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Understanding Low-Income Students' Motivations to Learn English as a Second Language at Universidad Central del Ecuador, 2022

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Maestría en Enseñanza de Inglés Como Segundo Idioma
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DEDICATORIA

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RESUMEN

Este trabajo examina las orientaciones motivacionales para aprender inglés de estudiantes universitarios ecuatorianos. Este estudio exploró el yo L2 ideal de los participantes y el yo L2 debe ser del Sistema del Yo Motivacional L2 de Dörnyei y la comunidad imaginada, la identidad imaginada del marco teórico de inversión de Darvin (2019) y Norton (2015). Se recolectaron datos de veinte participantes y cuatro entrevistas individuales a estudiantes de pregrado de la Universidad Central del Ecuador (UCE). La motivación y la inversión representaban los deseos de los estudiantes de idiomas, y eran situacionales y contextuales. Estas orientaciones se complementaron entre sí de tal manera que los estudiantes a veces compartían la motivación instrumental y el yo ideal de la L2, identidades imaginadas (inversión) o tenían ambas, pero con un enfoque diferente. La motivación instrumental de los estudiantes trascendió sus orientaciones de inversión.

Palabras clave: motivación; comunidades imaginadas; identidades imaginadas; postura internacional; inglés como lengua extranjera;

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the motivation orientations to learn English of Ecuadorian undergraduate students. This study explored the participants' ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self from Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and imagined community, imagined identity from the theoretical framework of investment from Darvin (2019) and Norton (2015). Data were collected from twenty participants and four individual interviews from undergraduate students at Universidad Central del Ecuador (UCE). Motivation and investment represented language learners' desires, and they were situational and contextual. These orientations complemented each other in such that students sometimes shared instrumentality motivation, and ideal L2 self, imagined identities (investment) or they had both but with a different focus. Students' instrumental motivation transcended their investment orientations.

Key words: motivation; imagined communities; imagined identities; international posture; English as a foreign language; Ecuadorian students

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INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, language learning has become an important component of the education process. As a result of globalization, the English language has become the world's lingua franca, and this has affected language policies (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2005; Widdowson, 1993). Like in many countries, the Ministry of Education in Ecuador has executed several actions and introduced a curriculum intended at improving English as a foreign language (EFL) learning in the country (Ministerio de Educacion, 2016). In fact, English is the foreign language officially taught in private and public educational establishments nationwide (Curriculo Lenjua Extranjera, 2016; 2018). Despite the implementation of EFL curriculums, the actual level of knowledge of English in Ecuador is low, as evidenced by its proficiency ranking in the English First standardized exam (EF, 2020; 2021; 2022). The international company specialized in teaching languages, English First (EF), conducted the twelfth edition of the study entitled "EF English Proficiency Index". In the study for the year 2022, it was announced that Ecuador was ranked 82 out of 111 globally and 18 out of 20 among Latin American countries (EF, 2022). Similarly, previous editions of the study ranked Ecuador 18 out of 18 among Latin American countries for the years 2019 and 2020 (EF, 2019; 2020). Moreover, the exams showcased that Latin America as a region have continually improved their scores over the past year, with more countries in the moderate proficiency category. However, Ecuador's score positioned it in the 'low proficiency' category calculated by Education First (EF) which corresponds to the lower half of the Common European Framework of References of Languages (CEFR) English level B1 and A2 language proficiency (EF, 2022).

Ecuador has continually demonstrated low levels of English, despite ongoing efforts and policies aimed on improving the quality of English teaching and learning. This is particularly worrisome due to the trends in the region and the ongoing push by the country´s

Ministry of Education. Various studies outside of Ecuador (Dhanasobhon, 2006; Noom-ura, 2013; Wiriyaachitra, 2002) have listed the multiple factors that can impede English language learning for students. For instance, Gulnaz, Ahmad and Mandouh (2016) explain that factors ranging from teachers' insufficient knowledge of the English language to class-size and inadequate infrastructure are integral to students' English language attainment. The problem, as these studies indicate, is often framed as one of resources, pedagogy, or culture. A growing strand in the literature, however, has strived to foreground the role of motivation in the process of English language learning.

To understand how motivation is conceived, it is essential look beyond theories of a psychological nature (Gardner, Dörnyei) and consider those of a sociocultural nature of motivation (Darvin, 2021; Norton, 2012). As an example, the study completed in Thailand by Noom-ura (2013) found that the main components that impede learning are students' inability to connect to the language and the fact that they have little access to the English language outside of the classroom. Motivation can be a trigger for students' language learning by helping them maintain their best efforts. Norton (1995, 2000, 2013) suggested the concept of investment, through which she considered "the language learner as having a complex social identity and multiple desires" (Norton, 1995, p. 18) in the real social world, where different power relations exist. Learners invest in a language because it will help them acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power (Norton, 2013).

In recent years, the definition of motivation has been inclining toward a more sociocultural understanding. To better understand learners' connection with the language, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) suggest that second language motivation theory needs to include self, identity, and global English as a target language. Several academic studies (Gardner &

Lambert, 1972; Soureshjani and Naseri, 2011; Hudson, 2000) concerning the factors that influence second language acquisition have been carried out, and the results demonstrated that motivation is a fundamental factor in foreign language learning in university level students. Darvin and Norton (2021) argued that motivation and investment "are complementary rather than contradictory constructs and that together they offer a more comprehensive understanding of language learning and teaching." (p. 2). For instance, a language learner may be highly motivated but may also be disconnected from their investment in the language (Darvin & Norton, 2021). Therefore, the significance of the concept of 'motivation' and 'investment' cannot be denied in foreign language learning. In the case of the English language and its current status as the most important international language in today's world, these concepts are important to understand if English learners study English in order to get closer to particular communities or if those communities exist within their learning context (Dörnyei, 2009). Although most research conducted (Gardner, 1985; Pierce, 1995; Masgoret & Tremblay, 1990) has been concentrated on the role of cultural, social, and linguistic context in foreign language setting, the sociological motivation and language learning processes of disadvantaged students in Ecuador have been rarely investigated.

In Ecuador, EFL is taught in a community where exposure to the English language occurs almost exclusively in the academic environment. Learners could be highly motivated to learn a language but may not necessarily be invested in the language practices of a given classroom or community (Darvin, 2020). While the relevance and influence of imagined identity has been recognized, much greater research attention has continued to be placed on the L2 learners' actual and real-life communities (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007); also, there remains a shortage of research that explores the relationship between the EFL learners' imagined communities and identities and investment. Therefore, to bridge the gap, a qualitative case

study method was adopted to investigate the relationship between learners' imagined communities and investments in the context of Ecuador, where the Ministry of Education has introduced policies to enhance the quality and quantity of English teaching in all socio-economic areas, especially the lower-mid socioeconomic level, in order to prepare students to meet the challenges of globalization. In particular, the research aims to understand the interplay among different factors contributing to the structuring of these learners' imagined identities and the investment they made across their EFL learning experiences. Thus, the present study seeks to explore the factors that directly or indirectly influence the motivation of low-income undergraduate students on the foreign language learning process. In response to the scarcity of research concerning Ecuadorian EFL learners' sociological motivation in post-secondary level, this study explores how motivation and investment can complement each other by exploring different English as foreign language learning experiences based on individual responses and one-on-one interviews with Ecuadorian students.

Furthermore, the study of language learning motivation in different social contexts is necessary to reveal whether low-income students lack motivation (Lamb, 2012). It remains unclear, however, whether young people in such areas have less motivation to learn English, or whether they are being denied the chance to realize their aspirations due to other factors, including educational practices unfolding within the classroom. Therefore, the relationship between students and the language needs to be examined, as motivation and investment are one of the most important factors driving learning (Norton, 2013; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Understanding the role of learners' attitudes, goals, and expectations are essential before effective instructional programs for learners studying in different social contexts can be designed and implemented.

In this thesis, I will first review the most important theoretical constructs investigated in the study and discuss the potential role of motivational factors in affecting EFL learners. This will be followed by a description of the research procedures and the presentation of the results of the research. Next, I will provide a detailed discussion of the findings in the light of theories of motivation and investment. The paper will be concluded by outlining implications for educational policies and future directions of research.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The influence of the sociocultural surroundings on motivation to learn a foreign language was central to early theories of L2 motivation, such as Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model of second language learning. Still, motivation to learn a foreign language greatly differs from one individual to another, suggesting that individual differences greatly influence the motivation levels of learners. It has been argued that students' motivation and perceptions can impact the process of learning a foreign language. Wang and Littlewood (2021) suggest that motivation for learning is one's motivation to complete a desired goal. As such, motivation and the factors that influence it have been widely studied. One of the most influential authors in this field of study is the psychologist Gardner (1985), whose socio-educational model paved the way for understanding the importance of motivation in second language (L2) acquisition, and the importance of exploring motivation as an individual difference factor. In Gardner's socio-educational model of L2, motivation is conceptualized as a complex of variables, specifically "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language" (Gardner, 1985, p. 10). He concluded that learners expressed two types of attitudes toward L2 learning. First, an integrative orientation referred to the learner's positive view of members of second language groups. Second, an instrumental orientation referred to learners that are interested in speaking the L2 for practical purposes such as earning a higher salary or securing a better job. The proposed term by Gardner and Lambert (1959) of integrative motivation, had been widely studied in L2 motivation research, but the popularity of this notion has waned because of its incompatibility with other motivational constructs, improper in the global English era, and the lack of empirical evidence and application in various educational contexts (Dörnyei, 2009).

Over the following decades, the field of SLA saw the rise of an emphasis on the socio-cultural aspects of second language learning. Researchers have broadened our understanding of L2 motivation. There is extensive literature (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Norton, 2006; Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2013; Ryan 2009) suggesting the importance of considering the interplay between the concepts of identity, investment, and the imagined communities of L2 learners. Benedict Anderson (1983) first introduced the term *imagined* communities and later developed by Norton (2007, 2013) imagined communities refer to the communities that are constructed through learners' imaginations. They embody the communities that learners wish to join and become a member of in the future, the learners' imagined communities directly inform their perceived identities; the desired sense of self that learners project for themselves in the future through the acquisition of a new language (Norton, 2007). Imagined communities and identities can play a critical role, influencing the learners' capacity to make different learning decisions that may contribute to the shaping of the learners' learning trajectories. Kanno and Norton (2003) argued that since our actions will be driven by our aspirations, "our identities then must be understood not only in terms of our investment in the "real" world but also in terms of our investment in possible worlds" (p. 284).

The involvement of distant communities created through learners' imaginations serves as a significant source that creates an impact on their learning. In this sense, these imagined communities give learners the opportunity to picture themselves as being the members of a community to which they wish to become a part. This study aims to understand if such imagined communities exist between Ecuadorian students. In addition, it is important for English language educators to recognize that learners' ideal L2 self is a drive for promoting imagined communities in the classroom and understanding how this can tie into learners' motivation orientations. The literature review will elaborate on these concepts (L2 Motivational Self

System, investment: imagined communities and identities) that can be found in a country such as Ecuador where advancement in a career may be the reason to seek out and connect with an L2 identity (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

The Role of Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation explains why people select a particular activity, how long they are willing to persist at it and what effort they invest in it (Dörnyei, 2001). In the field of second language acquisition, several different language learning goals have been proposed. For instance, Gardner (1985) supports the relationship between motivation and learning. Gardner argues that a second language learning (L2) is affected by a favorable behavior, a desire to attain an objective and attitude. Students with a high degree of motivation develop a positive attitude towards language learning; therefore, better long-term outcomes. Language learning motivation is a combination of complex variables, including goals, expression of efforts, and favorable attitudes towards the target language (Gardner, 1985). All these elements including the attitudes of the learner, energy, level of effort and time may help determine someone's level of motivation to master a language.

Dörnyei (1998) has emphasized the impact of motivation and the connection with language learning. Motivation can be categorized in two main types: extrinsic and intrinsic. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), extrinsic motivation occurs when an individual does something seeking rewards, such as grades or praises, whereas intrinsic motivation is defined as the degree to which individuals place themselves to learn something new for the pleasure of doing a particular activity without expecting external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Gardner (1985) argues that second language (L2) learning is affected by a favorable behavior, an intrinsic motivation to attain an objective and attitude. Therefore, students with a high degree

of motivation show positive attitude towards language learning. Intrinsically motivated students learn because of their desire to acquire the language. Attitudes towards learning a new language relates to motivation (Dörnyei, 1998). Deci and Ryan (1985) explain the important distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. They argue that goals are only effective motivators if they become incorporated to some extent. Intrinsically motivated students engage in the learning process because they find it enjoyable; whereas extrinsically motivated learners carry out the learning process in order to obtain an award, grade and not be punished. Noels (2001) identifies intrinsic language acquisition goals, which relate to feelings of enjoyment and improvement experienced during the process of foreign language learning. In the field of foreign language learning motivation: the development of intrinsic orientations is often dependent on classroom factors including the teacher's personality, quality of teaching, and instructional tasks (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). These include the resources available in foreign language education that are also dependent on socio-economic factors, which might then influence learners' intrinsic interest indirectly (Munoz, 2008).

Gardner (1985, 2006) differentiated instrumental goals, which are associated with the utilitarian values of speaking another language, from integrative goals, which express learners' desires to learn the language in order to become integrated into the target language culture. Gardner and Lambert's (1972) theory of motivation draws an important relationship between motivation and "goal". Consequently, the authors proposed two terms that are commonly used in the field of motivation: Integrative orientation refers to the positive attitude of an individual to learn a language and culture. Integrative motivated learners might have a strong reason to learn the L2 (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). In contrast, instrumental orientation refers to the practical reasons of an individual to learn a language. Some learners might be motivated to learn a second language as a required part of their academic and professional career. Different

studies carried out in different parts of the world (Valsecchi et al., 2017; Wang, 2009; Mahreez, 1994) found that most of the participants believed English as a foreign language to be one of the most important subjects to learn for academic and professional purposes. Consequently, in the foreign language learning field, Yashima (2002) suggested the concept of "international posture" as an alternative to Gardner's (1985) "integrativeness" considering English as language for international communication rather than communication with a specific L2 groups. This emerged language learning goal include "interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to study or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners and a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures" (Yashima, 2002, p. 57). For the context of the Ecuadorian education, the present study draws on Yashima's (2002) international posture as a more appropriate alternative to the concept of integrative motivation which is mainly related to English as second language (ELA) context rather than (EFL) context. English as a foreign language has become a learning goal for some learners in the twenty-first century with English serving as the lingua franca in a globalized world (Jenkins, 2007). Other language learning goals can also include friendship, travel, and knowledge orientations (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983). For this reason, it is essential to consider the notion of international posture to determine their imagined selves "linked to global concerns, and through the process find meaning in learning English while learning to use the language" (Yashima, 2009, p. 159).

Investment: Imagined Communities and Imagined Identities

The theory of imagined communities has been particularly relevant to the study of English learning and communication in EFL contexts. Anderson (1983) formulated this concept within a political context, whereas this study considers the concept within an educational setting. Inspired by this concept of imagined communities, Wenger (1998) included

imagination as one of the core elements that enables people to learn and to engage in a community. He argued that in order to join a community, people not only socially participate in different tangible communities of practice, but also depend on their imagination to "include in their identities other meanings, other possibilities, other perspectives" to create a "mode of belonging" (Wenger, 1998, p. 187). The notion of imagined communities later became the theoretical foundation upon which Norton (2001) developed her theory applied to second language acquisition (SLA). Norton (2001) suggested that learning is not simply constricted to the actual communities that learners participate in, such as schools and churches; instead, to a great extent, the involvement of distant communities constructed through learners' imaginations also serves as a significant source that creates an impact on their learning. In this sense, these imagined communities give learners the space to imagine themselves as being the members of a community to which they wish to become a part (Norton 1995, 2006, 2007). Additionally, Kanno and Norton (2003) defined imagined communities as "groups of people not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect though the power of imagination" (p. 241). Thus, English language learning seems to involve a process of learners' negotiation of their identities as members of such a global community conceived in their minds, or an imagined community (Ryan 2009). Norton (2007) argued that investment should be regarded as a social construct that is subject to an embedded social environment. The concept of investment should be understood within a social context in which L2 learners would make contextualized investments that, in turn, yield academic and material gain for the learners themselves. In other words, the imagined communities manifest the communities that learners wish to join and become a part of in the future, and learners' imagined identities: a desired self that learners project for themselves in the future (Norton, 2006). It is essential to distinguish imagination from fantasies. Imagination that learners create is not wishful thinking that

separates one from reality and that can hardly be realized; rather, it is "hopeful imagination" in which rules and regulations exist and guide the learner's behavior. In other words, it is the mental vision of a more desirable and possible future that facilitates the planning and regulation of the learners' learning behavior and thus may lead to a change in their identities and learning path (Kanno & Norton, 2003).

Beyond the notion of motivation, investment refers to "the commitment to the goals, practices, and identities that constitute the learning process and that are continually negotiated in different relations of power" (Darvin, 2019, p. 245), which concerns language learners' social identities, social contexts, and their past experiences. As this definition suggests, what influences second language learners' learning is not just limited to their individual characteristics, such as cognitive skills and personalities; rather, the social context that the learners engage in also plays a role in affecting their commitment and desire to learn the language (Kanno & Norton, 2003). For example, in Norton's (1995) study, when an immigrant woman in Canada perceived herself as an immigrant language speaker, she remained silent, but when she perceived herself as a multicultural citizen, she challenged the marginalization that occurred with being a non-native speaker and spoke in English. Norton (1995) argued that language learners invest in language learning to access symbolic resources, which refer to "language, education, and friendship," and material resources, which refer to "capital goods, real estate, and money" (p. 17). Investment in capital leads to the construction of a future identity. Thus, identity relates to the future self with "investment in possible worlds" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 248). It may be difficult or unclear for Ecuadorian EFL students to place their possible selves in a L2 speaking community since they do not have many opportunities to communicate with L1 English speakers or speakers of English from various linguacultural backgrounds throughout their EFL learning experience.

L2 Motivational Self System

In the field of L2 motivation, the theory L2 Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2005) also draws on the notion of imagination. Dörnyei (2005) describes the connection between discovering the ideal L2 self and the vast imagined communities in learners, stating that "our idealized L2-speaking self can be seen as a member of an imagined L2 community whose mental construction is partly based on our real-life experiences of members of the community-communities speaking the particular L2 in question and partly on our imagination" (p. 102). Dörnyei (2005) argues that the main drive of language learning is the learners' future images of themselves as successful users of the language. The theory hypothesizes that students' visions of their future selves as English users in an interaction with members of a certain community is the catalysts for L2 learning. His model of motivation contains three self-related components: The Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 learning experience (Dörnyei, 2005). In this model, Ideal L2 Self is one's ideal self-image of a competent L2 speaker. The Ought-to L2 Self contains "attributes that one believes one ought to possess (i.e. various duties, obligations, or responsibilities) in order to avoid possible negative outcomes" (Dörnyei, 2005, p.106) associated with not being able to speak the L2. This type of motivation is related to Higgins' (1998) ideal/ought selves in the sense of duty, responsibilities, or obligations. Considering Higgins' (1998) ideal self which focuses on future desired ends, while ought-to self focuses on avoiding future feared ends. For that reason, instrumentality can be separated into two different categories. Motives relating to job and career succession are instrumental motives that focus on the ideal L2 self; conversely, motives such as studying to pass a course and avoid parents and teachers' disappointment are instrumental motives that focus on the ought-to self (Dörnyei, 2005). Previous research on the motivational self-system has discovered the role of parental encouragement as an important social and

contextual influence on the motivational self-system (Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Taguchi et al., 2009). The third component of the model is the L2 learning experience, which considers the impacts of classroom environments, teachers' personalities, curriculum, and grades on learners' motivation to continue learning (Dörnyei, 2005).

Furthermore, what influences second language learners' learning is not just related to their individual characteristics, such as personalities, cognitive skills; rather, the social context that the learners engage in also plays a role in affecting their commitment and desire to learn the language (Norton, 2007). Hence, it is important to understand the relationship between second language learners' imagined communities and L2 investment (Kanno & Norton, 2003). However, there are some limitations, Gulnaz, Ahmad and Mandouh (2016) and Susilo, Suhatmady, and Sunggingwati (2017), demonstrate that students are not intrinsically motivated to learn a language because they are not exposed to L2 social contact outside of the classroom. Therefore, students do not experience authentic interactions nor have real-world reasons to use the L2 in their daily lives and thus do not feel motivated to internalize it. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013) also believe that EFL learning success is related to learners' motivation. Gardner & Lambert (1959), Noels (2001), and Williams & Burden (1997) have highlighted the significant effect of parental and family encouragement on students' motivation to learn. Similarly, Auquilla & Fernández (2017) case-study discovered that one factor that affects motivation is that socio-economically disadvantaged students do not get to use the foreign language outside of the classroom because their social circle consists of Spanish-speaking individuals. Therefore, students do not have the opportunity to put everything they've learned into real-world context nor practice their English-speaking skills outside the classroom (Auquilla & Fernández, 2017).

Ryan's (2009) case study in an EFL setting in Japan revealed that there is a correlation between the ideal L2 self and reported personal satisfaction when using a language with others.

Ryan (2009) identified this as integrativeness, suggesting that discovering the ideal L2 self can act as a motivational tool, allowing students to see the difference between using the language outside the classroom (i.e., in the community, engaging with other English speakers) and English as an academic subject (required for school, only being used in the classroom). The impact of the wider social context on self-related beliefs in L2 motivation was investigated in Lamb's (2012) recent study. Lamb (2012) found that students in rural areas of Indonesia held significantly less-favorable views of their Ideal L2 selves than the participants from urban areas, and the Ideal L2 self also had smaller influence in motivated behavior for rural learners.

International Posture

The English language, which is now considered a global language (Crystal, 2003) has demanded the need for a common tool for communication between individuals from all language groups (Ushioda, 2006). Students know the value of English as an asset for their future academic and professional career. As mentioned earlier, Yashima (2002) introduced the variable: international posture, which is a revised form of Gardner's (1985) construct of integrativeness. International posture was conceptualized to replace the motivational desire to meet and communicate with a specific language community, or more precisely, an imagined community residing in learners' minds by offering an "imagined international community" (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004). This desire to communicate with an imagined community may prove to be a useful motivator within EFL learning, as international posture has been positively linked, directly or indirectly, to several desirable outcomes in language learning motivation such as the willingness to communicate (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004), and the Ideal L2 Self (Kormos & Csizér, 2008). International posture is defined as "interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness

to interact with intercultural attitude toward different culture" (Yashima, 2002., p. 57). As Lamb (2004) stated, contemporary aspirations to English learning, such as understanding movies, pop songs and studying or traveling abroad, reflect one's international posture. Therefore, international posture can be seen as a positive motivational form that is beneficial for the language learners to have. In addition, the inclusion of international posture in motivational studies of language learning may provide important additional insights into the incentive to learn in the EFL context.

English as a foreign language is a field of study that could potentially open doors to better job opportunities and provide economic benefits to individuals and to countries (Araújo et al. 2015). Governments are aware of the importance of speaking the English language and the Ecuadorian government have invested significant resources in teaching English as a foreign language in school (British Council, 2015; Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Research has shown that learning English as a foreign language has various positive aspects besides economic gains and better job opportunities. For instance, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released the PISA 2025 (OECD, 2021) report which revealed a positive connection between learning and speaking languages and students' attitudes towards global competence. Through language, students can learn and gain access to other cultures (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2004). Not only does the English language enhance career expectations, but it also enhances educational expectations which can be defined as an individual's set plans for future acquisition (Jacob and Wilder, 2010).

Research has shown that foreign languages can be an important driver towards better job opportunities. In response to this emerging language goal, the OECD conducted the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment study (OECD, 2018) to examine how speaking and learning a foreign language at school relates with students' career and

educational expectations. The study collected data from questionnaires and qualitative interviews from fifteen-year-olds in seventy-nine (79) countries, including Latin American countries (Costa Rica, Mexico, and Peru). While the collected data from the interviews (PISA, 2018) cannot be generalized, the insights and experiences shared by these students are useful to illustrate how some students perceive the role of languages in their expectations and life plans (Covacevich & Vargas, 2021). Education expectations could be influenced by different factors, such as learners' ability, attitudes, school achievement, and through external factors, which include family expectation, costs of education, socio-economic status and returns of education, etc. (Jacob and Wilder, 2010).

Covacevich & Vargas (2021) state that students who are planning an international career consider foreign languages very relevant for short- and long-term plans. The following data samples are drawn from Covacevich & Vargas' (2021) report which depicts the important role of learning foreign languages in determining career choices. For instance, Eva who speaks Spanish and is leaning English, said that "[…] speaking English is very important, especially to find a job, even in Costa Rica. If you don't speak English, you don't find a job" (p. 31). Contrary to Eva's response, Neil, who speaks Danish and is also learning English, said that "[…] I don't think that for me it will be important. I will study and work here in Denmark, and here all lessons are in Danish. Maybe if we receive international students who only speak English, then it would be useful to talk to them" (p. 32).

As illustrated in the above excerpts, some students choose career plans to benefit from the foreign languages they acquire. Nonetheless, students perceive that speaking and learning a foreign language is a powerful tool for their future careers and it can be useful in their preferences Covacevich & Vargas (2021). This is more likely to be the case if young people take foreign languages into account when developing their career and educational

expectations. These expectations depend greatly on the context and the opportunities students perceive to be available to them (Schoon and Parsons, 2002; Patton and Creed, 2007).

Instrumental and integrative motivation can be combined in most language situations (Dörnyei, 1998). The relevance of integrative and instrumental motivation depends on circumstances and contexts in which foreign language function. A university is composed of groups of people with different gender, age, socio-economic class and educational background. Students' academic affiliations could affect the attitudes and perceptions of learners when learning the target language. Integrative motivation is emphasized in some studies; however, it has been reported that the reasons most frequently chosen by students are the instrumental ones. Gardner and Lambert (1972) highlight that learners who have positive attitudes towards the language and wish to incorporate into their context are more driven than those who pursue for the purpose of obtaining a reward. Gardner (1985) states that Integrative motivation seems to be more influential than instrumental motivation. Conversely, Dörnyei (2001) suggests that both integrative and instrumental motivation are linked favorably and contribute to the objective of language acquisition. The significance of instrumental or integrative motivation relies largely on the language-learning context. Likewise, Brown (2000) emphasizes that learners tend to combine both integrative and instrumental motivation rather than just one orientation when learning language. Wang (2008) also suggests that more beneficial learner results can be achieved by combining both orientations during the process of learning a new language.

Furthermore, Noels (2001) argues that an individual may simultaneously have more than one orientation for learning a foreign language. Although some are more important than others. Although deriving from seemingly different theories, international posture and ideal L2 self both highlight learners' power of imagination. International posture captures learners'

attitudes toward the international community represented by English. Similarly, learners' vision or imagery of themselves as competent English users in an imagined community is the central essence of the ideal L2 self (Ryan 2006).

To summarize, motivational orientations, perceptions of L2 ideal selves, and imagined communities might be strongly influenced by social and contextual factors. Students' immediate environment: their family and friends, and the broader socio-economic context play an important role in learning attitudes, goal setting, and the effort and persistence with which they carry out learning tasks. The wider social and educational context also has considerable impact on motivational variables and autonomous language learning behavior. This study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the role of motivational variables that influence lower socio-economic students' foreign language learning. Considering the actual selves or existing identities of Ecuadorian students as foreign language learners, an examination of their possible selves (i.e., ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self), international posture, and imagined identities may elucidate their language learning motivations and investments (imagined communities).

Ecuadorian EFL Curriculum

In Ecuador, the English language is considered as an important tool to move forward in the global world in many different aspects and areas and this is reflected in the proposed curriculum: Currículo Lengua Extranjera (2016), which is the mandated foreign language curriculum in the country. The Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación), the office in charge of basic education to children aged six (6) through seventeen (17) years old, have referenced the Common European Framework (CEFR) as the framework for curricular planning and implementation. The updated curriculum recommends up-to-date

methodologies, strategies, and various types of technology to promote English language learning throughout the country. The methodologies discussed in Currículo Lengua Extranjera (2016) include communicative language teaching (CLT), content and language integrated learning (CLIL), and the implementation of technology, which supports EFL learning. The updated (2018) version of the curriculum has also mandated that students must graduate high school with an intermediate level of English in reading, writing, listening, and speaking and this can be found in Currículos de Niveles de Educación Obligatoria (2018) which is a B1 level according to the CEFR. The curriculum mandates learning the language from grade two (2) until high school. Students' progress and promotion is indicated by advancements in levels from A1 to B2. For higher education, students must have at least level A2 when entering college and after four (4) years, graduate with a B1 level. Those who want to become English teachers must graduate from the university at least with the B2 level (Ministry of Education, 2016). Most universities expect students to achieve a B2 level as a requirement for graduation. For example, Universidad Central del Ecuador (UCE) requires their undergraduate students achieve A2 to B1 levels, depending on their academic degrees (UCE, 2020).

Even with the implementation of the 2016 curriculum and mandated English language learning, which is supposed to improve EFL in the country, Ecuador still ranks 18th out of 20 in English language proficiency compared to other Latin American countries (EF, 2022). The data found in the study completed by Education First (EF) depicts the reality of English as a foreign language in Ecuador. As a reflection of this matter, a study was held by Auquilla and Fernández (2017) with 142 rural students at different public high schools in Azogues, Ecuador. The study found that educational policies regarding the teaching of the English language in public educational institutions have not yet been sufficiently optimal for students who finish high school to achieve the level of English proficiency B1 level established by the Ecuadorian

Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación). Therefore, most public high school students fail to attain a high proficiency level of English to continue their undergraduate studies.

Although the literature review describes the factors affecting learners' motivational orientations (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Gardner,1985; Norton, 2006), it is with limitations as the studies were conducted outside of the Ecuadorian context. However, it could be inferred that social context with L2, and socio-economic conditions of where the EFL teaching-learning process takes place influences foreign language learning orientations.

METHODOLOGY

According to Heigham and Croker (2009) the current qualitative case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries and contexts are not clearly evident" (p. 13). By this definition, it is suggested that the objectives of a case study are (1) to improve conditions or practice based on what has been observed in a particular case, (2) to extend to other cases that may share a similar context, and finally (3) to obtain an in-depth understanding toward the particular case in question (Heigham & Croker, 2009). Accordingly, this qualitative case study can provide useful insights into the role of motivation and investment as imagined identities in students' learning and investment in the EFL context of Ecuador.

Participants and Context

To examine various dimensions of the language learning experience, participants' perceptions and reflections were gathered from a questionnaire and one-on-one interviews. For this study, undergraduate students in their sophomore year (second year) of college were considered since they have completed at least one year of English courses at the higher education level. Thus, their responses will reflect their aspirations for future upcoming years for graduation and post-graduation. The participants were enrolled in different academic degrees.

Universidad Central del Ecuador (UCE) is located in the metropolitan city of Quito, it houses students from different socio-economic backgrounds and regions across the country including Pichincha and the surrounding provinces Santo Domingo, Cotopaxi, Imbabura, and Napo. UCE conducts socio-economic surveys for freshmen students, in which the students must complete when registering for classes. The 2018-2019 socioeconomic survey conducted

by UCE reveals that 28.6% students are low-income (*bajo*), 57.1% students are middle-income (*medio)*, 14.3% students are other (*otro*), and 0% students are high-income (*alto*) (Córdova & Wendy, 2022). UCE's students' backgrounds, availability and willingness to participate in the study made it the appropriate site for this study.

For the present study, sixty (60) public university students equally distributed from two different English A2 level classrooms at Universidad Central del Ecuador were contacted via email and provided with brief information of the study in place. English level A2 is the second level of English in the CEFR, and it is understood that students reach that level at UCE by completing their first year in university. Thus, UCE students at the A2 English level have experienced learning the English language for at least a semester. Twenty (20) public students responded to the email and decided to volunteer to take part in the study by filling out the consent form through the online platform Survey Monkey. After electronically singing informed consents, participants proceeded with the survey provided in the same online platform Survey Monkey. The individuals' contact information was obtained from their professor working at Universidad Central and approved by the Director of UCE. The contacted individuals were not related to the author of this study.

The group of participants was made up of seven (7) male students and thirteen (13) female students. This data of gender distribution does not reflect that of UCE but rather of the participants that took part in the responses. The study participants reported to have the following characteristics: Fifty-five percent (11) of the respondents were between eighteen (18) and twenty-two (22) years old; forty percent (8) were between twenty-two (22) and twenty-six (26) years old, and 5% (1) were over twenty-seven (27) years old. Participants self-identified regarding socio-economic status. Three different social economic statuses were mentioned: eighty percent (16) of the participants identified as low-mid income level (*medio*

bajo), twenty percent (4) low-income level (*bajo*) , and 0% (0) high-income level (*alto*). The English language levels that the participants have were also a characteristic observed. Once again, participants self-classified their level of English proficiency: fifty-six percent (9), were intermediate level, and forty-four percent (7) were beginners.

Research Instrument

A survey was used as the qualitative research instrument under a qualitative case study research design. The survey was provided in the participants' L1, Spanish. Part of the survey consisted of a questionnaire to elicit participants' age, gender, place of residence, estimated English proficiency level, years studying the language, reason for studying English, and their socio-economic status (self-identified). The survey, designed by the author consisted of fifteen (15) Likert-type scale closed-ended items and one open-ended question. Before it was administered, study participants were provided with an informed consent form in Spanish. The survey aimed to gather information on factors that impact motivation in English language learning and orientations towards learning English as a foreign language. The participants responded to the fifteen (15) Likert-type scale items which measure the students level of agreement concerning different motivational factors involved in English language learning. For these items, students evaluated their responses based on a five (5) point Likert scale. In the scale, one (1) signified "strongly agree", two (2) signified "agree", three (3) signified "neutral", four (4) signified "disagree" and five (5) signified "strongly disagree". Additionally, the survey included an open-ended question that prompted the participants to think about the most important reason they have for learning English at UCE.

After the survey phase, all the participants were contacted again for the interview process. Four (4) participants volunteered for one-on-one virtual interviews. The interviews

were scheduled and conducted through the video conference platform Zoom. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain in-depth information about each participant's experiences and factors that influence their motivation to learn English. The interviews were semi-structured, audio-recorded, and conducted in Spanish (later translated into English). Each interview lasted about fifteen (15) minutes. To create the interview questions (see Appendix A), the author referred to the following studies: motivational factors from Gardner (1985; i.e., goals, efforts, e.g., "Did you have any goals for English learning?"); factors closely related to investment from Norton (2007; i.e., "Would you like to travel outside the country?"; and students' imagined identities from Dörnyei (2005; considering the actual selves and future identities; e.g., "Do you think English could help you in any way in your future professional career?"). Lastly, the participants' responses were carefully examined and compared to elicit their imagined communities (if any) and how they enable or disable students from investing in learning English.

FINDINGS

The questionnaire collected the following information: sixty-five percent (13) students declared to have studied English for one (1) to two (2) years, twenty-five percent (5) students have studied for two (2) to four (4) years, and ten percent (2) students have studied for five (5) to nine (9) years post-secondary learning. The participants reported that only fifteen percent (3) students try to speak the English language outside the classroom, eighty-five percent (17) students acknowledged that they study English for academic purposes, while fifteen percent (3) student study for personal reasons. Those three participants shared that they also study English outside of UCE in different private institutes.

Table one shows the results for the first item "I want to communicate well in English" in which eighteen (90%) of the students (eleven strongly agreed and seven agreed) expressed that they want to communicate well in English.

TABLE 1. Want to be able to properly communicate in English.

Rating	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Neutral	2	10
Agree	7	35
Strongly agree	11	55
Total	20	100

As shown in the table below, three (15%) of all the surveyed students indicated that they try to speak English outside the classroom. nine students (45%) indicated that they don't speak English outside the classroom, while eight students (40%) indicated that they neither do. This was expected as Ecuador is a predominantly Spanish-speaking country. Additionally, students' social backgrounds reflect this as their English exposure is exclusive to the school environment.

TABLE 2. Try to speak English outside the classroom.

Rating	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0	0
Disagree	9	45
Neutral	8	40
Agree	0	0
Strongly agree	3	15
Total	20	100

Table three (3) indicates that five (25%) of the surveyed students feel comfortable when they have to speak English. For the most part, the participants only speak English inside the classroom, rarely outside.

TABLE 3. Feel comfortable speaking English.

Rating	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly disagree	3	15
Disagree	4	20

Neutral	8	40
Agree	4	20
Strongly agree	1	5
Total	20	100

Table 4 shows that five (25%) students expressed that the teacher motivates them to learn the English language. While thirteen (13) students (65%) did not think that the teacher motivates them to learn the English language. These responses correspond with the information gathered from the one-on-one interview discussed later about a teacher-centered learning environment.

TABLE 4. Teachers' motivation towards English language learning

Rating	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly disagree	7	35
Disagree	6	30
Neutral	3	15
Agree	2	10
Strongly agree	2	10
Total	20	100

As shown in Table five, eighteen (18) of all the surveyed students (90%) believe that it is important to know about the English language and its culture. It could be said that the participants acknowledge the importance of the English language for their personal and professional careers.

TABLE 5. It is important to learn about the English culture

Rating	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0	0
Disagree	2	10
Neutral	0	0
Agree	11	55
Strongly agree	7	35
Total	20	100

The questionnaire included two statements using Likert-scale to determine the frequency of the English language. The scale to determine frequency consisted of three (3) points as follows: One (1), once a month. Two (2), once a week three (3), more than once a week

As shown in Table 6, ten students (50%) dedicate their time to learn English outside the classroom once or more than once a week. This activity is performed on their own free time outside the classroom.

TABLE 6. Time dedicated to learning English outside of the classroom

Rating	Number of Students	Percentage
Once a month	10	50
Once a week	4	20
More than once a week	6	30
Total	20	100

Table seven. shows that nine (9) students (45%) try to read books and articles in English outside the classroom once or more than once a week. It should be noted that the students' academic majors require them to read some material in English.

TABLE 7. Reads books and articles in English outside the classroom.

Rating	Number of Students	Percentage
Once a month	11	55
Once a week	4	20
More than once a week	5	25
Total	20	100

Table eight illustrates that nine (9) (45%) of all the surveyed students consider the content presented in the classroom to be important, while eleven (11) students (55%) consider that the content presented is somewhat important.

TABLE 8. The content presented in the English classroom is

Rating	Number of Students	Percentage
Not important	0	0
Somewhat important	11	55
Important	7	35
Extremely important	2	10
Total	20	100

It can be said from the data in Table nine that eleven (11) students (55%) affirmed that the English language is important for their families. Seven students (35%) affirmed that it is somewhat important. While two students (10%) affirmed that it is not important for their

families. Correspondingly, the four interviewed students stated that English is very important for their families and that they influenced them in their learning.

Table 9: Importance of the English language in the family

Rating	Number of Students	Percentage
Not important	2	10
Somewhat important	7	35
Important	9	45
Extremely important	2	10
Total	20	100

As shown in Table ten, twenty (20) students (100%) think that the English language is important or extremely important for their professional career. It should be noted that English is a required course at UCE.

Table 10: For my professional career, the English language is:

Rating	Number of Students	Percentage
Not important	0	0
Somewhat important	0	0
Important	11	55
Extremely important	9	45
Total	20	100

In addition to the above close-ended questions of the survey, the students were asked to think about and explain the most important reason why they learn the English language. Students provided answers to the open-ended question that reads as follow: In your opinion,

what is the most important reason to learn English? Please explain your answer. The results obtained from the open-ended question are detailed in the bulleted list below. Reoccurring patterns across the data collected were identified after the analysis of the dataset, which contains all the students' answers to the open-ended question of the survey, see bulleted list. The following results were obtained from the analysis of the qualitative data: instrumentality orientations of the ought-to L2 self were predominantly present while others demonstrated ideal L2 self-orientations.

Participants' responses to the open-ended question about "the most important reason to learn English".

- *English is important for society and needed more each day*

- *It is required by the curriculum*

- *To obtain my university degree*

- *To understand books for my degree*

- *To better understand articles and literature in the language*

- *To acquire new skills and knowledge and to speak with people from different parts of the world*

- *I need it to register for the next semester*

- *I study for academic purposes*

- *It motivated me to be fluent in the language*

All participants were aware and acknowledged that the English language could provide future career and academic opportunities. The students also mentioned that the English language could be a gate for advancement in their future careers. Students expressed mixed orientations for learning English which related to educational concerns and future job opportunities (higher salaries and high-rank positions in their careers). All the answers

contained the same elements, just as one participant expressed: "*It is very important for my education and professional life*".

Table eleven (11) lists responses from students' one-on-one interviews. The responses were categorized in six different variables discussed in the literature review: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, international posture, imagined communities, instrumentality, and L2 learning experience. Even though all the participants agreed on the instrumentality of the English language for their careers, the students acknowledge that the English language is primordially a requirement for graduation. This means that they want to complete and achieve the required English level of proficiency set by Universidad Central del Ecuador to obtain their academic degree. Most participants showed a mix of orientations (motivation and investment) towards learning the foreign language.

Table 11: One-on-one interviews excerpts

Category	Participants' Responses
Ideal L2 Self	"It is important to know a second language" "For me, it is important to know and understand the language" "I want to be able to understand movies, books and articles of interest" "I want to acquire the skills" "I want to be fluent in the language"
Ought-to L2 Self	"English is required for my undergraduate degree" "It is required in University" "It's required for graduation" "It is needed to understand articles related to medicine"
International posture	"English could open up doors for job opportunities, even in Europe" "English can help us go out to different countries" "The English language is a global language" "Independent of your academic background, English opens doors of opportunities for us"

Imagined identities/ communities	"I would like to travel to the U.S. and learn its culture" "I like to travel, and I want to learn more about the culture. Therefore, it is important for me to communicate when I travel abroad" "I want to visit England and Europe" "I would love to travel to the United States and other countries" "I need it to use it in my future career and reach the English-speaking population in Ecuador"
Instrumentality	"It can help me obtain a better and higher paid job" "It could open up doors for job opportunities" "English can open many opportunities for us" "I need to understand books in English" "The language can help me obtain new knowledge" "English can help me get a job with higher pay" "Better job opportunities" "It can help understand book, movies and research papers better" "It helps me read and understand documents for my academic degree"
L2 learning experience: Classroom influence	"The teacher makes class interesting" "We only learn what is provided in the textbook" "Our teacher is strict and only wants us to follow the book" "We just follow the syllabus and the textbook" "I wouldn't take an English course at UCE by personal choice" "The teacher motivates us to learn English"
L2 learning experience: Parental influence	"For my family is very important that I study English" "It is very important for my family" "It is important for them"

The students mentioned that it motivates them to learn the English language to travel abroad which will allow them to interact with people and learn about other cultures. In addition, the students recognize the fact that learning the foreign language is important for global communication, which could open many academic and career opportunities for them in the future. Other students believe learning English will help them pursue post-graduate studies abroad after they graduate from their current programs of study. It could be said that these students share a common imagined identity in an imagined community. Lastly, being able to read and comprehend scientific articles or research papers and books in English

related to their academic studies is an important aspect of ought-to L2 self that motivates these university students to learn the English language. Accordingly, the participants seemed to think that however important Spanish was, English appeared to be an important medium of communication that aids communication no matter where they find themselves either in Ecuador or abroad. Some instances of this narrative are found in Jen's and Stef's (pseudonyms) comments below:

> *We need to know English to better serve our current population of retired elderly Americans and we have to focus on them (I am a business major). Personally, I like to travel and meet new people, therefore it is very important for me to learn the language to communicate well.* (JEN)

> *I'm in architecture, so English is important to read and understand the articles for my major and it gives us opportunities to study and work in other countries, especially in Europe.* (STEF)

The participants revealed some characteristics related to international posture and concerning an L2 identity adopted for the purposes of intercultural communication worldwide. These features could be the willingness to communicate with international speakers, learn more about different cultural resources, travel, work and live abroad even if they mostly did not have much experience in communicating with speakers of English as a first language. Additionally, the students acknowledged that English is the language of global communication as they want to not only travel to the United States and England but other European nations as well. These motivational factors were determinant in their formation of an L2 motivational self. When it comes to their real-life experiences of communication in English, it was revealed that only one student had international travel experience. Another

participant, saw English as a contact language when coming across tourists at a holiday site in Ecuador or a foreign speaker at a conference in school.

Regarding learning experience, the students provided mixed responses about their teachers and instructional material. Some students provided negative responses about the teacher-centered lessons they experienced which to them was demotivating. Whereas others mentioned that their teacher made their learning more interesting. Furthermore, students believe that the English language is necessary in today's globalized world. The students stated that English is important for their future professional and academic achievement. Besides the above-mentioned variables of motivation shared by the participants, they believe that learning the foreign language allows them to increase and improve their knowledge and experience new opportunities for further learning. For some students, English is important for their individual achievement, or their ideal L2 self.

To sum up, the participants were fully aware that the English language is a requirement and mandated to obtain their undergraduate degree. However, the students believed that what motivates them to learn English, besides the academic reasons, is their desire to achieve different goals based on their personal desires, future post-graduate studies and future professional career aspirations. These findings could also be the result of the Ecuadorian government's incentive for the language and policies set in place: promoting the English Language as the language that improves the access to higher salaries, better work positions, cultural exchange programs, opportunities to pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees in English speaking countries among others. The responses reflect orientations that are mainly extrinsic motivation centered on qualification.

DISCUSSION

The data analysis performed after applying the survey to the undergraduate students at Universidad Central del Ecuador reveals that the participants want to able to communicate properly in English. Despite this, the survey showed a low number (15%) of students that use the English language outside of the classroom by talking to native English speakers, watching movies, or reading books. The results of the questionnaire demonstrate the students' high level of awareness of the impact of English as a global language. In addition, the results of the questionnaire obtained high values of the categories L2 self and Instrumentality. High motivation levels in the categories of international posture and instrumentality can be potentially explained by the position of English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2007), and the desire of Ecuadorian undergraduate students to be competent English speakers. Although the students see the English language as an important asset for their future, they did not clearly define an imagined community that is connected with their EFL learning. Lastly, although the participants demonstrated the above-mentioned orientation and their investment in the language, they shared a disconnect from the current curriculum set forth by UCE.

International Posture

In the field of foreign language learning, *international posture* is the students' attitudes towards English as an international language (Yashima, 2002). As an example, many participants mentioned that they feel encouraged to learn English because it is the language of global communication. Additionally, the four interviewed participants saw English as an important international language, and hence a key factor and incentive for their engagement to learn English. The perceptions of the English language as an important *lingua franca*, even in Ecuador, was attributed to the language being widely used outside of the country.

Ideal L2 Self

Students expressed their desire and their imagined future selves living and working abroad. Their imagined community was mostly surrounded by an environment where English-speakers live, and they associated English with America and Europe. The participants were certain, at least in their ideal L2-selves that they will travel to their imagined communities. When the participants were asked if they would study English even if it wasn't required by the University, they responded the following:

> *Like I mentioned before […] the English language could open many "doors" for us, regardless of the major we study. In my case, speaking two languages is very important and it can help me obtain a high-pay job. Also, it can help me communicate well when I travel abroad* (SID)

> *Yes, the English language can help me understand and obtain new knowledge. Also, it could open doors for English-speaking countries, even Europe. Personally, it can help me better understand books, movies, and articles of interest.* (POU)

Ought-to L2 Self

Stef also shared narratives of ought-to L2 self (Dörnyei, 2005). She felt concerned with the University's required curriculum and her parents' approval for learning the language. She shared her concern as follows:

> *I study English since high school because is it mandated in the curriculum. To graduate university, I need to reach a B1 level […] because of the curriculum. For my family, it is very important to learn English […] my sister also studies English because of the curriculum.* (STEF)

Imagined Identities and Communities

The respondents demonstrated that regardless of English being a requirement for their studies, they would still invest in studying the language. Similarly, Goharimehr (2018)

conducted a qualitative case-study in which an open-ended questionnaire about imagined identities and communities was applied to eleven undergraduate students at a Japan university and showed the importance of feeling attachment to imagined identities and communities. She revealed that the learners whose imagined identities and imagined communities were incorporated were more willing to learn English compared to those without a desire to imagine a future identity or participate in a community of practice. In the present study, the participants' imagined identities and communities matched, and they had confidence and imagination of their possible selves and communities, which suggests that they were all motivated to learn English instrumentally or interculturally. Moreover, as in Hyun-Kong et al.'s (2018) study, L2 learning attitude and the ideal L2 self apparently influenced participants' motivation to learn English, and imagined communities were also evident in their accounts of language learning experiences and future career expectations.

Yashima (2009) conducted a survey study with 191 high school students in the Japanese EFL context, investigating the relationships among many variables including international posture, ideal self, and an imagined international community and found that extrinsic motivation highly correlated with these constructs. Likewise, the participants in this study were considerably motivated by such external factors including job opportunities as well as by integrative factors. Participants SID and STEF both shared the importance of learning English for their resume as it could potentially make them better candidates for future jobs:

Because having English in your resume […] is very important, especially English since it is a language used globally. (STEF)

At any workplace, if they see in your resume that you speak English […] it helps you a lot. (SID)

L2 Learning: Classroom Environment

Like the other focused categories, classroom environment was also used as an interview question to elicit the participants' perceptions of a motivating classroom environment. Emerging patterns in the participants' responses resulted in a teacher-centered classroom. The participants expressed concerns of their classroom environment and showed a disconnect with UCE's English curriculum. While educational policies are supposed to support the teacher and promote learning in some instances the participants explained that it is not happening. The participants showed a disconnect from the English language curriculum and teachers. Their imagined identities and communities are limited and confined to the classroom context. In addition to a motivating teacher being one who adopts differentiated instruction, the participants seem to think that the teacher's personality is an important aspect that drives engagement and maintain students' motivation. In this regard, three participants shared the following:

> *The teacher makes us only write and repeat everything, he wants us to memorize everything […] when the English language is not acquired that way, it shouldn't be that way. The teacher goes by the curriculum, and we cannot steer away from the syllabus set in place. We stay in one topic at time and cannot move to another topic unless the syllabus says so.* (JEN)
>
> *The teacher is very strict and very close-minded. His personality demotivates us a bit. The teacher strictly follows the syllabus.* (STEF)
>
> *The teachers are strict and only makes us read the textbook. They just follow the textbook and do not make it interesting. We only learn what is in the textbook and nothing outside from it.* (SID)

These comments coincide with Borjian's (2015) findings about EFL learners in Mexico that lack interest in teacher-centered methods and a traditional focus on grammar.

Furthermore, these negative findings may be explained by research that suggests that teachers who use autonomy-supportive teaching methods enhance student empowerment, learning, and performance (Jang, Reeve, & Halusic, 2016). As well as Peng's (2015) study, which examined university learners in an EFL setting in China. His study found that correlation between positive L2 learning experiences and an intent to become a part of an imagined community could lead to envisioning proficiency in English. Additionally, Peng (2015) argued that students who imagined themselves as part of the global community and constructed the image of a proficient user in that community had the ability to look beyond tests in a heavily exam-oriented context. Peng (2015) warned that the importance of passing examinations might undercut learners' desires to connect with their imagined community. The study suggests that effort on the part of teachers could help learners see their true potential ideal L2 self, especially in relation to engaging with English outside of the classroom.

Discussion conclusion

The present findings have inspired further reflection on how to interpret EFL learners' learning and communication in a globalized era. The notions of future selves, imagined communities, and international posture appear to apply to the current context. Driven by imagination, learners would be able to envision English-related possible selves (Dörnyei 2009), or the future-selves situated in an English-speaking community, which can influence their motivation to learn and communicate in English. All surveyed participants stressed the importance of meeting the levels of English required to pass mandatory exams and reach the required level of fluency to graduate from UCE. In this matter, instrumental motivation reveals "a desire to accomplish something, such as obtaining a graduate diploma" (Ehrman, 1996, p.139). Nonetheless, the interviewed students also perceived English as an investment,

which will be used for different purposes such as understanding reading material, traveling abroad, and getting better job opportunities and salaries.

The students demonstrate a combination of both orientations during their process of learning the English language, which goes along with Brown (2002) and Noels (2001) arguments that individuals have more than one orientation for learning a foreign language simultaneously. In this case, although the students are required by their university (UCE, 2020) to study English (ought-to L2), they showed to have additional purposes and objectives for learning the language (international posture and imagined communities and identities). Lamb (2002) states that motivation is crucial for producing positive language learning results as his study found that motivation played an important role in English learning among students in a public education environment. For this reason, it is necessary to view motivation as one of the main factors that trigger learners' motives to learn a foreign language (Spratt et al., 2002). The dataset analyzed from the participants' responses showed that these drives interact and overlap in different manifestations within their performance. However, these students, although they see the utility of EFL, they are not able to clearly pinpoint what is that imagined community. These students see the instrumental value but perhaps are struggling to relate themselves to that value. Their ought-to L2 selves (requirement for graduation) seems to overtake their ideal-L2 selves as that remains rather abstract, and perhaps that leads to some form of disengagement from the schools' curriculum.

CONCLUSION

Motivation and investment are not only about current selves or identities, but they also point to future selves and identities (Kanno & Norton, 2003). In this study, motivation was present through participants' ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self from the L2 Motivation Self System, and investment was represented in the participants' imagined communities, imagined identities. These L2 selves and imaginations for future selves can be a strong impetus for students' continuous language learning efforts. This study provides further empirical evidence to the theories of motivation and investment proposed by Darvin and Norton (2021) and Darvin (2019). Motivation and investment were not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary in and across participants. The study found that the students relate to these imagined communities but were not clearly defined. Since the focus of the present paper has been to illustrate students' perceptions of motivational actions that cause them to engage in learning English, the survey responses, and narratives of four students were used to address this aim.

Despite the important findings regarding a limited understanding about motivation and investment, there are some limitations of this study. Results from the individual and group interviews with four participants cannot be overgeneralized. Future studies should explore how motivation and investment correlate to students' language competence and performance because although the participants noted that they improved their English skills, this study did not evaluate how much they have improved because of their motivation and investment. Another limitation here is that the participants in this study constituted a small sample and might not be representative of all EFL students in Ecuador. Moreover, the results might be specific to this group of UCE students and not to a group that is universal to learning L2 English. Hence, it is assumed that with a diverse range of participants, a higher number of

participants, and even a mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative), more comprehensive results can be achieved in further studies. The findings are constrained in their generalizability as they are representative of the capital city of Ecuador only. The educational context in rural areas in this country and in other parts of the South American continent is very different from the situation that one can observe in large metropolitan cities. Even though it is possible that the results have applicability in other large cities in South- America, further research in other regions on the continent would be necessary as countries greatly differ in their educational systems and international relations.

Nonetheless, the findings presented in the present study conclude that understanding students' perceptions of the motivational strategies teachers adopt and use in their L2 classrooms could help teachers implement effective strategies to meet the language learner's needs. Hence, knowing the perceived instrumental goals that students have for learning an L2 could help teachers better form and adopt autonomy-supportive styles and practices (William, 2011), which can be useful in fostering both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in students. Therefore, it is hoped that this study can contribute to a better understanding of L2 English learners' motivation.

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APPENDIX INDEX

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Preguntas abiertas:

1. ¿Cuál es la razón más importante que te motiva a aprender inglés en la universidad? Por favor, explique su respuesta.

2. ¿Cómo crees que el inglés te puede ayudar en tu futuro personal o profesional?

3. ¿Crees que todos los estudiantes en Ecuador deberían aprender inglés? ¿Por qué?

4. Me podrías comentar sobre tu experiencia aprendiendo inglés. ¿En qué escuela(s) estudiaste inglés?

5. ¿Has viajado fuera del país? ¿Si, por cual razón?

6. ¿Te gustaría viajar fuera del país? Por favor, explique su respuesta.

7. Para tu carrera académica, ¿Crees que el inglés es importante?

8. En tu familia, ¿Alguien más habla o estudia inglés?

9. Para tu familia ¿Es importante que aprendas inglés?

10. Si el inglés no fuera un requisito para graduarte, ¿tomarías clases de inglés como electivas? ¿Por qué?