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An Investigation on the Motivations of Italian Students in Learning English



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Abstract

This paper starts from a general overview of the sociolinguistic history of Italy, in order to justify the country's negative attitude towards foreign languages. The study aims to critically discuss the English as a Foreign Language education in Italy. It intends to analyze the classroom environment surrounding English lessons, especially looking at students' motivation in learning English. Therefore, a survey and semi-structured interviews among high school students between seventeen and nineteen years old have been conducted. The analysis of the students' responses confirms the main previous theories on motivation: in line with the theory of Csizér & Dörnyei (2005), the importance of knowing the utility of the English language and developing the desire to become integrated in the L2 community happened to be the main driving forces that motivate students to learn English. Furthermore, the importance of familiarizing with the target language and culture that constituted the tenth commandment that Csizér and Dörnyei (1998) developed aiming to motivate learners, was reconfirmed. In fact, this research highlights the lack of opportunities for international experience and the consequent low motivation of the students in learning a language without having real contact with the L2 community. Finally, the limitations of the research will be outlined, as well as ideas for further research.

Key words

English; motivation; Italian schools; L2 learners'; language policies; proficiency; internationalization; community of practice; interactive lessons; EFL teaching; EFL classroom; self-confidence;

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1. Introduction

Italians are well known for their relatively low interest in learning foreign languages and in particular for their poor proficiency in English (Pulcini, 1997). Also, as Pulcini and Campagna claimed (2015), as far as the command of English language **concerns**, a division between two Europes seems to exist. Citizens of Mediterranean countries, such as Italy and Spain, have indeed an average lower level of communicative competences and proficiency in English skills compared to citizens of northern Europe countries. The causes of this gap are multiple, and they consist of linguistic, social and educational factors (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015). Before explaining these causes it is interesting to look also at the former fascist dictatorship of Italy (1922-1943), in order to get a better understanding of past attitudes of the country towards the spread of English. The Fascist regime always promoted politics of linguistic purism, fighting dialects, minority languages and foreign languages (Pulcini, 1997). Because of the regime's hostile attitude towards languages different from Italian, the German schools that were present in the bilingual regions of the north of Italy were forced to be closed and German teachers had to keep working illegally (Janecková, 2016). In 1940 the "Accademia d'Italia" (Italian Academy) also published a list of Italian substitutes for foreign words and violations were punished through fines or even imprisonment (Pulcini, 1997).

According to Pulcini (1997), there are two main reasons for Italians' low proficiency in English which are to be found in the sociolinguistic and educational structure of Italy. First of all, until seventy years ago, the illiteracy of the population has always been high, reaching 75 % in 1861 (Pulcini, 1997). Furthermore, this phenomenon was amplified by the presence of multiple

and different dialects and regional languages (1997). Therefore, school institutions had to make education programs that focused first on Italian language teaching, giving foreign language teaching lower priority (1997). Before English, the study of French as a foreign language was introduced in technical institutes in 1870 and later in 1889 in gymnasia (De Mauro & Boylan, 1995). However, the conservative party of those years maintained a strong opposition to the introduction of foreign languages in education. As Italian has its roots in classical literature, the main idea of the party was to allow foreign language teaching in schools but only for the same purpose Greek and Latin are taught for, namely only to train students' logical and mnemonic skills and not to use and practice those languages (1995).

Consequently, the second reason identified by Pulcini (1997) to explain the Italians' low proficiency in English are indeed the inefficient teaching practices that have been popular in the country: the models of language teaching are similar for both classical and modern languages and they are based on written translation work, literature studies and little practice of oral skills (Pulcini, 1997). Although English as a Foreign Language (EFL) was introduced in elementary schools in 1990 (Pulcini, 1997), Italian proficiency is still one of the lowest in Europe. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (2018), Italy is one of the last European countries in the world ranking, placing itself at number 34. The only countries ranked lower than Italy are France, Ukraine and Albania, respectively at the positions 35, 43 and 52 (EF English Proficiency Index, 2018). Furthermore, De Mauro & Boylan in their study in 1995 proved that less than 20% of Italians could command the four skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing of a foreign language (De Mauro & Boylan, 1995). Additional proof was found by Costa & Coleman (2013) when they investigated through a survey the possibility of introducing English as a medium of instruction in Italian higher education. In their study they found that this was hardly

possible since **that** teachers' and 31% of Italian students did not have adequate English competences. Thus, this research thesis will focus on the EFL classroom environment in Italian secondary schools, with the purpose of investigating students' attitudes towards the subject and to critically analyze the way English is taught.

2. Context and relevance

During the 1970's, experts that were part of the Council of Europe started working in order to determine what the educative and linguistic needs of particular groups of individuals in learning a foreign language were. For example, immigrants, college students and types of professionals have been studied with the aim of setting learning objectives according with learners' expectations (Lombardo, 1988). This means that Europe wanted to establish a syllabus of EFL teaching based on learning objectives and final use. Teaching materials and methods were designed on the basis of the learner groups' priorities and needs (1988).

On one hand, language for specific purposes became established, such as English needed by doctors or English needed by lawyers, and those purposes were also concerning groups without a profession but with an immediate shared interest like high school students. On the other hand, a second focus emerged, and it was on the specific situations of learners, considering their motivation, competence and time to study as factors that play a role in their foreign language acquisition (1988). In a parallel way, in Canada and the U.S.A., there also was an interest in defining learners' needs in order to establish as much effective teaching strategies as possible. This attention was mainly dedicated to newly arrived immigrants or foreign students in their process of second language learning (1988). For this reason, Gardner and Lambert (1972) theorized the concepts of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation and demonstrated

how learning a language for utilitarian reasons, such as finding a job or passing an exam, is not as effective as learning it for the desire to integrate yourself with the target community and become similar to its members (1988). This theory was later contradicted as other studies proved that learning a foreign language is not the same as learning a second language because being immersed in the target culture and being surrounded by its speakers (for example being an immigrant that is learning the language of the host country) is different from the uni-cultural setting of a classroom where there are no native speakers of the target culture (1988). Therefore, what motivates learners is subjective and depends on their individual situation. **Later** Eccles et. al (1983) applied the expectancy-value theory to the American educational setting, demonstrating that expectations and perceived value actually influence learners' motivation in executing tasks (Wigfield, 1994). This means that how successful or unsuccessful learners think they are in the achievement of the tasks and how positively or negatively they value that achievement, affects their motivation in learning (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

The second theory that represents a milestone in research on motivation is Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) in which the scholar attempted to study learners' interest in foreign language acquisition in Canada. He carried out his research through a questionnaire based on the idea that interest consists of three measures, motivation, integrativeness and attitudes towards the learning situation (Lalonde & Gardner, 1985). Much research about students' motivation within an EFL classroom has been done and the studies of Gardner and Eccles has very often been used as a starting point. Multiple **setting** have been analyzed and scholars broadened the concept of motivation, adding variables and new elements that play a role in it. For example, Mori & Gobel (2005) analyzed motivation on the basis of the gender variable within a Japanese EFL classroom. Moreover, Ilter (2009) explored how

technology can be used to increase students' motivation within a Turkish EFL university classroom. Bahous, Bacha & Nabhani (2011) demonstrated how an over-focus on written skills and little practice with oral skills, non-adequate teaching materials, and unclear utility of language course contribute to the high demotivation of Lebanese students of English. In addition, Chang (2012) explored how group dynamics such as group cohesiveness and norms have an effect on Taiwanese students' motivation in an EFL setting. Talking about Italy in particular, some studies about motivation have been carried out (see for example Lombardo, 1988). However, these studies only concerned university settings and not the mandatory education environment. For this reason, what this research will add to the previous research is a change of perspective, aiming to investigate high school students' motivation in learning English.

Furthermore, the research will be relevant in two fields. The first is the field of education, in particular EFL teaching, as it will investigate the adequateness of the Italian educative system in terms of foreign language teaching. Prior research in this context has also shown how the inclusion of students' voices is fundamental in order to modify courses' practices and syllabus (Carroli, 2008). For this reason students' suggestions were incorporated in the study and they served as a basis to delineate how to improve learning effectiveness. This study might serve as a starting point in order to elaborate a new *modus operandi* to adopt within the classroom environment. In addition, the research will be relevant in the field of Intercultural Communication. As will be explained in detail later, one of the main motivations to learn a foreign language is *integrativeness*, which refers to the desire of learners' to become integrated in the target community. In fact, eagerness to become similar to L2 speakers is considered as the main force able to enhance Intercultural Communication (Csizér & Dörnyei, 1998, p.204). Furthermore, foreign language education specifically aims to train students to be able to

overcome boundaries and interact in a multicultural and multilingual world (Akhmetshin et. al., 2017). Therefore, EFL classrooms should represent intercultural spaces in which teachers and students might confront their cultures through stimulating discussions (Carroli, 2008, p. 185).

3. Theoretical Framework

Much research has been done around the way foreign languages should be taught and learnt and there is still an ongoing debate criticizing educative models for being detached from the complex and multicultural modern world (Cole & Meadows, 2013a, p.121). In fact, scholars argue that even if foreign language education is supposed to overcome boundaries and nationalist limitations, it has been reinforcing existing borders for students through the way languages are taught (2013a, p. 121).

3.1 Creating an intercultural discussion

The most popular tendency in foreign language teaching is to keep language and content separated, where content mostly refers to the literary-cultural content associated with the foreign language (Swaffar, 2006). This means that EFL educators have developed a preference to have two different lessons, one for the language and one for the literature, with all the negative consequences that come with it. In fact, cultural knowledge, namely the knowledge of the culture, literature and everything around it, should never be separated from cultural experience, namely the experience of the culture and the practice of the language (Carroli, 2008). Literature has the potential to encourage language and cultural learning at a deep level. This potential, however, is not always achieved and as a result literature can become an annoying experience for

the students (2008) and vice versa the linguistic-only lessons might have a similar effect on students. One solution that scholars have proposed is to modify the teaching methods, switching from a *teacher-controlled* to a *discourse-based* discussion. In this way, literature can become the starting point for intercultural discussion and attract more students' attention (2008). The study carried out by Carroli (2008) confirmed that idea. Through a research based on a survey for secondary school students, the author demonstrated how students are not completely aware of the link between language, literature and culture. The solution that she proposed is to transform the literature space into an intercultural space, "where the popular and canonic culture meets the students' culture and language to produce new meanings, including students' experiences" (2008, p. 185). However, students might have different perceptions of the same phenomena, and this happens due to changes that occur within individuals at different times. These perceptions are not fixed but can evolve or change, depending on different learning conditions (Marton, 1981). Nonetheless, it has been proven that high motivation in learners can compensate for lack "in one's language aptitude and learning conditions" and for this reason, researchers over the past decades largely investigated how to improve L2 learners' motivation (Csizér & Dörnyei, 1998, p. 204).

3.2 Learners' motivation studies

"Motivation is a concept that explains why people behave as they do rather than how successful their behavior will be" (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005, p. 20). However, together with other factors such as learners' abilities, opportunities and conditions and quality of instruction, motivation plays a role in learning success. Although there are other elements that might determine excellent or unsuccessful learning of a foreign language, Dixon et al. (2012) demonstrated that one of the

most important is indeed motivation. According to Csizér and Dörnyei (2005), it is constituted by five elements. The first one is *integrativeness* and it refers to the intention of the learners to integrate themselves within the L2 community and become similar to its speakers (2005, p. 20). Secondly, *instrumentality* has been the most considered variable as it represents the perceived benefits and usefulness of L2 proficiency, such as getting a better job or a higher salary. For many language learners this is indeed their main driving force (2005, p. 21). Then, the *attitude* and *interest* towards the L2 speakers and community also play a role. In particular attitudes towards possible direct contacts with L2 speakers are associated with interest in travelling to their country and appreciation of their cultural products (2005, p. 21). Finally, the last element is the *perceived vitality*, namely power and prosperity, of the L2 community. This is defined by its economical, political or social status, demography and representation in media and government. This concept also explains why minority groups in multilingual settings tend to learn and use the dominant language of the majority (2005, p.21).

For many years research on motivation has often been carried out by adopting a social-psychological approach and only in the 1990's did scholars start attempting to take a pragmatic, education-oriented approach instead (Csizér & Dörnyei, 1998). Their goal was to consider more factors related to the classroom environment in order to be directly relevant to the application. This new current of thought was tested by Clément et. al. (1994) in a Hungarian EFL classroom. Through a survey, the authors demonstrated how motivation consists of three main elements, namely integrative motivation, self-confidence and anxiety, and the influence of classroom dynamics (1994, p. 421-424). The first factor corresponds to Csizér and Dörnyei's integrativeness, but the other two elements were new. The author suggested that self-confidence plays a key role in terms of determining the attitude and efforts of the learner towards the foreign

language. In particular, in a multi-ethnic context the individual tends to have positive attitudes towards the L2 community and seeks contact with it. Those relatively frequent and pleasant contacts contribute to lowering the individuals' anxiety and improving their self-perception (1994, p. 422). With regards to a uni-cultural classroom setting self-confidence is less likely to happen but still possible to achieve through contacts with media and travelling abroad (1994, p.423). Furthermore, it has been proven that situation specific factors like classroom dynamics, atmosphere within it and structure of the class as a group, contribute to motivation, as well. For this reason, in the conclusion of the study Clément et. al. (1994) suggested to incorporate dynamic group activities in the syllabus of EFL courses, in order to improve group cohesion and promote an environment more leading to learning.

Additionally, Dörnyei (1994) in his comprehensive study attempted to create a general framework, summarizing all the components of motivation that had been theorized before. This motivation framework consisted of three dimensions: the *language level*, the *learner level* and the *learning-situation level* (1994, p. 279). The *language level* is the most general one, and it concerns the pragmatic values, attitudes, disposition and interest associated with the target language. Namely, it corresponds to *integrative* and *instrumental* motivation. Secondly, the *learner level* refers to more personal dimensions, such as personality traits, self-confidence, anxiety and perceived L2 competence of the learners. Lastly, the *learning-situation level* includes situation specific elements regarding three specific areas: *course-specific components*, such as teaching methods and materials, *teacher-specific components*, such as teacher's behavior and teaching style and *group-specific components*, such as group cohesion and classroom structure (1994, p. 280).

Consequently, Csizér and Dörnyei (1998) came up with ten commandments for motivating language learners within the classroom environment that will now be listed and briefly explained.

1. *“Set a personal example with you own behavior”*. Since students attitudes are modeled after their teachers’, teachers themselves have to be motivated, in order to successfully motivate their students (1998, p. 215)
2. *“Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom”*. It has been demonstrated that tensions and anxiety within the classroom environment contribute to lowering students’ L2 motivation. For this reason, teachers should always create a relaxed atmosphere (1998, p. 215)
3. *“Present the tasks properly”*. Task presentation plays a key role in students’ achievements. Therefore, teachers should present the tasks trying to catch students’ attention, proposing realistic goals and suggesting strategies to reach them (1998, p. 216)
4. *“Develop a good relationship with the learners”*. Establishing good rapport between teacher and students is a fundamental requirement in any educational approach (1998, p.216).
5. *“Increase the learners’ linguistic self-confidence”*. The perceived L2 competence of learners is subjective. This means that it is not what they actually know that determines their L2 use but rather what they think they can do. Increasing their self-confidence might actually increase their L2 competence (1998, p. 216).
6. *“Make the language classes interesting”*. Part of the teachers’ role is to find ways to make the learners’ experience as pleasant and interesting as possible (1998, p. 216).

7. *“Promote learner autonomy”*. Students should take responsibility for their own success or failure, rather than ascribe them to external factors outside their control (1998, p. 217).
8. *“Personalize the learning process”*. L2 course should be adjusted in order to always be perceived from the students as directly useful for them (1998, p. 217).
9. *“Increase the learners’ goal-orientedness”*. It has been proven that setting their own goals or orientations can actually increase students’ L2 motivation (1998, p. 217).
10. *“Familiarize learners with the target language culture”*. This means that it is necessary to make L2 “real”, offering to learners a broader view of the language, culture and community (1998, p.218).

3.3 Including diversity to overcome nationalist practices

Considering these studies, it seems like a change in EFL teaching is needed. Therefore, it could be useful to adopt a new way of teaching foreign languages. Two different points of view on this issue have been proposed by Cole & Meadows (2013a; 2013 b). They start from the idea that foreign languages should be taught leaving space for diversity and reducing what they called “nationalist standard practices” (2013b, p. 29), referring to the monolithic view of a language that is offered to students. In fact, foreign languages are often taught making use of the essentialist paradigm that identifies them with specific nation-states, highlighting the international differences and exaggerating the intra-national sameness (Cole & Meadows, 2013b, p.30). Moreover, hardly any of the many language varieties are known by the teachers or represented in the classroom and students are usually expected to only learn “standard” varieties (Cole & Meadows, 2013b, p. 30). Then, through a Critical Discourse Analysis the authors presented three linguistic strategies that teachers use in order to promote nationalist ideologies

within the classroom: *objectification*, *prescription* and *alignment*. By *objectification* they mean “equating one formal piece of language with another”, for example “just” means “right now”, leaving out all the other alternatives, such as “just” means also “exactly” (Cole & Meadows, 2013b, p. 36). *Prescription* refers to decisions that come from positions of power (such as from the teachers) that determine what can be considered as legitimate language and what is incorrect, like for example representing only the “standard” accent of a language (Cole & Meadows, 2013b, p. 38). Lastly, *alignment* concerns the identification of a language characteristic, especially the standard characteristics, with one culture and one country, excluding any linguistic diversity (Cole & Meadows, 2013b, p. 39). In the second part of the research, the authors demonstrated how these three linguistic strategies can also be used in an alternative way: they can serve as a tool to promote diversity. For example, they can be used to associate different accents with different dialects (objectification), highlight phonetic variations that differ from the “standard” (prescription) and deciding what is “proper” according to the continuously shifting contexts (multiple *alignment*).

3.4 Adopting a community of practice approach

Cole & Meadows (2013a) also suggested a solution: adopting a “community of practice” approach within the EFL classroom. This term identifies a group of individuals characterized by constant interaction, shared repertoire and same purpose (Cole & Meadows, 2013a, p. 128) and giving this orientation to the lessons means giving space to the negotiation and cultivation of multiple identities in different contexts. In fact, the process of learning a language is “a process of becoming, or avoiding becoming a certain person, rather than a simple accumulation of skills and knowledge” (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007) and to be proficient means to make the language

your own, without conforming to the standard dictates (Hall, 2012, p. 225). We should indeed talk about “active appropriation” of a foreign language, rather than “passive acquisition” (2012, p. 225). In addition, nobody can have full knowledge of a language and all individuals are proficient in multiple registers or varieties of a language (Cole & Meadows, 2013a). These different registers are the so called *truncated repertoires*, namely “all the means of speaking, i.e. all those means that people use and know why while they communicate” (Blommaert & Backus, 2013, p.11).

Accordingly, the “community of practice” approach considers identity not as something that we have, but as something that we practice and constantly negotiate through every social contact (Cole & Meadows, 2013a, p.128). The goal of this model is indeed to train the student to perform “multiple and shifting personae in the classroom” instead of imposing on them prescribed and nationalistic values and practices (2013a, p. 129-132). In order to apply the model in practice, both teachers and students should be involved. On one hand, teachers should present an overview of the linguistic diversity and give the students the possibility to “explore any language varieties being used by real people in real situations” (2013a, p. 134). For example, through role plays and analysis of cultural products, students will have the possibility to experience different identities, such as young professionals, celebrities, college students and so on. The lessons might also include guest lectures from speakers of different varieties and the teachers should not categorize those varieties following hierarchical principles, but rather just state that those varieties differ from each other in some ways (2013a). On the other hand, students might work in group to reflect upon the wide range of varieties and possibilities that they are exposed to. To conclude, this approach is useful in order to reject “essentialized identities” and improve students’ intercultural competence (2013a, p. 137).

Therefore, this research will investigate how, the teaching methods and course syllabus adopted within the ELF classroom setting in the observed Italian secondary schools might influence students' motivation to learn English.

This leads to the following research question:

RQ: Which factors or teaching methods in Italian secondary education might contribute to students' low proficiency in the English language?

This main question will be analyzed by answering the following sub-question:

SQ1: In what ways do the course structure and teaching practices have an effect on students' motivation to learn English?

4. Method

In this section, the methodology used to carry out the research will be described in detail. The data collection for this thesis took place in the science-oriented high school "A. Orsini" and in the art-oriented high school "O. Licini", both located in the city of Ascoli Piceno, in the center of Italy. Specifically, these types of school were selected because they do not focus on linguistic subjects and students only have three hours of English lessons per week. The reason for this choice is to be found in the schools' educational priorities. In language oriented high schools, students have more hours of Foreign Language Teaching compared to the other subjects that are taught. During those classes they follow a specific program, different from other schools and they can also participate in several international experiences and exchanges. Having this perspective, schools where English is taught but it is not one of the main focuses of the school program were included in the sample. In the scientific high school, the focus is on physics,

mathematics and chemistry, while in the artistic one, the most important subjects are video making and photography, advertising graphics and restoration. Therefore, in the hierarchical pyramid of subjects of those schools, English is likely to be placed at the bottom, and this might affect both students' interest and the attention and opportunities given by the school board to English courses.

In order to carry out the research that has been performed throughout three phases, a qualitative method has been chosen, as it is especially adequate to document and analyze factors that play a role within the language learning/teaching process and setting (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 154). All the steps that have been taken will be outlined in the next paragraphs.

4.1 Ethnographic Observation

Recently, scholars started to see Second Language Acquisition as inevitably connected to other fields like Intercultural Communication, Cultural Adaptation and Socialization (Dörnyei, 2007, p.130). Consequently, the number of studies around this topic has increased in the last ten years, and ethnography has been very much used to serve scholars' purpose to understand how these processes are perceived and experienced by participants (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 154). For this reason, the first step of the data collection was for the researcher to do an ethnographic observation of English lessons, paying attention to the teacher's speech, the general environment of the class and the participation of the students. The goal was to provide a "thick description" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.130) of the classroom "small culture" (Holliday, 1999), and this was achieved by the researcher experiencing the English lesson and becoming immersed in the school setting. Three English lessons in three different classrooms have been observed, two in the scientific high school and one in the artistic one and all of them were held by a different teacher. The classes have been selected according to the teachers' and schools' availability. During this first phase,

the researcher did not interact with the students, but was only sitting next to the teacher, taking notes.

4.2 Survey

Then, the second phase took place on the same day after each observation in each class and consisted of a written survey that was given to all the students in the classrooms, reaching in total 58 students, aged between seventeen and nineteen years old.

Students were first asked for their informed consent before filling in the survey. The goal of the research was explained, making clear that students' answers will be kept anonymous and that they will be analyzed only for academic purposes. The teachers were asked to end the lesson 15 minutes earlier, in order to give the students time to fill it in.

The survey method has been chosen because it is a relatively quick way to gain a large amount of information and because in this way students can feel free to anonymously express their thoughts both positive and negative about the way they are taught English, without the teacher knowing. In particular, the survey contained factual questions about students' age and grades in the discipline, behavioral questions about their experiences with the language and attitudinal questions about their thoughts with regards to teaching methods, importance and use of English and their attitudes towards the language and lessons. Likert-scale and short-answer questions have been used (Dörnyei, 2007, p.102-107). The survey was written in Italian, as we do not know the students' exact level of English and they might not be adequately proficient to express themselves in the open questions. Furthermore, the questionnaire has been designed on the basis of previous researches about students' motivation and attitudes in Foreign Language Teaching settings. Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985) has been used as a model to write the questions. Gardner wanted to investigate secondary school

students' approach and mindset towards English as a Second Language Learning, and his questionnaire focused indeed on three particular factors that play a role in this setting: intensity of the motivation, desire to learn the language and attitudes towards the process of learning a language (Ghazvinia & Khajehpoura, 2011). In addition, the adaptation of Ghazvinia and Khajehpoura (2011) of Gardner's study was also helpful in the creation of the questionnaire. The distinction that they expressed between "integrative motivation" and "instrumental motivation" was included in the formulation of the questions, in order to find out if students have the desire to become integrated within the L2 community or if they just perceive English as useful for their academic or professional achievements.

Later, the survey was descriptively analyzed, using a theme coding method to try to find a common pattern through all the students' answers.

4.3 Semi-structured and Focus Group Interviews

The third and last phase of the data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews (Dörnyei, 2007, p.136) that were conducted when the students finished filling the survey in. This type of interview has been chosen for its flexibility, as the participants have the possibility to elaborate the questions. Although a pre-prepared interview scheme is used as a guide, the participants can eventually lead the conversation where they prefer (Dörnyei, 2007, p.136). This compromise between structured and unstructured interviews has been adopted in order to not limit the responses and make the students feel free to express themselves. The participants were informed beforehand about the informality and anonymity of the interviews in order to ask their consent. Moreover, they were asked for their consent to be recorded, only for academic purposes. Hence, two students from the first classroom and two from the third classroom were chosen on the basis of the observation and the teachers' suggestions. In the first class, Interviewee 1 was selected

because during the lesson she was addressed multiple times by the classmates as “the best of the class”, while Interviewee 2 was considered by the teacher as being particularly not interested in the subject. In the third classroom, the method to choose the participants was the same as in the first class. In fact, Interviewee 3 was chosen because the teacher considered him “the best student in the class” and Interviewee 4 because he was constantly making jokes without paying too much attention during the lesson. In the second classroom the process was different as there was the possibility to conduct a “Focus Group Interview” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 144). This format requires the researcher to record the responses of a small group of participants, usually between 6 and 12, and it functions as a quick way to gain a relatively large amount of data. In addition, it is interesting to generate a group brainstorming and let the participants reply, inspire and challenge each other (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 144). In this way, it was possible to collect several insights into the role and use of English at secondary school and also to look at how the students see this topic together as a group, rather than individually. To start with, the interviewer briefly explained the purpose and the topic of the research and assured the students that it was an informal conversation and they would remain anonymous. Then, after getting students’ consent to be recorded, the researcher explained that there is no right or wrong answer, as what matters are their honest thoughts and ideas. The interviewer started asking general questions about for how long students were studying English, why they were doing it and how they liked it. Then, the following part required them to think about their personal experiences with the English language and their perception of it, making them reflect upon its importance and utility. The last part of the interviews concerned the school setting and the students were asked if there was something that they would like to change in the way they are taught English and something that could improve their motivation in studying this subject.

To conclude, the method by which participants have been selected is what Dörnyei calls “theoretical sampling” or “purposive sampling” (2007, p.126): it was a flexible and continuous process during which respondents have been selected depending on previous discoveries. The observation of the lessons guided the choice of the participants. The purpose was to find students that would provide varied and useful insights (Dörnyei, 2007, p.126) and for this, their participation during the lesson was taken into account and the teachers in the first and third class also encouraged specific students to be interviewed. The second class was an exception, as the teacher was not present and the participants spontaneously joined the Focus Group.

4.4 Analysis criteria

Once the data have been collected, a thematic analysis was performed in order to come up with the results. Thematic analysis has been chosen because it makes the results of the study accessible to a broader public and the researcher is able to adapt his approach according to the purpose. Furthermore, “through focusing on meaning across the data set, TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective and shared meanings and experiences” (Braun et. al. 2019, p.57).

The approach that I used was theory-driven. This means that the analysis has been performed in light of the previously described theories. Through a deductive procedure, the main general ideas were coded from the surveys and then the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, looking for similar but more specific patterns in students’ answers. Both with the survey and the interviews, I first started taking notes of initial observations and consequently identifying initial codes per topic. Then, I looked for specific patterns that the survey and the interviews responses had in common and finally defined the main themes.

In the line of this approach, the results will not be presented in the next section as divided between survey and interviews. On the contrary, they will be presented as a whole, following the thematic patterns that have been identified.

5. Results

In this chapter a description of the results of the investigation will be offered. First of all, the impressions and ideas coming from the ethnographic observation of the three classes will be reported, in order to give an idea of the environment and situation where the data collection took place. Secondly, both the general outcomes of the survey and the interviews' responses will be illustrated, following the thematic patterns that were found among the whole sample.

The ethnographic observations took place in three different classrooms. The first two were in the science oriented high school, where the focus is on scientific subjects like mathematics and physics, while the third class was in the art oriented high school, where students can choose which course to take among photography, graphics and restoration. As the scientific school is familiar to me, when I went to do the data collection in the first class, I felt comfortable and therefore I waited outside the classroom for the teacher to arrive. At that point, I introduced myself and explained what, with the permission of the headmaster, I was planning to do. Then, I asked the teacher if she was fine with that and she responded in a very enthusiastic way and let me sit by her side during the lesson. While the students were doing some reading comprehension in order to practice for the final exam, I paid attention to the communication between them and the teacher. In addition, I talked to the teacher, who clearly expressed her dissatisfaction towards an institutional program with only three hours per week of English lessons. During the practice session, the teacher went to all the students to help them and answer

their questions, she was always speaking first in English and then in Italian, in case somebody did not understand. What I also noticed, is that even when the students understood the teacher's request in English, they always answered in Italian, without even trying to speak in English. Overall, the students seemed focused and interested and they also checked the exercises. They seemed to have a good relationship with the teacher and they always asked for her advice.

In the second class, which was also located in the scientific high school, what happened was different. As I planned beforehand, I was waiting for the teacher outside the classroom. When she arrived I introduced myself, explained my field of study and asked if I could do the investigation there. Unexpectedly, the teacher told me I could stay the whole hour alone in the classroom and she left. Therefore, I walked into the classroom and introduced myself to the students, talking about my academic career and describing the topic of my thesis. The students were immediately enthusiastic about it and in this way it became possible to conduct a focus group interview whose dynamics will be described later. Moving on to the third classroom, I went to the artistic high school, which was not familiar to me. For this reason, I had a contact person who was working there, and I was introduced to the teacher, whose lesson I was going to take part in. While we were walking towards the classroom, she informed me that some students have dyslexia and ADHD. When I entered the classroom, she presented me to the students, and I briefly explained what I was there to do. The students were curious and paid more attention than usual to the lesson, according to the teacher. Nonetheless, I could see how some of them were not really paying attention. For example, two students were sleeping on their desks, other students were talking or chatting on the phone and others did not even have a book or a notebook. They started doing exercises to learn the grammar rules of how to use "whose", "where" and "who", but during the whole lesson they seemed very distracted. In fact, they were

continuously losing track of the exercises and asking for the right page of the book. The teacher was patient, she waited for them to think and created a relaxed environment. One thing I noticed was that the teacher always spoke first in English and then translated into Italian, but was also always asking for synonyms or other ways to say something, generating a brainstorming and catching the attention of the students.

The three scenarios were really different from each other but they presented a common feature. None of the students ever spoke in English during the lessons and the teachers constantly had to translate every sentence into Italian. Also, all the students were curious about my research and my academic path. They seemed to pay more attention than usual to the lesson because there was something new, different from the other days.

Subsequently, I asked the teachers of the first and third classrooms if they could end the lessons fifteen minutes before, in order for the students to have time to fill in the survey and they were fine with that. In class 2 I did it after introducing myself, since the teacher was not there.

The survey was filled in by 58 students in total, 20 from Class 1, 21 from Class 2 and 17 from Class 3, and it revealed interesting answers. The ideas that students expressed were also supported in a later moment by the interviews. All the outcomes will be presented in the next section and they will be divided into three main thematic patterns that have been identified among the responses.

5.1 Students' awareness and critiques

The first thing that was noticed among the survey responses was the awareness of the students around the role of English. Most of them agreed upon the evident importance of the English language, especially when it helps in communicating with foreign people. Moreover, in the open questions some students made comments about the low proficiency of Italians in English,

although the survey did not mention this. To give an example, one of the participants wrote “Come è possibile che in Italia si studia Inglese da così tanto tempo, però si parla così male” (*how is it possible that in Italy we study English for such a long time, but we still speak it so badly*), referring to the fact that English was introduced as a mandatory subject from the primary school, when the children are 5 or 6 years old.

Accordingly, the first idea that participants expressed during the interviews is that speaking English is actually useful and this is clear in the mind of the students. Among all the possible reasons for that, they talked about academic and professional careers, for which English creates more opportunities. Secondly, they said that international experiences are made possible by the fact that through English we can communicate with everybody and knowing English lets you have access to even more information. In fact, they asserted that it is possible to read more articles or newspapers, that might not be available in Italian, and broaden your mind.

Talking about the role and use of English and its utility, students then focused especially on its communicative aspect. They recognized English language as a medium to communicate between different countries and they talked about its role as a Lingua Franca, confirming once again their awareness of the benefits that come with knowing English.

Besides recognizing the importance of English for the academic and professional career, as well as to communicate with everybody, students were also aware about the situation of English teaching in Italy and the problems that the Education Minister should address. They all agree upon the fact that English is a subject undervalued by the school system, and that institutions should invest more in it, giving more opportunities to the students to practice it in real life. To sum up, they would like to include in the syllabus more use of skills that can be actually useful for them outside the school, such as oral skills.

5.2 Not feeling at ease speaking English

Another important outcome of the survey is that 33 students out of 58 affirmed that they do not feel at ease in speaking in English in the classroom. Also, 20 out of 58 find the lessons useless and 14 out of 58 have a negative attitude towards the lessons.

In fact, an issue that students expressed during the interviews concerns their feelings during the lessons, in particular referring to the fact that they do not feel comfortable in speaking English in the classroom. An evidence for this is that during the observation in all the three classes, no student spoke In English. The reasons the interviewees gave is that they are afraid of making mistakes and for this they are anxious even to try to speak English. They have low self-confidence and therefore they always think to be not good enough.

One student, Interviewee 4, expressed a different point of view. Even if he is afraid of making mistakes when speaking English, the important thing for him is to express himself. He acknowledges that he probably makes mistakes, but as long as he manages to make himself understandable, his goal is achieved.

5.3 Suggestions for improvement

There were some interesting comments in the open questions of the survey, most of them suggesting to leave out literature from the program because it is considered not helpful in order to learn how to speak English. Multiple students also expressed the idea that how they are taught English should be revised as they would like to practice using the language more and not only studying it in theory. The main solution that they proposed is to have more possibilities to participate in international experiences, like school exchanges, as they recognize the importance of travelling and using English in everyday life.

The last part of the interviews was also focused on students' ideas and suggestions for improvement. They were asked what they would like to change and what could improve their motivation in studying English. Overall, they agreed upon two main points. On one hand, they would like to have different lessons with more interaction and discussion, alternated to the regular frontal lessons. An interesting idea of alternative lessons that they proposed is to include lessons held by a mother tongue teacher, in order to learn their accent, instead of always listening to Italian teachers. On the other hand, what could improve their motivation would be to have more opportunities for international experiences, in order to practice English and have real contacts with an L2 community and culture. What they claim is that during the regular lessons, they do not think at English as being "real" and this contributes to their low motivation. They would like to be stimulated through experiences in order to feel the need to speak English and practice it in real life.

To conclude, all the participants to the interviews responded positively to the possibility of including role plays during the lessons in order to practice oral skills and learn different registers of the language.

6. Discussion

In this section, the outcomes of the investigation will be explained more in depth and linked to the relevant theory. Also, statements will be supported by direct quotes that the participants expressed during survey and interviews. The tripartite motivation framework that Dörnyei (1994) proposed in his comprehensive study will be used as guideline to explore three different areas of interest. In fact, the discussion will start from the *language level* that includes attitudes and interest of the learners towards the L2 world, as well as perceived utility of the target language

and the benefits associated with becoming proficient in it. Secondly, the *learner level*, which refers to personality traits of L2 learners, will be analyzed, in particular regarding their self-confidence and the anxiety that they might feel when speaking the target language. To conclude, the *learning-situation level* will be scrutinized. It consists of all the external factors that contribute to the learning process, such as teaching methods, teaching style and group dynamics within the classroom.

6.1. Language level

According to the research results, the idea that being proficient in English is useful stays clear in students' minds. In fact, interviewees mostly agreed upon the *instrumentality* of English language, recognizing its value in terms of academic and professional careers, but also access to information. This means that students note the possible benefits that come with studying English and this represents one of the main motivations for them to learn it. The following sentence that a student said during the interview summarizes the ideas that studying English increases the chances of having a better job, a higher salary or a more objective view on the news presented by the media.

“Penso che l’Inglese sia una materia obbligatoria in ogni scuola perché è importante per avere più opportunità di lavoro, fare più esperienze internazionali, ma anche perché ti rende capace di avere accesso a più informazioni. Per esempio, leggere il New York Times che parla della politica italiana è un modo per avere una visione più oggettiva sull’argomento” (see Appendix 9.4.1)

I think that English is a mandatory subject in every school because it is important to know it in order to have more job opportunities, do more international experiences, and also because it

allows you to have access to more information. For example, reading the New York Times that talks about Italian politics, is a way to have a more objective view around the topic.

A second reason that students gave to justify the importance of English is its communicative aspect and its role as Lingua Franca. In fact, they are aware of the fact that not only they can use English to have contact with English communities and media, but also to communicate with foreign non-native English speakers.

“E puoi usare l’Inglese come mezzo di comunicazione tra due paesi che non sono inglesi” (see Appendix 9.4.3)

And you can use English as a medium to communicate between non-English speaking countries

“Per esempio, se vuoi parlare con uno Spagnolo e non conosci lo Spagnolo, potete parlare in Inglese” (see Appendix 9.4.3)

For example, if you want to talk to a Spanish person and you don’t know Spanish, you can both speak English.

The *integrative* motive was also present in students’ answers. From the survey, it was found that most of the students like watching English movies or TV series, besides studying it at school. This can be considered as a proof of their desire to become similar to English speakers. In addition, most of them would enjoy the possibility of having English speaking friends and also manifested their desire to have more opportunities to travel abroad and have real contacts with a community of English speakers.

Overall, the theories about integrative and instrumental motivation were confirmed by the research as it was demonstrated how these two motives definitely play a role in the students' motivation to learn English.

6.2 Learner level

One of the main outcomes of the survey was the students' response to the question about feeling at ease in speaking English inside the classroom. In fact, 33 participants out of 58 said that they do not feel comfortable in speaking English during lessons. Later, students' attitudes were further investigated through in-depth interviews, and these confirmed how low self-confidence and a feeling of anxiety might prevent students from learning a foreign language to the best of their ability. Participants during the interviews expressed their anxiety about talking in English especially because they think they are not good enough and then they are afraid of causing misunderstandings.

“Ho paura di fare degli errori e creare fraintendimenti. Ho paura che la gente possa capire qualcosa di diverso da quello che intendevo” (see Appendix 9.4.1)

I am afraid of making mistakes and creating misunderstandings. I am afraid that people might understand something different from what I meant.

This shows that how learners use the target language is not a result of their actual knowledge, but rather of what they think their knowledge is. Also, self-confidence can be increased in learners through frequent and positive contacts with the L2 community, but in a uni-cultural setting like the observed classroom settings, it is unlikely to happen. This is also the

reason for the students' desire for more internationalization within the school. This topic will be addressed in the next section.

As far as the learners' dispositions are concerned, the research has shown how the fifth commandment to motivate students elaborated by Dörnyei & Csizér (1998) actually needs to be applied. It consists of increasing learners' self-confidence, perhaps helping students to set more reasonable standards for themselves and making them feel less anxious about their abilities, when it comes to speaking in their L2.

6.3 Learning-situation level

The following quote clearly explains how learners' motivation might be influenced not only by internal forces such as individuals' perceptions and personality, but also by external motives, such as group dynamics. To be more precise, the term "group" here refers to the classroom and those dynamics concern everything around the collective learning process that can affect the individual learner.

“Non mi sento a mio agio a parlare in Inglese a scuola perchè ho paura di fare errori, dato che so di non parlarlo bene. Ho anche paura che i miei compagni ridano quando faccio un errore, quindi preferisco non parlare” (See Appendix 9.4.2)

I don't feel at ease in speaking English in class because I am afraid of making mistakes, as I know I am not good at it. I am also afraid that my classmates would laugh if I make a mistake so I'd rather not speak.

In fact, here the participant states that since he is convinced he will not be able to speak good English, the anxiety feeling comes from the fear of having the other students laughing about his mistakes. In this way, as demonstrated by Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels (1994), the lack of social cohesion within the classroom contributes to lower student self-confidence. For this reason, as the second commandment states, teachers during lessons should create an atmosphere which is as pleasant as possible, in order to make students feel relaxed and more confident about themselves.

Furthermore, students criticized the standard setting of frontal lessons, expressing their desire to alternate them to different lesson formats with more interaction between students and teacher. They proposed doing more activities and discussion in order to make lessons more interesting, including more practice of oral skills.

“Vorrei aggiungere più Speaking alle lezioni, questo ci aiuterebbe molto. Inoltre, apprezzeri se facessimo qualcosa di diverso dalle solite lezioni frontali, magari fare qualche attività” (see Appendix 9.4.1)

What I would like is to do more Speaking during lessons, that would really help us. Also, I would appreciate doing something different from the regular frontal lessons, maybe doing some activities.

“Mi piacerebbe molto avere lezioni più interattive nelle quali possiamo discutere insieme, perché così mi sento vivo e partecipe” (see Appendix 9.4.3)

I would really enjoy more interactive lessons, during which we can discuss together, because I can feel alive and actively participate to the lesson.

From these quotes, it is clear that the standard learning situation in terms of teaching style and methods and structure of the lesson are not efficient in catching students' attention and also contribute to lower their motivation. Therefore, the solution that scholars proposed seems to perfectly fit in this context: switching from a teacher-controlled to a discourse-based discussion, in which students' voices have space (Carroli, 2008). This can be a way to execute the sixth commandment (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998) of making classes interesting. In addition, the Community of Practice approach seems to be worth a try. In fact, students expressed their desire for more activities and interaction and all the interviewees were open and enthusiastic towards the possibility of including role plays in the lesson to practice different *personae*.

One of the main critiques that students addressed to the current educative system is that it seems detached from reality. To be more precise, they claim that studying English at school and only in theory is not enough to learn it, because they do not consider it as a real thing that can be useful in their lives.

“Studiarlo a scuola non è bello la maggior parte delle volte perché dobbiamo studiare cose che non sono utili nella realtà fuori dalla classe poi.” (see Appendix 9.4.2)

Studying English at school is not nice most of the times. This is because what we have to study is not something useful for us outside the classroom.

Therefore, the tenth commandment that Dörnyei & Csizér (1998) theorized represents the solution to this issue. In fact, learners should become familiar with the target culture and community in order to make English a real thing and prove its utility in life. Students proposed two solutions. They stated that their motivation could indeed be increased by alternating lessons

held by mother tongue teachers in order to familiarize with their accents and by including more internationalization in the educative programs.

“Secondo me sarebbe molto utile alternare lezioni con insegnanti italiani a lezioni con insegnanti madrelingua” (see Appendix 9.4.2)

In my opinion it could be really useful to alternate lessons with Italian teachers and lessons with mother tongue teachers.

“Qualcosa che potrebbe aumentare la mia motivazione nello studiare l’inglese, sarebbe l’avere più possibilità di fare esperienze internazionali. In quel caso, dovrò parlare inglese per forza perchè ne avrò bisogno. Potrei essere più motivato solo se usassi l’inglese nella pratica” (see Appendix 9.4.1)

Something that could improve my motivation in studying English could be to have more opportunities to do international experiences. In that case, I will have to speak it, I will feel the need. I could be more motivated only if I use English in practice.

“Trovo difficile imparare l’inglese senza andare all’estero” (see Appendix 9.4.2)

I find learning English without going abroad difficult.

To conclude, students confirmed previous theories that criticized the over focus on written skills and literature. According to the respondents, the lessons should be based more on discussions in which they can take part and include interactive activities and role plays in order to let the students practice more oral skills. The interviewees especially focused on the importance of participating in international experiences, since they consider real contacts with an English speaking community as the most efficient way to learn English.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this research has been to investigate L2 teaching and learning circumstances, focusing especially on students' motivation in studying English. Much research has been conducted around this topic, and the theories that have been developed about motivation elements, incentives and obstacles were presented here. Since Italy has been the landscape of hardly any of these studies, this thesis offers important insights into the Italian L2 learning environment. The purpose of the research has been to question the efficacy of Italian foreign language education, in particular in terms of motivation to learn English. As previously described, due to socio-linguistic reasons Italians' low proficiency in English is well known.

Therefore, this research wanted to look into students' ideas and motivation in first place to try to delineate the main issues and answer to the following research question and sub-question:

RQ: "Which factors or teaching methods in Italian secondary education might contribute to students' low proficiency in the English language?"

SQ1: "In what ways do the course structure and teaching practices have an effect on students' motivation to learn English?"

I went to observe three English lessons in two Italian high school classrooms, in order to become immersed in the school environment. Then, through a survey and consequent in-depth interviews, students thoughts were directly involved in the discourse on foreign language education. The study confirmed the theories according to which the main motivations for students to study English are its utility for practical purposes like getting a good job or communicate with foreign people and the desire of become integrated in the L2 community and become similar to L2 speakers. Furthermore, it was demonstrated how, according to previous

studies, self-confidence plays a key role in learners' success and might contribute to lowering their motivation. Eventually, the students' critiques concerned the boring frontal lessons, most of the times about literature. They would prefer more interactive lessons based on discussions and practice of oral skills and more contacts with the L2 community. Given the results, this research suggests the use of the Community of Practice approach within EFL education, as it will catch students interest, letting them practice their oral skills and actively participate to the lessons, and the introduction of more international experiences at school to improve students' motivation.

To answer the sub-question, this research has shown how the course structure and teaching methods that are popular in Italy can affect in a negative way the motivation of the students. In fact, students often find frontal lessons boring and teaching methods not adequate to their actual needs, with absent or little practice of oral skills.

Eventually, the research question can be answered. The factors that contribute to Italian students' low proficiency in English are mainly their low self-esteem and the fear of making errors in front of others, the lack of international opportunities where students can go abroad and practice the language, the over focus on grammar and literature with no opportunities for the students to participate into a discussion, and the courses' programs and syllabus that they find detached from reality.

As far as future research is concerned, one possible approach would be to look more in depth at self-perceptions and self-confidence, better analyzing how they could be improved. This line might eventually lead to the field of psychology but it would be relevant to apply it to the Foreign Language Acquisition process. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to explore the teachers' point of view on EFL education and the reasons behind their teaching style and

methods. Therefore, conducting in-depth interviews with English teachers might be a way to complete the circle, involving every participant in the discourse.

To conclude, the research overall confirmed the theories that it started from. Especially, the theories about motivation were reaffirmed, as the students mentioned its already known components. Also, the ten commandments (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998) developed to improve learners' motivation happened to be relevant and students' suggestions revealed how the Community of Practice Approach might be the solution for some of the EFL teaching issues.

7.1 Limitation of the research

Although this research has shown important insights into the motivation of Italian students to learn English, it also presents its limitations. One of them is the sample of participants that took part in the research since only students between seventeen and nineteen years old have been selected. In fact, students of a different age might have a different perspective on the EFL education issue and might respond differently to the study. Secondly, two different schools with different orientations have been chosen to be the setting of the investigation. Nonetheless, they were situated in the same city and we do not know for sure how much the English course programs might change according to the local administration. This means that moving the research to another city, the outcomes might be different and therefore the present study cannot yet be representative for the whole Italian environment. Since that the time limit to conduct this research was of ten weeks, it was not possible to look more in depth to the past and current language policies outside the school. Future researchers might therefore look at them and investigate if the policies of the Fascist regime still have an effect on the modern policies and on the population's general attitude towards foreign languages.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Original survey

12/2/2019

Quanto sei motivato ad imparare l'Inglese?

Quanto sei motivato ad imparare l'Inglese?

Questo sondaggio sarà anonimo, i suoi risultati verranno utilizzati solamente per scopi accademici e non saranno condivisi con terze parti. Impiegherà approssimativamente dieci minuti. Grazie in anticipo per collaborare a questo studio e condividere la tua esperienza. Si è pure libero di lasciare qualsiasi commento o consiglio alla fine.

1. Quanti anni hai?

2. Da quanti anni stai studiando inglese?

3. Oltre che a studiarlo a scuola, fai anche altre attività per migliorare il tuo inglese? (es. lezioni private, vedere film in lingua inglese...)

4. Che voto hai in inglese al momento?

5. Pensi che questo voto rispecchi giustamente ciò che sai? Perché? Perché no?

6. Sei mai stato all'estero in paesi di lingua inglese? Se sì, dove?

7. Riesci a pensare ad un'esperienza in cui studiare inglese ti è stato utile?

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1L27e4kVDeRzyGLnYievzEaY9mgHzrDKLoy_5BgtYNIe4f7e-5c0329a

1/3

Scanned by CamScanner

12/2/2019

Quanto sei motivato ad imparare l'Inglese?

8. Quanto è positivo il tuo approccio alle lezioni di Inglese?
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
per niente molto

9. Quanto reputi utili le lezioni nel tuo corso di Inglese?
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
per niente molto

10. Quanto ti senti a tuo agio a rispondere o fare domande in Inglese durante la lezione?
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
per niente molto

11. Quanto ti incoraggiano i tuoi genitori a studiare Inglese?
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
per niente molto

12. Quanto sei motivato nell'imparare l'Inglese?
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
per niente molto

13. Quanto pensi che sia importante diventare bilingue?
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
per niente molto

14. Quanto sei interessato alla letteratura, cultura o modo di vivere inglesi?
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
per niente molto

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1L27e48VOWRzyGLmYmevzEAY0mgNzGALcy_SBghYNIwdi?ts=5d328fs

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Quanto sei motivato ad imparare l'inglese?

15. Quanto sei interessato ad imparare l'inglese per comunicare con persone straniere che parlino inglese?
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
per niente molto


16. Quanto sei interessato ad imparare l'inglese per motivi pratici (es. per trovare un buon lavoro...)?
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
per niente molto

Grazie per il tuo tempo!

17. Questo sondaggio è stato interessante? Ti ha fatto riflettere sull'importanza dell'inglese?

18. Puoi lasciare qui sotto eventuali commenti o suggerimenti

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9.2 English survey

How motivated are you to learn English?

This survey is anonymous. Its results will be only used for academic purposes and will not be shared with third parties. It will take approximately ten minutes. Thank you in advance for participating to this study and share your experience. Please, feel free to leave any comment or feedback at the end.

1. How old are you?
2. For how long are you studying English?
3. Besides studying English at school, do you also do some activities to improve your English (es. Private lessons, watching English movies...)?
4. What grade do you have in English at the moment?
5. Do you think that this grade is a fair representation of what you know?
6. Have you ever been abroad in an English speaking country? If yes, where?
7. Can you recall an experience in which having studied English was useful to you?
8. How positive is your attitude towards the English lessons? (on a scale from 1 - not at all - and 5 - a lot)
9. How useful you think the English lessons of your course are? (on a scale from 1 - not at all - and 5 - a lot)
10. How comfortable do you feel to answer or ask question in English during the lesson? (on a scale from 1 - not at all - and 5 - a lot)
11. How much your parents encourage you to study English? (on a scale from 1 - not at all - and 5 - a lot)
12. How motivated are you to learn English? (on a scale from 1 - not at all - and 5 - a lot)

13. How important do you think becoming bilingual is? (on a scale from 1 - not at all - and 5 - a lot)
14. How interested are you in English literature, culture or way of living? (on a scale from 1 - not at all - and 5 - a lot)
15. How interested are you in learning English in order to communicate with foreign people that speak English? (on a scale from 1 - not at all - and 5 - a lot)
16. How interested are you in learning English for practical purposes (es. To find a good job...)? (on a scale from 1 - not at all - and 5 - a lot)

Thank you for your time!

17. Was this survey interesting to you? Did it make you reflect upon the importance of English language?
18. You can leave here any comments or suggestions.

9.3 Interview scheme (English Translation)

Small introduction: first of all, thank you for accepting to participate to this study. I am doing this research for my master's thesis and your help is very important for me. I am investigating the motivation of Italian students in learning English and the teaching practices used here. I will ask you some questions but please think about this as an informal chat in which you can share your thoughts. Your identity will be kept anonymous and your name will not appear in any part of the research. Feel free to say anything you think appropriate.

1. For how long have you been studying English?
2. Do you like studying English? Why? Why not?

3. Why are you studying English? What is your motivation? (it is for personal interest, because you think is important, because you think is useful...)
4. Why do you think it is a mandatory subject in every school? Why is so important? Do you agree with that?
5. Do you have practical experiences in which you used the English language, for example contacts with foreign people? If yes, what was your impression when you were talking?
6. Would you like to have English speaking friends or not? Why?
7. Is there something that you find particularly difficult about learning English?
8. How is it like an English lesson in your class? what are you usually asked to do?
9. What do you like about it? what you don't like about it?
10. Do you find the lessons boring or interesting?
11. Do you think the teacher is a good teacher?
12. Do you pay attention to her feedback or ask for her help?
13. Is there something that you would change in the way English is taught?
14. Do you feel comfortable in speaking English in the class or do you feel anxious in answering questions? Why? Why not?
15. Do you feel confident to speak English outside the classroom? Why? Why not?
16. In your opinion, when can you say that you are good in English? What is the level you aim to reach?

17. Do you ever practice real life situations during the lesson? Would you like to do that? (for example, doing role plays of different life situations to practice the different registers you might use)

18. What could improve your motivation to learn English?

9. 4 Interview transcripts

9.4.1 Interview 1 - scientific high school

2.

Interviewee A: yes I do, because I have always been encouraged from my family, my uncle is British.

Interviewee B: no I don't. Because I think that in a few years maybe a new language will become more important than English.

3.

A: for personal interest

B: only because it is mandatory at school

4.

A: job opportunities, international experience opportunities and access to information. For example reading what The New York Times says about the Italian politics is more objective.

5.

B: we were in Berlin for the school trip and a friend of mine wanted to buy some shoes but he doesn't speak a lot of English so I helped him. I made a lot of grammar mistakes and I was aware of this, but at least they could understand me and I have been useful for my friend.

A: exchange experience in Galles. Very interesting because you can see the difference and sameness with other cultures. It is important to see how different people manage things in a different way from what you are used to do. You can learn and have a different point of view.

6.

B: no because it is hard to go outside my comfort zone, I can't communicate with them, it will be difficult for me.

7.

B: no because it is like another subject, you have to study in general, there no something difficult in particular

8.

B: in depends on the period. Some period we have explanation of literature in order to do the oral exam, other periods we practice use of English or listening exercises in order to pass the written exam, we practice all the 4 skills. Lessons are in English first, but then the teachers translates it in Italian is somebody didn't understand. Oral exams are about literature or random texts talking about it.

9.

A: very good for the grammar, a bit confusing for the literature. What I would like to add is more speaking. Adding more speaking would really help the students. Also, do something different form the standard frontal lessons, maybe activities. As far as I am concerned, I am good in English but not thanks to the lessons. I learnt on my own with my experiences and also watching movies in English.

B: they had to first teach the grammar because we made a lot of mistakes and in this way she left out the speaking.

10.

B: I enjoy the class more when I am practicing rather than when the teachers speaks about literature.

13.

B: they should add to the standard frontal lessons other types of lessons, more interactive.

A: we could also speak about real-life arguments, without always following the book.

14.

B: no because I am shy in general with humanistic subjects and in English I am afraid of making mistakes and don't make the others understand me. I am afraid that they might understand something different from what I mean.

A: I don't talk too much because I don't want that the other think I want to expose myself because I am good in English. But also because I feel the pressure to always have to meet the expectations that the teacher has for me.

15.

A: outside the classroom I have no problems, I feel fine

B: only if it is really needed because someone doesn't understand me. Otherwise I don't feel the need . For example in Madrid it was not that useful because they didn't speak English, I had to know Spanish.

16.

B: when you speak with a person in English and you can understand and make others understand yourself, having a confrontation on opinions. I also think that the goal of English at school should be to learn how to communicate, together with having broader opportunities. In general, I think that languages serve as a medium to make people communicate with each other, to make

different countries communicate. Literature is not useful for this goal, because you can learn English literature in Italian and it will be the same.

17.

A: it would be really useful because also if you happen to be abroad, you cannot use the same English in a job interview and in a pub.

18.

B: I am not motivated at all. Something that could improve it would be an international experience that I have to do not for my choice. So I will feel in need of speaking English. Also, there are problems on how we study English at school. If I would go to Germany, I will learn more German than English, cause maybe I like it more. I could be more motivated in studying English only if there is something practice to use it for, something for which I need to speak English.

9.4.2 Interview 2 - focus group - scientific high school

3.

E: I like it especially because I know that it's useful

F: yes, for example I don't like studying literature but then it is nice to watch a movie in English or speak English

G: studying it at school is not really nice, maybe because of a wrong teaching method. In fact they tell you to study things that don't correspond to the reality

4.

E: to be able to communicate when I am abroad. Literature is not really useful.

F: also to have access to information for example in the web, that perhaps are not available in Italian.

H: to find a job

I: because it is the mean to communicate with everyone. For example, if you talk to a Spanish but you don't know Spanish, you can speak English.

L: we absolutely agree that English is an important subject and it should be always be mandatory at school. But it is not valued enough.

5.

M: when I was abroad

N: it was useful also for the university entrance tests and to pass English certificates exams

D: language certificates most of all. And not literature.

E: yes because somebody might be interested in literature but teachers cannot only teach literature leaving language lessons behind

F: yeah I also think that you can only like English literature if you first know English

7.

D: it is hard to learn it without going abroad

F: especially regarding speaking and listening skills, not only the grammar

L: here we study English but we have an Italian teacher with no English accent and then when you happen to go abroad and talk with a mother tongue speaker you don't really understand

N: at school teachers focus more on the grammar rules but then when you travel you think you can speak English but you don't because you never practice speaking skills at school

8.

D: the teacher that we have now, she always explains things that have nothing to do with the syllabus of English that she should follow. And in the end you have to study the course program on your own

O: it would be good to speak English in class and also, one hour of listening to English literature explanation doesn't involve you in the lesson

M: we are saying these things because we would like to complaint against the government that doesn't invest in this education and doesn't value English teaching enough.

10.

Every participant: lesson are very boring

D: one hour of the teacher explaining English literature, with no pauses and no dialogue with us is a bit too much

12.

F: not really. In my opinion, the first three years of high school should be focused on teaching the grammar rules and then the last two years should be more about discussions and dialogues during the lessons, as we are going towards the università or the job market. It is also true that if you don't know the grammar in first place, it will be hard to participate into a discussion.

13.

F: in my opinion they should alternate regular lessons with an Italian teacher to lessons held by a mother tongue teacher. It would be really useful.

G: I think that they should literature out because the average level of the students is not good enough. Then if somebody is into literature can always study it at the university.

14.

Every participant: not at all

H: I don't feel at ease in speaking English because I know that I am not really good at it and then the teacher will make me notice my mistakes and maybe my class mates will laugh. That's why I often choose not to talk.

16.

E: when you can watch an English movie

F: when you are able to sustain a conversation and you know the words meaning.

H: when you can understand people abroad

G: just when you can understand others and others can understand you

18.

G: giving to the students more opportunities to travel, make International experiences. Not offering them only to people with money.

9.4.3 Interview 3 - artistic high school

3.

Interviewee D: because it is useful in everything you do, everything you want to learn, especially if you want to go abroad and it broads your mind.

Interviewee C : you also use it as a medium between two non native countries.

4.

D: also because knowing different languages and cultures can broaden your mind.

7.

C: for me it is difficult to speaking not translating from Italian, but thinking in English and constructing the sentence in the English way because we live in Italy and don't really hear of English.

8.

C: one lesson is for grammar and 1 for literature, every week. We do a lot of literature and for the grammar we practice the 4 skills. The written exams are more about grammar, the oral exams

are only about literature. It is difficult to recreate the sentences about literature because you tend to learn everything by heart.

9.

C: I like when we talk about literature, but especially talking in English.

D: yes I agree, I also really like to speak in English, practice it. The grammar is difficult to study because you always tend to think in Italian and maybe you might say something that you don't really mean.

10.

D: the grammar lessons are boring, I like literature and interactive lessons the most because I can feel alive and participate in the lesson.

C: yes I also like more interactive lessons, where we can discuss different topics.

13.

D: yes I would like to have more opportunities of international experiences and exchanges. When I went in France at the middle school it was an awesome experience but here at high school there are no initiatives like that. The only thing we are going to do now is the linguistic stage in Cork, so everybody soon applied for it.

C: yes the same. It would be also nice to welcome foreign students here, both to have them in your life for that period and during the lessons it can be interesting and it will catch students attentions

D: yes also because if you go abroad or you stay with a foreign person, you have to speak English, you have the need, so you do it.

14.

D: yes even if I am afraid of making mistakes, but I can express myself, I feel at ease and I like it.

17.

C: we don't do this but we would really like to and I think we can tell this to the teacher. It is a good idea.

18.

C: I would say listen to the English music that you like, because every song that you know can be useful. And you shouldn't think that the teacher is bad and against you. You should pay more attention and participate more to the lesson, in this way the lessons can be more useful. There are students always making fun of the teacher or not paying attention at all.

D: it is fundamental to have personal interests that can be useful for you but also international experiences might be good for you, to open your mind and see something new. I would like to live a year abroad. Teachers should find a balance between explanation and practice because with too much explanation is boring and too much practice is difficult.