this brief review of the FLL motivation literature that our configuration of motivation dwells on two parameters: (i) *causal* when associated with learning-related factors and (ii) *teleological* when directed towards short/long-term goals (Kim & Kim, 2016; Ryan & Dörnyei, 2013; Ushioda, 2001). The latter, however, does not seem to capture due scholarly attention despite its theoretical substance. Only meager effort has been reported on the teleological effect in FLL motivation research, especially when it comes to early-age segments such as preschool-aged learners. The issue goes far beyond this area of research to concern a whole tradition of seeing adults as typical research subjects, or approaching children based on methods characteristically used with adults (Pinter & Zandian, 2014). Examining the *propaedeutic* contribution of early FLL experience to one's subsequently established motivational disposition may not only draw attention to this research oversight but also provide enough incisiveness for educational stakeholders to tackle the issue of FLL motivation proactively. Insights from early exposure to FLS in the purview of the pedagogy of awakening children to languages seem to add much substance to this picture.

Awakening to Languages

Rooted in a pedagogy of discovery and inquiry (Meisani et al., 2020; Silva & Lourenço, 2023), the awakening-to-languages (ATL) approach revisits the teacher-learner roles vis-à-vis knowledge and practices. With more learner agency, the emphasis is on informed exposure to FLS wherein youngsters control what they learn through asking questions, sifting, collecting, organizing, and reflecting on information (Candelier et al., 2012). Although the linguistic acquisition remains important, exposure to FLS may affect the course of personality development. Intercultural *savoir-faire* (i.e., distinguishing similarities/differences between languages, expressing emotions, and responding to aspects of other cultures) is one of the life-long skills attendant to such exposure (Ben Maad, 2016; Byram, 2014; Candelier et al., 2012).

Giving primacy to experience languages/cultures over the literacy side, the ATL stands as a step to expand the epistemological base of the pedagogical mainstream. Its main tenet to *experience* rather than *learn* (about) languages would not conceptually consort with the prevailing proficiency-focused models of teaching FLS. Reasons for such a hegemony relate to globalization, as cultural crossovers make it a necessity to learn FLS, and learn them *fast*. This does not deny the effort, at least research-wise, to humanize the FLL experience (see Kuo and Anderson (2010) for a review). Nonetheless, ATL has received particular attention from European research circles, particularly from Francophone academics such as the Council of Europe affiliated group (Azaoui, 2012; Candelier & Kervran, 2018; Candelier et al., 2012). Related insights reverberate in European FLL policy to promote the values of openness in its multiethnic cities. This is evidenced in the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* guide that accentuates the need to "equip all Europeans for the challenges of the intensified international mobility [and] to promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity" (p. 346).

ATL may equally stand as a revealing pedagogical alternative in early-years FLL education. As all seems to be revolving around the usual debate on teaching FLS at ever-earlier ages, little consistency has accrued from the bulk of related research (de Bot, 2014). Some scholars went so far as to contend that early-age FLL may do more harm than good to the learners, as in the 2014 IATEFL (Copland & Garton, 2014). The issue, it is believed here, may well be rooted in the very proficiency-based vision dominating mainstream research despite the plethora of methodological resources. The whole ride seems to be condemned to tease out the likely proficiency 'gains', thus offering provision for the language teaching apparatus in tandem with the swelling interest in FLS, especially English, which has been aggressively promoted worldwide. Conversely, ATL reflects a pedagogically approachable vision in terms of objectives and practices. Based on principled exposure to FLS, this pedagogical alternative engages in age-appropriate ways of learning through sight, sound, taste, touch, smell, and doing. The propaedeutics of experiencing, rather than acquiring, FLS would unburden the parent-child-teacher triad.

In the context of the present study, ATL may fit nicely with the motivational constructs of self-regulation and the 'self' concept when it comes to early-years FLL. As globalization has fueled the *zeitgeist* for EFL mastery, quantifying success prevails through stringent standards of form-focused evaluation (Butler, 2009). Like any other learning experience, children would adopt a conservative, people-pleasing pattern of learning. Kuppens and Ceulemans (2019) describe this behavior as a way to suppress their needs and subordinate their subjectivity. They would therefore deactivate any possible self-regulatory processes (goal-setting, self-evaluation, etc.) to conform to the reward system established by their parents/teachers. Alternatively, an ATL-based exposure to FLS would reinforce such processes in light of process-oriented task completion, so much so that youngsters would be able to individuate their FLL course. Not only do they hold on to a transformational (instead of informational) interaction, they may well avoid maladaptive motivational patterns of avoidance (Dweck, 1986), typically associated with other-regulated learning.

Reliance on the self-regulatory process of goal-setting would result in an adaptive, sustainable, and intrinsic type of motivation (Dweck, 1986) that does not easily wane in the absence of other-regulated pressure. This fairly explains de Bot's (2014) conclusion, based upon a review of early-years FLL projects in the Netherlands, that despite the temporary gains in proficiency, motivation declined over time. Intrinsic motivation accrues through an advantageous learning environment wherein youngsters proactively set goals for what to learn and what not to learn. The silhouette of their self-system would crystallize accordingly, with their nascent possible-selves seeing achievement in the discovery of and interaction with the target language(s). As a matter of fact, it is either through ATL-focused programs or informal exposure to FLS that even preschool-aged learners may develop a motivational basis for their future formal FLL experience.

Based on this assumption, the present study sought to verify the following research questions:

1. Does exposure to FLS have any propaedeutic effect on children's motivation for later FLL?
2. How does such an effect emerge in their attitudes and behavior?

The Study

Participants

Three hundred and twenty-one primary school pupils took part in this study (Age $M = 10$ years and 4 months; Males $N = 146$; Females $N = 175$). They represented a linguistically homogeneous group, being all native speakers of Tunisian Arabic, while Modern Standard Arabic is the official language of instruction (Ben Maad, 2014). They came from both urban ($N = 182$) and rural ($N = 139$) areas and were enrolled in five public schools where English classes are mandatory from Grade Five, yet without following a particular FLL. The participants were indiscriminately chosen with the formal consent of their parents, who had mixed levels of education and belonged to diverse social strata (i.e., a clear gulf between those coming from affluent suburbs and poor rural areas in the southern part of the country). It is also crucial to point out that the educational system that engages these participants encourages bilingualism. The French language still occupies a prominent position due to its historical and economic ties with then Colonial France. In addition to these young informants, five research assistants helped with data collection and instrumentation. Aside from being the present teachers of the main informants, they assisted with (i) refining the scales by advising on and rating the scale content; (ii) and administering the questionnaire to their pupils during regular classes. They also trained on matters of ethics and treatment related to research about children based on guidelines from Lobe et al. (2008).

It follows that the sampling process experienced several modifications before settling on the ultimate group of participants. Due to the susceptibility to treating young individuals as research subjects, anticipated concerns as to response consistency and the intellectual limitations vis-à-vis the psychometric instrument were fully considered and put under scrutiny. The second step was to conduct a pre-posttest design based on the same sample as the latter study. Actually, the participants were feared to scatter among other primary schools, hence, any possibility of proceeding with them could not be guaranteed. It was ultimately felt more reasonable to opt for a relatively homogeneous sample with a clear variation regarding the extent of exposure to FLS, making the required comparison according to such a variable fairly manageable.

Design of the Study

In examining the hypothesis that early exposure to FLS has a propaedeutic influence on a child's motivational disposition felt in later stages of his/her schooling, the present study embraced correlational analysis. It drew on psychometric measurement to explore the relationship between target variables and determine the size and causal direction of such a correlation. Following an observational data collection process, focus was directed at two types of attributes: a foreign language exposure (FLE) attribute hypothesized to be the explanatory variable and a motivational attribute treated as the response variable.

The FLE variable was operationalized to document participants' handling of the learned languages in their formative years. This experience extended from their family environment, through formal settings such as preschool to public areas/events where FLS should be used. The response variable of motivation was treated according to three dimensions: (i) informants' attitudes toward FLL, (ii) willingness to use (WTU) foreign languages in (in)formal contexts, and (iii) persistency of FL use. The choice of this motivational triad was intended to provide a multifaceted representation of motivation. While the attitudinal aspect accounts for how individuals view FLL, WTU measures the behavioral commitment to such views. WTU bears on the well-cited L2 *willingness-to-communicate* construct (Fatima et al., 2020; MacIntyre et al., 1998), but expiates 'use' for 'communicate' due to the latter's exclusiveness to those having some command of FL. The persistence dimension, particularly associated with Dörnyei's (2000) within-task motivation, measures the endurance spent on difficult tasks and resistance to discomfort (Constantin et al., 2012).

A cursory appraisal of their proficiency level in English was also reported to detect expected correlations with their motivational outlook.¹ As such, positive correlations would further confirm the participants' extent of motivation. Additional demographic variables (gender and age) were included in the research plan to check whether the measured motivation would be equally susceptible to individual differences.

Instruments: Procedures and Validation

Both the variables of motivation and FLE were operationalized into two separate scales. The development of each scale proceeded in view of two major challenges. The first issue was the lack of comparable measures in published research for the possibility of making replications and building on some external validity. The second problem resulted from the delicacy of conducting research with young subjects. In view of this, scale development drew on suggestions from Lobe et al. (2008) on matters attendant to questionnaire building and implementation. To obtain sufficiently reliable data, all the items were formulated in a self-report style to be subsequently followed by a response format based on a 3-point Likert scale along with *agree*, *not sure*, and *disagree* options. Although it offers substance and variance as with higher point Likert scales, this scale was adopted to observe the intellectual exigencies of the young participants. For a similar purpose, the sequence of items followed a thematic line along a set of subscales, since a random shuffle might upset their concentration.

After the conceptualization and construction phase, the scales in focus went through two phases of treatment to secure some more expediency. On the one hand, both scales were translated into the native language of the respondents by two of the research associates, then translated again by two other assistants to be equated against the original output, and eventually, inconsistencies were fixed. On the other hand, the translated version was pilot tested on a small sample of five students (sharing the same profile as the main participants). They would report the intelligibility issues with any given item to be reworded and/or converted into a structurally simple statement when necessary. Some statements were shortened to make the reading task less challenging for the participants. Subsequently, another round of piloting was carried out on them, and no difficulties were raised henceforth. The one-time questionnaire distribution started with the announcement of the objectives to the respondents and a teacher-fronted demonstration about how to respond to the questionnaire. They were reminded that no compensation would be offered in terms of grading, nor should they write their names. When handing out the response sheets, the research assistants and their actual teachers, would code them for subsequent identification.² To further ward off the desirability factor, the participants were asked to deposit all the response sheets in a ballot box. After collection, only correctly-completed questionnaires were considered for data analysis.

Exposure-to-FLS scale

The FLE scale was designed to measure the participants' extent of exposure to FLS along the context triad of family, early school, and community. The sixteen-item questionnaire was set into four equal subscales, each measuring one aspect of such a relationship. Subscale 1 assesses how negative and/or positive the views of the entourage would be toward using EFL. Subscale 2 examines whether such attitudes would evolve into committed behavior by the child's entourage. Subscale 3 measures how far the informants experience EFL usage through handy media technology. Subscale 4 extracts data about the respondents' experience with events or locations (e.g., hotels, festivals, restaurants) where they would

¹ Proficiency was of peripheral importance *to the study*. Its value was constrained to the behavioral validation of motivation. Admittedly, one's proficiency level was only judged by the teacher as most of the informants had not spent more than a semester learning English by the time of questionnaire administration.

² To obtain gender and proficiency data, the questionnaires were marked by the assistants with M for *male* and F for *female* and A for *good*, B for *average* and C for *weak* upon delivery. All the data were converted to numerical values for subsequent analysis.

experience EFL as a tool of communication. According to the distributional data in Table 1, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity were not violated. For instance, homogeneity was observed across all the scale items given that their respective Levene's Test of Homogeneity scores proved to be non-significant, extending from $p = .13$ (Item 6) to $p = .95$ (Item 16). Equally verified was the item-reliability index, as the items obtained alphas beyond the common .70 cut-off, with Item 7 being the lowest ($\alpha = .72$).

TABLE 1
Distributional Estimates, Reliability and Loadings for the Exposure-to-FLS Scale

	Items	Distribution			Reliability			Factor loadings			
		SD	Skewness	Levene's	Undecided %	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Item Deleted	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4
Background attitudes	1	.94	-.43	.19	6.9	.77	.97	.47	.07	-.29	.64
	2	.92	-.27	.55	11.6	.76	.97	.41	-.01	-.22	.83
	3	.93	-.36	.82	7.7	.90	.96	.38	.03	-.18	.83
	4	.94	-.33	.57	7.7	.89	.96	.40	.01	-.20	.88
Supporting action	5	.95	-.24	.19	7.7	.81	.97	.90	.02	-.24	.45
	6	.94	-.21	.13	9.5	.76	.97	.87	.14	-.29	.42
	7	.94	-.04	.27	10.1	.72	.97	.89	.12	-.29	.40
	8	.95	-.11	.55	7.7	.75	.97	.87	.08	-.23	.45
Media	9	.92	-.52	.23	7.4	.90	.97	.28	.34	-.95	.22
	10	.94	-.31	.23	7.9	.87	.96	.22	.34	-.91	.15
	11	.96	-.19	.14	4.8	.73	.97	.34	.35	-.91	.31
	12	.93	-.34	.77	7.9	.89	.96	.27	.34	-.93	.22
Contact	13	.95	-.22	.71	7.9	.80	.97	.12	.90	-.33	-.02
	14	.94	-.23	.87	7.9	.82	.96	.07	.94	-.35	.01
	15	.94	-.47	.77	7.9	.79	.97	.13	.87	-.31	.06
	16	.95	-.23	.95	8.2	.81	.97	.06	.92	-.37	.00

Upon confirming their internal stability, the overall items went through factor analysis using the Principal Component extraction method. It suggested a four-factor structure whose overall variance was up to 68.57%. All the inter-correlations within each loading lot exceeded the acceptable .05 cut-off limit experienced in an exploratory research framework (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) (i.e., between $r = .64$ with Item 1 and $r = -.95$ with Item 9). It follows from these findings that the present factor solution substantiates the construct validity of the subscales.

Motivation scale

The twelve-item scale sought to capture the respondents' extent of motivation for learning/using FLL. Its first subscale appraises the level of motivation through youngsters' views of FLL. Subscale 2 measures their behavioral profile vis-à-vis such motivation. Subscale 3 reveals how committed these individuals are to learning/using FLS in terms of their persistence in the face of difficulties and response to uncomfortable situations. According to Table 2, the assumption of normality was observed due to the one-way negative skewness of the data that does not surpass the absolute level of 2.00/-2.00. The negative pattern of data distribution implies that the majority of respondents scored high on motivation, a trend accentuated by an assorted percentage of undecided responses ranging from 7.9% (Item 7) to 38.9% (Item 6). Homogeneity

results are not entirely solid despite the majority of the non-significant Levene's scores, a fact illustrated by the almost significant value of $p = .03$ for Item 2. In view of the relatively accepted assumption results in Table 2, the item-reliability index suggests some inconsistency. Only some of the present alphas are marked beyond the commonly acceptable limit of 0.70. Hence, six out of the 12 items were eliminated from further analysis. Such resolution did not opt for flexibility even with items that approximated the acceptable cut-off limit (e.g., $\alpha = .65$ for Item 6) due to the lack of prior validation of the scale. It felt safer to count on clearly high alpha scores to add more robustness to the data. This was confirmed by a re-test of the retained items, which yielded an overall scale reliability of $\alpha = .91$.

TABLE 2
Distributional Estimates, Reliability and Loadings for the Motivation Scale

	Items	Distribution			Reliability			Factor loadings		
		SD	Skewness	Levene's	Undecided %	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Item Deleted	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
Attitudes	1	.83	-.53	.20	16.1	.73	.89	.69	.40	-.25
	2	.90	-.17	.03	20.1	.45	.91	—	—	—
	3	.76	-.46	.93	15.1	.73	.89	.79	.08	-.09
	4	.65	-.56	.95	36.1	.42	.91	—	—	—
	5	.85	-.37	.73	20.6	.76	.89	-.17	.83	-.21
WTU	6	.72	-.24	.20	38.9	.65	.90	—	—	—
	7	.95	-.12	.09	7.9	.76	.89	-.12	.81	.12
	8	.71	-.57	.15	33.1	.63	.90	—	—	—
Persistence	9	.92	-.30	.25	11.6	.78	.89	-.05	.02	.84
	10	.70	-.39	.21	6.3	.74	.89	-.29	.14	.81
	11	.96	-.04	.71	27.8	.34	.91	—	—	—
	12	.71	-.37	.15	33.6	.69	.89	—	—	—

Note. Average mean value of undecided responses is 23.15 %.

In order to check the factorability of the remaining items before their submission to factor analysis, their overall correlation scores across the purported subscales were corroborated (i.e., r higher than the cut-off. 30 level). Then, the application of the Principal Component extraction method resulted in a three-factor structure with a total variance of 64.12%. The factor matrix reported in Table 2 displays three main loadings with high internal correlations, corresponding to the item groups purported to represent the three motivation subscales of *attitudes*, *WTU*, and *persistence*. It is worth noting that Item 1 shows a score of $r = .69$, and also cross-loads with Component 2 ($r = .40$). Such cross-loading does not seem to be problematic given that it does not surpass the acceptable.50 level to be established as an integral part of the second Component. The three subscales have the same loading pattern: a positive high loading, a positive low loading, and a negative low loading. In sum, the present factor solution, in the absence of the eliminated item scores by the reliability test, attests to the construct validity of the Motivation subscales.

An Outline of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprises two scale sets: the Foreign Language Exposure subscale and the Motivation for Foreign Languages subscale. The first subscale was purported to:

- Elicit information about the perceptions within the family regarding their children's learning and using foreign languages (e.g., *'My parents always encouraged me when I used English'*).

- Reveal whether these attitudes are validated by the family in the form of daily commitments, such as reading bedtime stories to their children in English and singing (e.g., ‘I sing in English and dance with my parents’).
- Verify FL media accessibility when it comes to TV programs and cellphones (e.g., ‘I always see American films and cartoons’).
- Elicit information about their hands-on involvement in events and venues, such as hotels and non-national restaurants, where they experienced intercultural contact (e.g., ‘I went to a birthday party and celebrated with English songs’).

As the second subscale revolves around their motivation for learning and using foreign languages, it was meant to:

- Measure the degree of their motivation by defining their attitudes towards learning such languages (e.g., ‘English helps me have friends from different countries’).
- Check if their behavioral patterns are consistent with their willingness to experience foreign languages hands-on (e.g., ‘I always watch films and cartoons without captioning’).
- Determine the extent to which these respondents were persistent and committed to experiencing or learning foreign languages when they met some difficulties in and out of class (e.g., ‘I try to finish the tasks even when they sometimes seem difficult’).

Results

To check for the hypothesized correlation between the informants’ exposure to and motivation for FLL in later stages of schooling, the analytical effort tested the inferences about the projected correlation.

Exposure and Children’s Motivation

The second part of the study addresses the hypothesized propaedeutic correlation between exposure to FLS and children’s motivation for instructed FLL. Before giving a quantitative account of such influence, it was crucial to perform a correlational examination on the FLE variable, which was thought essential for the subsequent analysis of the multivariate results. Three considerations were inferred from the correlation matrix (Table 3). First, Gender and Age showed low correlation with the rest of the variables, except for the latter being slightly but inconsequentially linked to the Media factor. Second, the exposure features demonstrated reasonably significant inter-correlations, ranging from $r = .34$ to $r = .85$. It is to be noted that such significance did not illustrate cases of frequent collinearity as none reached the $r = .90$ stratum (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001, pp. 82-85). Third, the informants’ proficiency level showed a consistent association with the exposure factors. These findings suggest a substantial correlation between all the exposure variables and the informants’ formative environment, most predominantly in the adult-based support area.

TABLE 3
Correlation Matrix of Motivation and Exposure-to-FLS Features

Subscale	Supportive attitudes				Supportive action				Media				Contact			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Gender	.04	.01	.05	.05	.09	.11	.14	.13	.01	.05	.01	.05	.12	.11	.09	.12
Age	.03	.03	.05	.05	.06	.16	.06	.05	.26	.25	.19	.24	.05	.06	.04	.05
Residence	.61	.36	.46	.45	.49	.51	.44	.46	.60	.62	.76	.46	.44	.39	.41	.35
Education	.69	.60	.68	.67	.85	.80	.75	.81	.66	.72	.62	.67	.56	.60	.58	.52
Preschool	.51	.42	.52	.51	.74	.71	.64	.66	.60	.63	.60	.52	.41	.42	.49	.42
Proficiency	.24	.26	.36	.35	.60	.56	.54	.53	.37	.47	.34	.36	.33	.33	.39	.34

To verify the correlation between the informants' FLE and their motivational outlook, data from the two scales were subjected to MANOVA. Only those items retained for the analysis were checked for reliability and construct validity. It is also important to outline the effect size of the relationship between the exposure features and the sum of the motivation variables, Eta squared (η^2) estimates are considered. Effect size is the amount of variance in the dependent variable of a given effect. To start with, despite their apparent significance, Gender and Age did not seem to weigh much on the participants' affect for language learning, as evidenced by the small effect size with partial $\eta^2 = .11$ and partial $\eta^2 = .12$, respectively. In contrast, the results for the Exposure-to-FLS subscales suggest significant differences, translated into statistically satisfactory η^2 values.

According to the recommendations of Tabachnick and Fidell (2001, p. 54), the corresponding η^2 scores range from (i) *acceptable* to Residence ($\eta^2 = .49$) and Preschool ($\eta^2 = .66$) to (ii) *large* to Education ($\eta^2 = .81$). In sum, the findings in Table 4 attested to the hypothesized correlation between the Exposure-to-FLS variables and the motivational disposition of the informants, especially when it comes to the Education determinant that garnered the largest share of correlation. In contrast, although the *F* test showed a significant correlation between their motivational disposition determinants and the individual variables of gender and age, the eta-squared results do not strongly confirm this correlation. This inheres. Building on the strong correlation results of the exposure variable, it is still important to determine the direction of that effect pattern in the subsequent analysis.

TABLE 4
MANOVA Results for the Exposure-to-FLS Effect on Motivation for FLL

Effect	Type III Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.	η^2
Gender	8.38	.699	3.09	.000	.11
Age	9.63	.803	3.50	.000	.12
Residence	38.90	3.242	25.02	.000	.49
Education	64.79	5.399	110.03	.000	.81
Preschool	50.49	4.207	50.59	.000	.66

A multiple comparison test was performed as a follow-up procedure to evaluate the nature of the significant difference (i.e., the effect direction being either positive or negative). The descriptive data reported in Table 5 shows a positive causal pattern for the three exposure variables. Irrespective of the nature of variance (i.e., positive or negative) for one item against another, there appears to be no discrepancy in each subscale, where the scores for the two items representing each subscale attest to the same pattern of differences. It is worth noting that the choice of items in each subscale was due to their internal loadings, as suggested by the EFA results in Table 2.

These results attest to an outright advantage for the Education variable over the Preschool and Residence variables. The pair-wise mean difference values (MD) attendant to Residence demonstrate internal consistency within the three motivation areas that range between MD = .71 (Item 10) and MD = .39 (Item 1). That is, participants from rural areas, already having little chance of exposure to FLS, expressed less motivation for learning languages, most palpably in the Persistence area. As for the Education variable, the difference between the two levels is larger, especially for WTU and Persistence. Children raised in educated families scored higher than those born to uneducated parents did. In this respect, MDs are as high for Item 7 (MD = 1.28) in the WTU section as they are for Item 9 (MD = 1.14) in the Persistence area. A similar consistency applies to the Preschool variable, where those receiving preschool education seemed to show more persistence in dealing with language learning difficulties than those who never attended preschool (MD = 1.03 for Item 9). This also applies to their WTU in and out of class (MD = 1.05, for Item 7).

TABLE 5
 Follow-Up Pair-Wise Comparison of the Exposure-to-FLS Features

Subscale		Residence		Education		Preschool	
Attitudes	Item 1	Urban	2.24	Yes	2.57	Yes	2.37
		Rural	1.85	No	1.68	No	1.98
	Item 3	Urban	2.55	Yes	2.72	Yes	2.60
		Rural	2.01	No	1.91	No	2.15
	Item 5	Urban	2.49	Yes	2.69	Yes	2.55
		Rural	1.87	No	1.52	No	1.93
Persistence WTU	Item 7	Urban	2.26	Yes	2.58	Yes	2.56
		Rural	1.76	No	1.36	No	1.51
	Item 9	Urban	2.43	Yes	2.69	Yes	2.58
		Rural	1.78	No	1.55	No	1.61
	Item 10	Urban	2.27	Yes	2.62	Yes	2.41
		Rural	1.56	No	1.51	No	1.49

Discussion

The decision to report the findings attendant to the reliability and validity of the two-scale instrument was deemed necessary for the analysis of the main findings. Equally important to verify at the outset was whether the distributional assumptions of homogeneity and normality were satisfied, which was the case in this study. If violated, the subsequent inferential analyses of variance would have been misleading and far from reasonably interpreted Tabachnick and Fidell (2001, p. 54). In this regard, the handling of exposure to and motivation for EFL measurements did not harm their consistency, and therefore, their research worthiness given the delicacy of dealing with a young sample. However, caution is warranted because such results remain an estimate of young informants who, irrespective of the guided effort here (Lobe et al., 2008), would remain particularly susceptible to their environment. Added to this call for caution is the fact that the quality of performance and rigor of assistant researchers may be upsetting, as they are all unfamiliar with this research experience.

One of the issues contained in the validation results was related to the operationalization of the exposure variable. Some concerns were raised regarding whether the background attitude dimension might well interface with and somewhat correspond to the supporting action dimension. The results showed that item inter-correlations showed considerable values, rising to $r = .47$ for Item 1. However, the level and consistency of the intra-correlations within each subscale demarcated the divide, with the lowest value of $r = .64$ for Item. Another issue worth raising here is the extent of indecision, despite the favorable results associated with the reliability of the two scales. In view of this, the percentage of undecided responses was fairly low for the Exposure-to-FLS scale (7.34 %), yet much higher for the Motivation scale (23.15%). This finding may be of considerable insight to researchers who may find some scientific value in such behavior (e.g., respondents being reticent to give negative feedback in an effort to please the fieldwork teacher). Viewed from a validation perspective, however, this may suggest some interesting intelligibility possibly embedded in the formulation of the scale items. Overall, it is tenable to build on these salient validation results, although revisions are welcome to ease such concerns.

The main findings suggested a clear effect of early-years exposure to FLS on the respondents' motivation for later instructed FLL. Analysis of the data reported in Table 3 indicated a strong systematic correlation between the aspects of exposure and the areas of exposure in terms of Residence, Preschool, and parents' educational background, most manifestly for the latter. One reason for this advantage is that family experience was not limited in time compared to preschool experience. There is an ongoing influence of parents who naturally transmit their socio-cultural heritage, or, in Bourdieu's terms (1989), symbolic capital, to their offspring. Those parents would belong to a social segment that treasures education, including FLL, so instilling academic values is not uncommon. Regardless of the amount and quality of EFL exposure in preschool, this experience would remain time-constrained and less accessible to rural areas.

Concerning Table 4 and confirmed in Table 5, the variance in respondents' motivational disposition was operationalized into three measurement areas: attitudes towards, willingness to use, and persistence to engage in FLL. The resultant picture yielded two learner profiles: highly motivated urban former preschoolers (HM) from educated families versus poorly motivated rural individuals (PM) with no preschool record, educated family background, or both. From a self-based perspective (Roshandel et al., 2018), the HM respondents most probably developed an early vision of the FL self in their formative years. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, p. 97) refer to the ideal self as a powerful motivator that consists of an "imagery/vision component that activates appropriate emotions and is cued to a variety of appropriate cognitive plans, scripts, and self-regulatory strategies." The findings here are in some way commensurate with this metaphorical image, in which the ideal self may mature over time (Ushioda, 2009; van Geert, 2011). In line with the results from the Attitudes subscale, the HM respondents clearly voiced their prospects about the FLL course. The FL self-perception they aspired to connect with accrued through the little details they picked up from the long and perhaps interrupted course of exposure to FLS.

Their fledgling vision would give them a sense of direction in their FLL experience, together with a strong *FL ought-to self* that would shield such an experience from upsetting factors such as fatigue and anxiety. Evidence of self-concept figures in the findings reported in the Willingness-to-use subscale. HM informants confirmed their sense of obligation and commitment to FLL through their means. Watching cartoons without subtitles did not deter them from connecting with that input, which would inherently trigger self-regulatory strategies to grapple with the linguistic downside. Sure enough, the closed-ended nature of the elicitation tools could not reveal much about those strategies, although insinuations might attest to this. What is behind the positive response to the item 'When I learn English words, *I try to use them off-class*', which implies the respondents' perceived duty to consolidate the newly acquired knowledge without any external compulsion ensuing from parents or teachers.

Also revealed about the HM respondents—in addition to their high motivational disposition—was their intrinsically oriented view of FLL. Although they did not dismiss the utilitarian value of FLL through their positive response to the item '*It is important for my future to speak English*', the significant results from the Persistence subscale substantiated such an intrinsic proclivity. Images of positive responses to difficulty are recurrent in goal-achievement literature, particularly for those who develop a process-oriented view of learning (Ben Maad, 2012; Dweck, 1986; Pintrich, 2000; Tercanlioglu, 2004). This challenge-seeking and relaxed approach to difficulty or mistake as a learning opportunity closely identifies the high persistence scores of HM respondents. It is perhaps such an orientation that justifies the endurance of their motivational disposition despite the long break since their last organized exposure to FLL at preschool. Persistence also revealed that their L2 ideal selves were gaining sturdiness that would shield them against any impediment in their FLL course.

The findings could have implications for research on motivation in FLL. To counter the hegemony of models that tend to focus on the synchronic aspect of motivation, the present study sheds some empirical light on its teleological facet (Kim & Kim, 2016; Ushioda, 2001). In addition to the prevalent view of motivation as a construct shaped by the way it interacts with context, Dörnyei (2005) refers to other motivational routes, which are worthy of research. This subscribes to a dynamic view of motivation as a malleable process that grows over time in a nonlinear way through a network of factors that ebb and flow in influence (Ushioda, 2001; Waninge et al., 2014). This conclusion lends itself closely to the study of the motivational dynamics of young EFL learners, an area meagerly charted in the literature. In this respect, the findings reported here provide a distinctive conceptualization of motivation as a process that is deeply rooted in the early years of schooling, long before the first day of learning English at school. This meshes with Lin's (2013) recommendation to reconsider Asian TESOL knowledge—already dominated by a discourse of language purism and commodification—and shift towards a paradigm viewing EFL as a dynamic plurilingual experience. As such, motivation is a developmental process and not merely a product.

This study has clear pedagogical implications for the organization of classroom management and schools. In its affirmative position about the classic question: *Does an early start lead to better language learning?* The study has provided an empirically grounded account atypical of the prevailing positivist accounts that

"glorify content, product, correctness, competitiveness" (Brown, 1990, p. 388). Instead of exclusively busying youngsters with form-focused activities to gain more literacy, an early year pedagogical intake based on participatory activities (e.g., songs, drawing, storytelling, photography) would offer opportunities systematically to everyone. As in the context of this study, an ATL-focused pedagogy—whether in the framework of an extracurricular school program or at pre-primary institutions—would provide organized and consistent exposure to FL experience, particularly to the advantage of LM children whose chances of exposure to FLS are slim. Rather than focusing on instant literacy gains, the transformative character of the ATL framework banks on the vision of digging deep to build high, and this fully applies to the seminal phase of one's FL motivational system.

Since the present findings highlight the impact of exposure on young learners' motivational dispositions, the ATL approach may present a judicious pedagogical framework to operationalize and contain this factor. The context of the study represents a novelty in ATL-based research, which has been tightly limited to the European scope of solving local educational issues. The study intended to promote ATL in ECE in terms of its applicability and research approachability in the MENA region and the Asian EFL context. Attesting to the strong correlation between principled exposure to FLS and children's motivational disposition for FLL constituted an off-shoot from a research project that has collected empirical evidence for the possible transformative merits (i.e., intellectual and personal development), the ATL approach may endow children with (e.g., Ben Maad, 2016; Kaowiwattanakul, 2020), especially for those coming from a background with less informal exposure to FLS. This transformative research line (Kaowiwattanakul, 2020) may represent a new feed for non-Western TESOL scholars and stakeholders, as in the case of the Asian EFL experience, beyond or at least in parallel with the dominant proficiency-based paradigm (Lin, 2013).

Conclusion

Research with young learners has been gaining ground in the field of applied linguistics in light of the current zeitgeist desire to learn languages as early as ever, with an increasing number of youngsters subscribing to FLL programs. Often, such research not only focuses on methods specifically conceived to study adult populations but also tends to apply the same findings to all other age categories. One research case in point is the study of FLL motivation, which has yielded only a small amount of literature from a child-focused perspective (Pinter & Zandian, 2014). Justified by this oversight, the present study sought to examine the teleological dimension of motivation among young children, prompted by the hypothesis that the amount and quality of early exposure to FLS have some propaedeutic correlation with one's motivational disposition. The results attested to such a correlation, accentuating the need to not only explore new research avenues and tools to observe the specificity of youngsters, but also revisit mainstream pedagogical practices geared toward early FLL.

No matter how relevant the idea of standardizing exposure to FLS through formal child-focused ATL programs might be, the present findings cannot be overstated. The validation efforts reported above cannot resolve issues often associated with the elicitation tools and procedures reported presently. One of the presumed issues is that some FL exposure factors require further scrutiny as to how much class activities are conducted and in what manner. This has remained unchecked, as most of the respondents came from a large number of pre-primary institutions. Sure enough, the findings could have been more revealing had the study extended its methodological scope (e.g., using a mixed-methods model) to disclose information hardly detected by the constrained nature of the current elicitation tool. A case study of some respondents from both HM and LM groups may likewise delve deeper into the dynamics of their motivational self-system and self-regulatory processes to capture what truly happens from building, through restructuring, to consolidate their motivational trajectories. Such information would provide academics with new research leads and, eventually, ECE stakeholders with empirically informed directions.

The study reported here stands as an empirical challenge meant to explore new possibilities of applying and evaluating ATL pedagogy beyond the confines of Western research circles, which have still

demonstrated exclusive interest in it. The implications of this study and beyond refer to its consideration as an incisive pedagogical alternative to mainstream TESOL methodology. In parallel with the dominating achievement-focused TESOL knowledge in the MENA region and elsewhere, this study accentuates the need to wedge a vital space for researching the transformative value of language learning (Kaowiwattanakul, 2020). This touches upon values (e.g., reciprocal understanding and respect for variety) and personality-building aspects, such as sustainable motivation, which is seen as a disposition rather than a product. Following the conviction that there is more to teaching languages at ever-earlier ages than acquisition, future research efforts should invest in operationalizing the exposure concept and its applicability in curricular platforms. The child-friendly pedagogical approach of awakening—hardly researched beyond the European confines— may therefore stand out as a solid groundwork for such efforts in the MENA region and Asia.

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(Received September 7, 2022; Revised July 21, 2023; Accepted September 10, 2023)