University Students' Demotivation in Learning Second Languages: The Case of Australian Universities

Giuseppe D'Orazzi

Abstract

Prior studies report a tendency of university students in Australia to quit their beginner level second language (L2) courses at an early stage (Martín et al., 2016; Nettelbeck et al., 2007). Demotivational patterns are meta-analyzed to understand what hampers the interest in learning French, German, Italian and Spanish of continuing students, discontinuing students, and quitters over one year of studies at Australian universities. Such a distinction across categories of students is offered in line with Martín et al.'s (2016) research. Demotivators are structured on three levels of analysis drawing on Gruba et al.'s (2016) and The Douglas Fir Group's (2016) frameworks, which encapsulate three levels of analysis, specifically micro, meso and macro. Findings suggest that beginner L2 students in Australia are demotivated by all three levels of analysis in very dynamic and interchangeable ways. Students were found to concurrently experience very different degrees of demotivation over time.
Keywords: L2 learning demotivation, L2 learning motivation, monolingualism, multilingualism, Australian university, English dominant language.

Introduction

Australian universities are witnessing a decrease in enrollments for second language (L2) courses (Martín et al., 2016). Beginner level L2 students, more than other groups of students, experience a drop in their motivation at a very early stage of their L2 learning process (Nettelbeck et al., 2007; Palmieri, 2019). This article reports on the findings of empirical research conducted to discover patterns behind student demotivation, following Thorner and Kikuchi's (2020) definition that "demotivation describes learners who were once motivated but have lost their motivation" (p. 368).

Baldwin (2019) argues that the multiple policies introduced by the Australian government "have enhanced and strengthened the significance of languages in Australia's need for a linguistically competent population." However, she urges "future research into student motivation and satisfaction

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regarding language learning" in Australia (p. 212). As a result, this article aims to understand what demotivates students when learning L2s at the university level within the Australian context, since L2 attrition is "a matter of national concern" (Nettelbeck et al., 2007, p. 27).

Since research participants are embedded in an environment dominated by the current world lingua franca (see also Lanvers, 2017; Lanvers & Chambers, 2020; Ushioda, 2017), this article highlights which contextual components hamper student motivation in learning French, German, Italian and Spanish in the monolingual and at the same time multicultural context where students are embedded (e.g., Lo Bianco, 2010; Hajek & Slaughter, 2014). Psychological and cognitive responses to the L2 learning process are expected to interfere with students' goals to become L2 speakers. Such dynamics are encapsulated in the formal learning environment where teachers and lesson plans might concurrently affect student motivation.

Literature Review

A copious number of studies have been published on L2 learning demotivation. Two main views have been followed by researchers in exploring L2 student demotivation in recent decades. Traditional studies on demotivation focus on the negative experiences reported by students mainly within the L2 formal learning environment, i.e., in an L2 class (e.g., Kikuchi, 2015; Thorner & Kikuchi, 2020). More recently, the detrimental role of negative emotions has been explored when learning an L2 (e.g., Gkonou et al., 2017; Teimouri, 2018). Features from the two views are integrated in this study to consider multiple factors which are interconnected in multidirectional and dynamic relationships in line with the Complex Dynamic Systems theory (cf. Hiver & Papi, 2020). For the purpose of this study, three factors have been analyzed based on the results of a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) (see methods). Each factor represents a level of analysis drawing upon Gruba et al.'s (2016) research which distinguishes the micro, meso and macro levels of analysis (see also Gayton, 2018; The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). The three factors have been named according to their focus, as shown in Figure 1 and presented in the following sections.

Figure 1. The three-level model
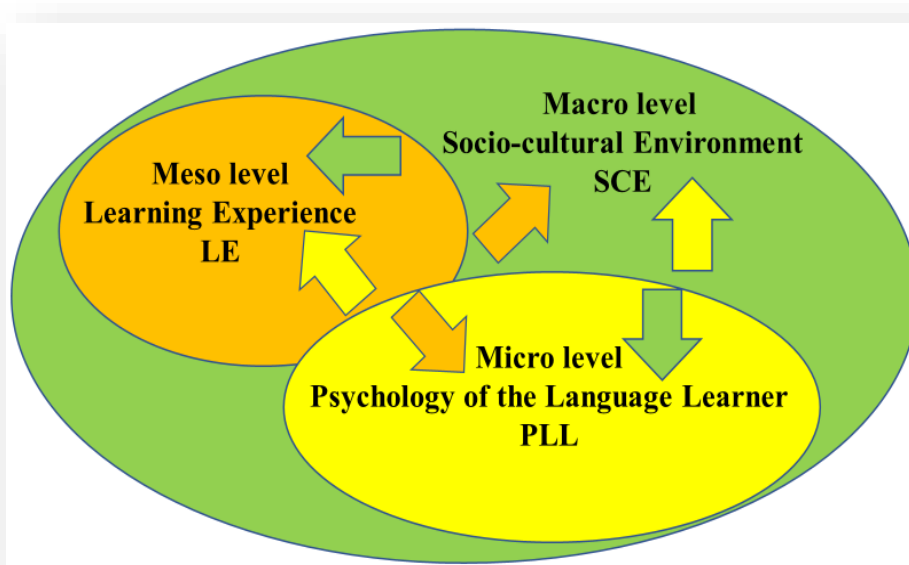
The Psychology of the Language Learner (PLL) at the micro level draws on Dörnyei's (2005) work, which includes variables related to students' psychological reactions to the L2 learning process and their cognitive capacities. The Learning Experience (LE) at the meso level is part of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009; 2020) and "involves situated motives that relate to the immediate learning environment, and includes attitudes towards classroom processes" (Csizér, 2020, p. 73). The Sociocultural Environment (SCE) at the macro level draws upon Ushioda's (2009) "person-in-context" construct and investigates the role of context on students' lack of interest in learning L2s in Australia. The arrows in Figure 1 illustrate the multidirectional and dynamic interconnection between all three factors at the three levels of analysis.

The Psychology of the Language Learner (PLL) Factor at the Micro Level

The PLL supports the central assumption that students' psychology and cognitive abilities may have a demotivating effect on them. The literature tends to agree that lack of self-confidence and negative emotions contribute to the decline of motivation (cf. Thorne & Kikuchi, 2020; Zhang, 2007). Four subcomponent categories of demotivators have been considered for the PLL factor at the micro level, as presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Categories of demotivators belonging to the PLL factor

Demotivators at the micro level The Psychology of the Language Learner			
Intrinsic Demotivation	Integrative Demotivation	Feared L2 Self	Performance Frustration

Intrinsic Demotivation encompasses students' lack of interest in learning an L2 over time (Ushioda, 1998). Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) define this category of demotivators as "learners' loss of interest" given to the lack of relevance of the L2 in the learner's life. A lack of desire to be in contact with L2-speaking people and be immersed in an L2-speaking environment was labelled as Integrative Demotivation, drawing upon prior studies on motivation (e.g., Gardner, 2001).

Fryer and Roger (2018) theorize the Feared L2 Self, which is the self that L2 learners fear that they will not achieve. Similarly, Śimśek and Dörnyei (2017) discovered that their research participants' motivation was affected by an Anxious Self. Their data reveal that anxious students experience anxiety in three different contexts: "language tasks, content areas and contextual conditions other than the traditional dichotomy of trait and state anxiety" (p. 65).

Students experience Performance Frustration when they lose their self-confidence and they are unsatisfied with their progress in learning an L2 (see also Cai & Zhu, 2012; Trang & Baldauf, 2007). As a result, a variety of negative emotions emerge. These have been the core of a wealth of recent literature. MacIntyre and Doucette (2010) focus on the role of fear and preoccupation on students' L2 learning performance, while Teimouri (2018) and Galmiche (2018) respectively explore how guilt and shame hamper L2 learners' motivation. Nonetheless, it appears that most of the studies on negative emotions focus on anxiety – a feeling of tension (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) which might

"prevent some people from performing successfully" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125). This correlation between learners' psychology and class performances was investigated by Dewaele (2013) and Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). Gkonou et al. (2017) also published a series of empirical investigations to gain understanding into the role of anxiety in learning L2s. The four empirical studies presented in their book describe anxiety not only as "language anxiety" caused by the L2 learning process itself, but also as a reaction to class dynamics and strategies put in place by language teachers. Indeed, Dewaele et al. (2018) and Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) distinguish between the role of foreign language anxiety and foreign language class anxiety, drawing on Horwitz et al. (1986). Horwitz (2017) specifies that there exist different types of L2 anxiety which are interconnected but at the same time different from each other: communication apprehension, foreign language classroom anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. For the purpose of this article, the first type of anxiety is part of the PLL factor at the micro level of analysis and the latter three constructs are included in the analysis of the LE factor at the meso level of analysis.

The Learning Experience (LE) Factor at the Meso Level

The literature furnishes a sizeable number of studies on demotivation related to the class environment, which is closely related to students' experience in learning an L2, as theorized by Dörnyei (2019). Among others, Falout et al. (2009), Falout and Maruyama (2004), Kikuchi (2015; 2019) and Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) undertook their research in Japan, Yadav and BaniAta (2013), Daif-Allah and Alsamani (2013) in Saudi Arabia, Khrishnan and Pathan (2013) in Pakistan; Moiinvaziri and Razmjoo (2013) in Iran, Ushioda (1998) in Ireland, Cai and Zhu (2012) in the US, Trang and Baldauf (2007) in Vietnam and Zhang (2007) cotemporaneously in the US, China, Germany, and Japan. In Australia, Nettelbeck et al. (2007) list numerous demotivators which influence students' attrition rates. They all have in common a strong emphasis on the role of the LE in student demotivation, which is explored here with three subcomponent categories of demotivators of the LE factor presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Categories of demotivators belonging to the LE factor

Demotivators at the meso level The Learning Experience		
Teacher-specific Demotivational Components	Course-specific Demotivational Components	Negative University Context

Teacher-specific Demotivational Components are related to the teaching style and approach of instructors, and the relationship between teacher and students (cf. Kikuchi, 2019; Yadav & BaniAta, 2013). Teachers' personalities and character also appeared to demotivate students in previous studies (Song & Kim, 2017). Course-specific Demotivational Components include the material chosen for a course, topics covered in class and the class environment (cf. Thorner & Kikuchi, 2020). Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) discovered four out of six categories related to the class environment, material, topics and approaches dominating an L2 class.

Negative University Context is related to the organization of language departments and universities in planning courses, distributing the number of students in a class and organizing extracurricular activities, i.e., social clubs and exchange programs overseas.

The Sociocultural Environment (SCE) Factor at Macro Level

The PCA detected two factors which were very similarly related to the macro context in which students live (see Appendix 1). As a result, the two factors were merged together with the attempt to explore the role of the society in which an L2 learning process takes place (see Methods section). Thus, this new factor was labelled the Sociocultural Environment (SCE) with the aim of underlining societal elements particularly belonging to Australia which might affect student motivation, since "classroom motivation is shaped by the broad social context" (Dörnyei, 2020, p. 43). The SCE factor encompasses three subcomponent categories of demotivators presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Categories of demotivators belonging to the SCE factor

Instrumental Demotivation is caused by the scarce utility of an L2 in terms of job opportunities according to students' goals and career preferences. In Australia, the increasing pressure on students to learn Asian languages, given economic and diplomatic ties between Asian countries and Australia (cf. Baldwin, 2019; Lo Bianco, 2016; Mascitelli & O'Mahony, 2014), discourages some students from learning European languages. Such a prominent need to improve the learning of Asian languages was reiterated by the national government's *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

Negative Contextual Components include negative external influential variables such as the attitude of a society towards foreign languages and cultures, as underlined by Krishnan and Pathan (2013) in Pakistan and Moiinvaziri and Razmjoo (2014) in Iran. In the case of Australian society, the assumed and controversial English "monolingual mindset" (Baldwin, 2019; Clyne, 1991) and a sense of British loyalty (Ozolins, 1993) hamper students' interest in learning L2s. This is confirmed by studies in other English-speaking countries (cf. Ushioda, 2017) where an English-speaking environment might significantly demotivate students who do not enjoy enough exposure to the L2 and its related culture(s). The latter is also associated with the worldwide general lack of value attributed to L2s, given the strong obstructing role of English as lingua franca (Lanvers, 2017; Lanvers & Chambers, 2020; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017) and as dominant language in Australia (Hajek, 2001).

The Negative Ought-to L2 Self is experienced only when students' relatives, friends and peers explicitly develop a vision of the L2 learner who has no need to become a fluent speaker of a specific L2 (see also Dörnyei, 2009; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Previous research contributes to understanding that L2 students can be negatively influenced "by their friends, parents, or other people in their lives"

(Kikuchi, 2019, p. 158). Such a definition dissociates from the Anti-Ought-to L2 Self theorized by Thompson (2017), where learners are "motivated by striving to do the opposite of external expectations" (p. 484).

Research Questions

The focus of this article is to understand what demotivates beginner level university students when learning French, German, Italian and Spanish. To do so, two research questions (RQs) are raised:

- What demotivates beginner L2 students at Australian universities?
- How does demotivation differ across continuing students, discontinuing students and quitters?

Methods

A mixed-methods research approach is utilized to validate the initial hypothesis of the effect of multiple variables on student demotivation using three overlapping and interacting levels of analysis (see Figure 1 above). A self-reported online questionnaire was designed drawing upon Oakes's (2013) questionnaire on motivation and Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) questionnaire on demotivation. Both questionnaires were partially modified to create a single, consistent tool to measure L2 student demotivation within Australian society in two different phases as part of a larger-scale study on motivation and demotivation (D'Orazzi, 2020). Such a questionnaire was later distributed via the online software Qualtrics to beginner students enrolled at the Group of Eight (Go8) Australian Universities.[1]

French, German, Italian and Spanish were chosen because they are historically the most widely taught European languages in Australia at the tertiary level (Baldwin, 2019) and they are offered at a beginner level in all Go8 universities.

A total of 719 students completed the questionnaire in the first semester of 2018. This first questionnaire included 51 five-point Likert scale items, 24 multiple choice questions, and four open-ended questions. Some of these students (*n* = 291) decided to complete a second questionnaire in the second semester of 2018. This second questionnaire encompassed the same 51 five-point Likert scale items included in the first questionnaire, 17 multiple-choice questions, and six open-ended questions. The link to the first online questionnaire was sent to L2 subject coordinators at the Go8 Australian universities, who invited their beginner-level students to fill it in. Students voluntarily provided their email address to be contacted for further phases of the research, i.e., a second questionnaire and interviews. After the end of each semester, individual interviews were administered (*n* = 37 and 25 respectively). Only students at the University of Melbourne were interviewed since the researcher was based at that university. Out of the 37 students who volunteered to be interviewed in the first semester, 12 students decided to discontinue their L2 learning process.

Derivation of Three Factors

Four factors were detected by a PCA with the statistical software SPSS using the responses provided by the 719 research participants to the first questionnaire's 51 five-point Likert scale items. A screen plot was first analyzed to understand which of the 51 items reached high Eigenvalue coefficients as presented in Appendix 2 (see Gómez, 2013). This suggested that items could be grouped into four main factors to reduce the dimensionality of such a large data set (cf. Jolliffe, 2002). Interpretation of the factors was based on considering the items with factor loadings greater than .40 (see also Sakai &

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[1] Australia's leading research-intensive universities.

Kikuchi, 2009); these are shown in Appendix 1. As a result, a fixed number of factors was preset with an Oblimin rotation method with Kaiser normalization to extract four factors via a PCA.

As previously discussed in the literature review, within each factor, different theories have been applied to explain the results of quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Factor 1 includes variables related to the formal learning environment, and therefore identified as the Learning Experience (LE). Factor 2 includes variables linked to students' psychological and cognitive reactions to the L2 learning process. As a result, it was called the Psychology of the Language Learner (PLL). Factors 3 and 4 were merged into a single factor labeled the Sociocultural Environment (SCE), given the very similar variables grouped together for each of the two original factors identified by the PCA.

The decision to structure the data analysis results into three factors was validated by relatively high Cronbach's Alpha values and not large 95% confidence intervals for each factor – the PLL (α = .84, 95%CI = .820; .855), the LE (α = .86, 95%CI = .841; .871) and the SCE (α = .76, 95%CI = .735; .786). These results suggest strong internal reliability of each single factor, as observed in previous studies which utilized similar questionnaire items (e.g., Oakes, 2013). Each of the three factors was allocated to a level of analysis to simplify the analysis of multiple interconnected variables belonging to L2 learning processes. Variables of each of the three factors at three levels of analysis were organized into subcomponent categories of demotivators based on previous studies on motivation and demotivation in learning L2s, as shown in the literature review above (see also Figure 5 below).

Figure 5. Three-level model with its subcomponent categories of demotivators
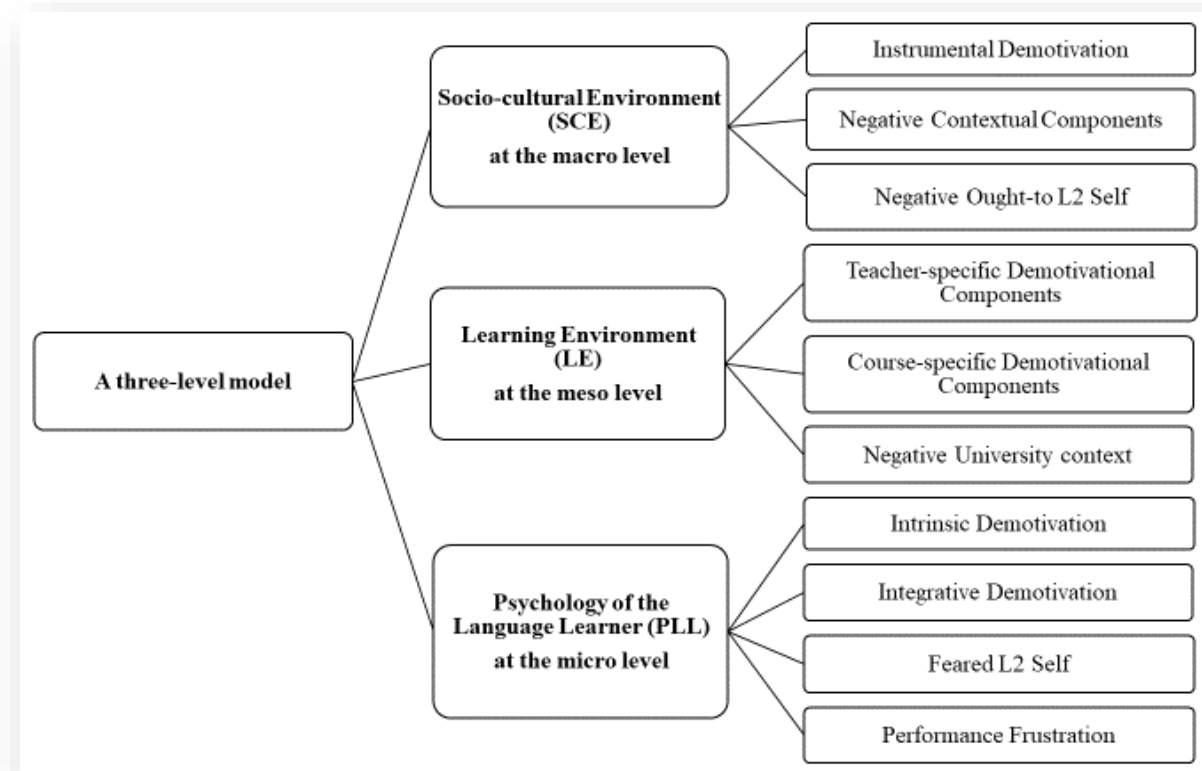
Qualitative Analysis

Factors and relative subcomponent categories of demotivators discovered via quantitative methods were used subsequently for the qualitative analysis (see Figure 5 above). A thematic content analysis of students' interviews and first main responses to three selected open-ended survey questions (SQs) assists in explaining to what extent the three factors demotivated L2 students and which demotivators specifically belong to the three factors at the three levels of analysis (see Figures 8, 9 and 10 below). SQ1 appears in the first questionnaire while SQ2 and SQ3 appear in the second questionnaire:

1. Please list the three main negative aspects in studying French/German/Italian/Spanish at university;
2. Please list the main negative aspect in studying French/German/Italian/Spanish during this semester;
3. Please list the main reason why you decided not to enroll again in a French/German /Italian/Spanish subject at university this semester.

Results

Research Participants

Almost one third of research participants in both semesters were enrolled at the University of Melbourne. The second largest pool of participants was at the University of Sydney in both semesters (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequencies of research participants across institutions and relative proportions

Universities	Survey 1		Survey 2	
	Number	**Percentage**	**Number**	**Percentage**
University of Melbourne	228	31.7%	91	31.3%
University of Sydney	121	16.8%	43	14.8%
University of Western Australia	109	15.2%	46	15.8%
Monash University	87	12.1%	46	15.8%
Australian National University	67	9.3%	28	9.6%
University of Queensland	42	5.8%	15	5.2%
University of New South Wales	38	5.3%	13	4.5%
University of Adelaide	27	3.8%	9	3.1%
Total	**719**	**100%**	**291**	**100%**

Across L2 groups, the same number of student participants ($n = 199$) were studying French and Spanish in the first semester: 77 and 75 in the second semester, respectively. Less participation was observed from German and Italian students in both phases of the research ($n = 176$ and 71, 145 and 68, respectively).

More than 92% of the participants were younger than 25 years old. Female students outnumbered male students, who were below 30% in both phases of the research. Slightly fewer than 80% of the participants spoke English as their first language (L1) or one of their L1s. However, English native speakers were significantly more numerous in the second semester (85.9%). Only 55 students had a cultural background from a country where their L2 is spoken. Twenty of them also completed the second questionnaire. Around 60% of the research sample in both semesters chose an

L2 as their optional/elective subject, including "breadth subjects" and "broadening units"[2] at the University of Melbourne and at the University of Western Australia, respectively. Fewer than 80% of the participants were domestic students, and slightly more than 60% were first-year undergraduate students in both phases of the research.

A Three-Level Model – Quantitative Trajectories

For the purpose of this article, the data analysis is structured in three levels which correspond to three factors as presented in previous sections. Differences between students who stated they would continue learning an L2 from one semester (S) to the other (continuing students) (n = 593 in S1 and 167 in S2) and students who stated they would discontinue learning an L2 from one semester to the other (discontinuing students) (n = 126 in S1 and 39 in S2 respectively) are analyzed. In addition, responses provided by 85 students who did not enroll in an L2 course in the second semester but completed a section of the second questionnaire are also analyzed. The latter are here labelled "quitters," drawing upon Martín et al.'s (2016) study distinction among (a) committed students, (b) doubters, and (c) quitters. No data regarding quitters from semester two to semester three are collected. Means of students' responses to the five-point Likert scale items of each factor show that continuing students were more motivated on average by all three factors than discontinuing students, since their mean values were on average close to 2 (in a range of five points, 1 stands for *strongly agree* and 5 for *strongly disagree*; see Figure 6). Quitters were less demotivated than discontinuing students at the micro and meso levels of analysis in semester one only, as quitters were not enrolled in semester two.

Figure 6. Mean values across factors for continuing (cont.) and discontinuing (disc.) students and quitters
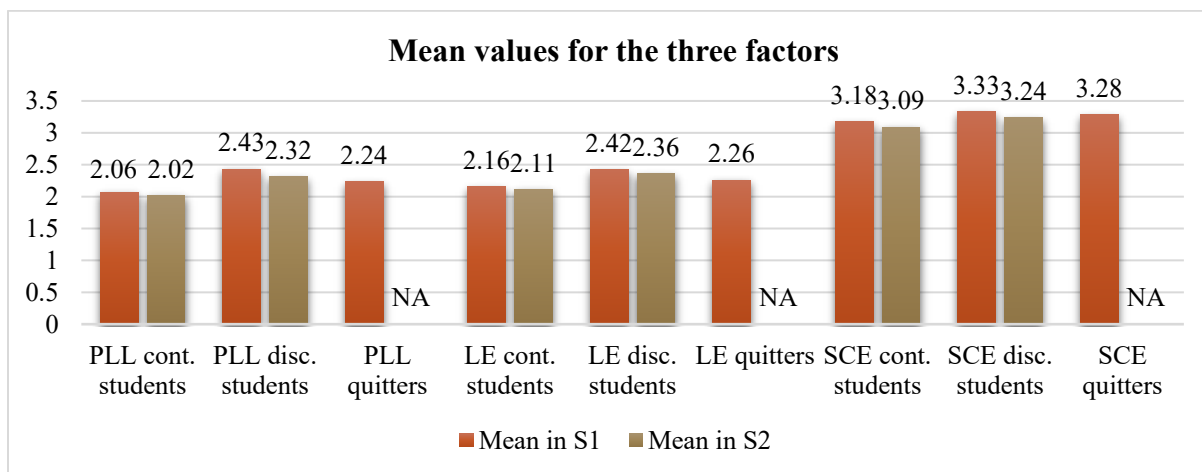
Standard deviation values suggest that continuing students generally responded more similarly to the five-point Likert scale items belonging to the three factors than discontinuing students and quitters (see Figure 7). In particular, discontinuing students indicated a larger range of responses in the second semester, especially in regard to the influence of the LE factor at the meso level and the SCE factor at the macro level on their motivation.

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[2] "Breadth subjects" and "broadening units" are subjects not related to students' degrees.

Figure 7. Mean values across factors for continuing and discontinuing students and quitters
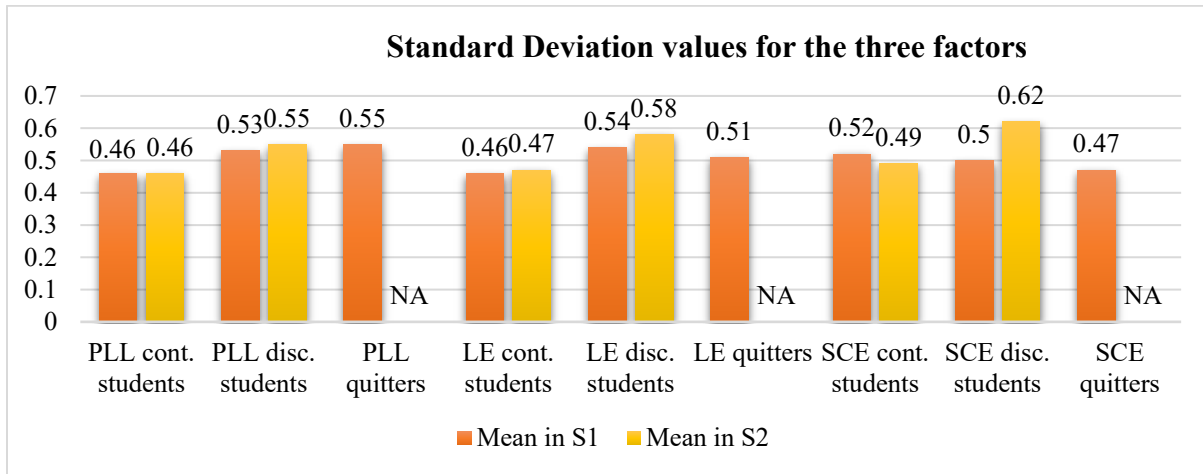
The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to estimate the differences between average responses provided by the three student cohorts. In the first semester, data confirm that the mean differences across the three cohorts for all three factors were statistically significant (see Table 2).

Table 2. ANOVA results across three student cohorts for the three factors in the first semester

Factors	PLL	LE	SCE
F statistic	$F = 33.4$	$F = 16.6$	$F = 5.7$
p-value	$p = < .001$	$p = < .001$	$p = .003$

In the second semester, an independent sample's *t*-test detected much smaller differences between continuing and discontinuing survey students' average responses, which were statistically significant only for the PLL factor at the micro level and the LE factor at the meso level. No quantitative data about quitters were collected in the second semester (see Table 3).

Table 3. *t*-test results across two student cohorts for the three factors in the second semester

Factors	PLL	LE	SCE
t statistic	$t = -3.176$	$t = -2.448$	$t = -1.462$
p-value	$p = .003$	$p = .018$	$p = .150$

The PLL factor at the micro level was the most motivating factor for continuing students in both semesters under consideration, where low means represent high levels of students' motivation ($M = 2.06$ and 2.02 respectively). Discontinuing students were not particularly motivated by this factor, since the mean values are not very low in both semesters ($M = 2.43$ and 2.32 respectively). This suggests that more discontinuing students than continuing students experienced negative psychological reactions and/or poor performances during their L2 learning process. Such a result was confirmed by higher standard deviations for discontinuing students than for continuing students in both semesters ($SD = 0.53$ and 0.55 and 0.46 and 0.46 respectively). More quitters were demotivated by the PLL, given the mean of 2.24 and the higher standard deviation compared to continuing students. Such noticeable differences were validated by the highest *F* value for this factor in the first

semester [F = 33.4, p = < .001] and the highest t value in the second semester [t = -3.176, p = .003] across the three factors under analysis.

Similarly, continuing students were generally motivated, on average, by the LE at the meso level in semesters one and two (M = 2.16 and 2.11 respectively). On the other hand, discontinuing students were the most demotivated by the LE over one year of L2 studies (M = 2.42 and 2.36 respectively), while quitters appear not to be as demotivated by the LE as discontinuing students (M = 2.26). Nevertheless, the last two student cohorts presented more different perceptions of the formal learning environment, based on higher standard deviations compared to continuing students, who answered more similarly to questionnaire items related to the LE factor at the meso level (see Figure 7 above). These differences of motivation between student cohorts were also found to be statistically significant in the first [F = 16.5, p = < .001] and second semesters [t = -2.448, p = .018].

Means for the SCE factor at the macro level demonstrate that higher levels of demotivation were shared by all categories of students. Continuing students were the least demotivated by the SCE, especially in the second semester (M = 3.18 and 3.09 respectively) while discontinuing students and quitters show very similar degrees of demotivation, with mean values above 3 (*neither agree nor disagree*) (M = 3.33 and 3.24 for discontinuing students respectively in both semesters and 3.28 for quitters in S1). Higher standard deviations for continuing students in the first semester and discontinuing students in the second semester indicate that a larger range of responses were provided by these research participants when exploring the SCE effect on their L2 learning process (see Figure 7 above). Qualitative data will confirm this result (see next section below). Students were motivated and/or demotivated by the SCE depending on their personal experience of the L2 they were studying, independently from their status of continuing or discontinuing students or quitters. Indeed, differences across categories of students were not large in the first [F = 5.7, p = .003] and second semesters [t = -1.462, p = .150], in contrast to what it was observed for the PLL and LE factors.

Furthermore, Pearson correlations were also calculated to estimate the strength of linear relationships between the three factors (see Table 4).

Table 4. Pearson correlations between the three factors in the first and second semesters

Factors	Semester	Pearson correlation	P-value
PLL and LE	1	.384	<.001
	2	.456	<.001
PLL and SCE	1	.396	<.001
	2	.397	<.001
SCE and LE	1	.159	<.001
	2	.130	.063

The strongest and most positive correlation was between the PLL factor and the LE factor in the second semester [r = .456]. The PLL also shows a strong, positive correlation with the LE in the first semester [r = 384]. This is consistent with the initial hypothesis that students' psychology was strongly connected to dynamics experienced by students in the L2 class, where the micro and meso levels of analysis were intertwined, as represented in Figure 1 above.

Students' psychology was also associated with the society where an L2 learning process was carried out. Positive correlations of medium strength between the PLL and the SCE in both semesters [r = 396 and r = .397 respectively] support the central assumption that students are "person[s]-in-context" who constantly and dynamically receive societal influences (Ushioda, 2009).

The strength of the correlation between the SCE and the LE was not as strong as the rest of the correlations between factors in the first semester [r = .159] or second semester [r = .130]. Data reveal that the formal learning environment was not particularly strongly affected by the society where students lived. Nevertheless, positive correlations of low strength demonstrate that a relationship exists between the two factors, as outlined in Figure 1 above, but it was not as important as other correlations (see Table 4 above).

A Three-Level Model – Qualitative Trajectories

Qualitative data suggest that students were simultaneously demotivated by all three factors under analysis. Themes related to the LE factor at the meso level occurred more often than others, especially in the first semester, while the SCE factor was not found to be the most demotivating factor, as previously revealed by quantitative data analysis.

Figure 8 presents the most frequently recurring themes for the PLL factor at the micro level emerging from interview narratives and responses provided by all three categories of students to the three Survey Questions (SQs) mentioned above.

Figure 8. Most frequently recurring themes for the PLL factor at the micro level
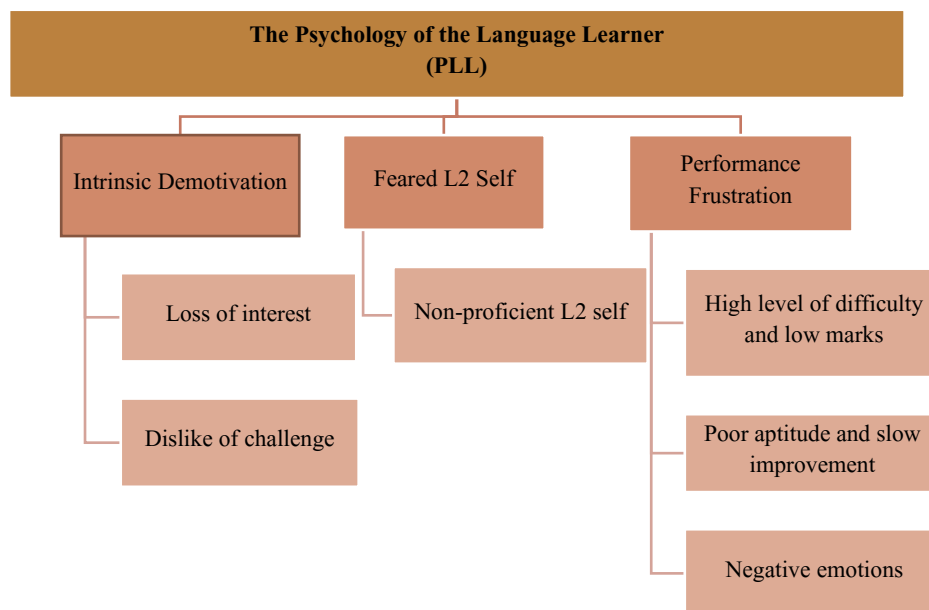
Within the PLL, demotivated survey participants and interviewees underlined that the L2 learning process was considered a very hard task. Discontinuers and quitters confirmed that learning an L2 takes a lot of time and effort. Some of them encountered more difficulties in memorizing words and concepts than continuing students, which confirms quantitative data analysis outcomes. Poor L2 performances, both in and out of the class environment, discouraged all three categories of students, who originally deemed a European L2 learning path an easy task. Hence, negative emotions hindered students who doubted their aptitude for learning L2s and received negative marks. Stress, anxiety, fear of failing, and discouragement were reported. These emotions emerged more often in the second phase of the data collection, which appeared to be more difficult than in the first semester, especially for discontinuing students. Consequently, the latter started to dislike the challenge stemming from an L2 learning process.

Slow progress and difficulties in acquiring an L2 anticipated the Feared L2 Self. The image of not being able to reach an ideal level of L2 knowledge demotivated weaker continuing and discontinuing students in both semesters and more quitters in the first semester. These difficulties experienced by research participants led quitters and discontinuing students to lose interest in the L2 that they were studying, in order to prioritize different subjects, which in most cases were their core subjects – around 60% of research participants chose an L2 as their optional/elective subject in both semesters. No themes related to Integrative Demotivation were identified in students' responses to SQs.

The LE factor at the meso level of analysis was found to be the most demotivated factor and very strongly related to the micro level. The dynamics experienced by students in their L2 class directly influenced their performance and psychological reactions, as validated by the high strength of correlations between the PLL and the LE presented in previous sections. Most frequently recurring themes coexisted together and were related to all three subcomponent categories of demotivators at the meso level (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Most frequently recurring themes for the LE factor at the meso level
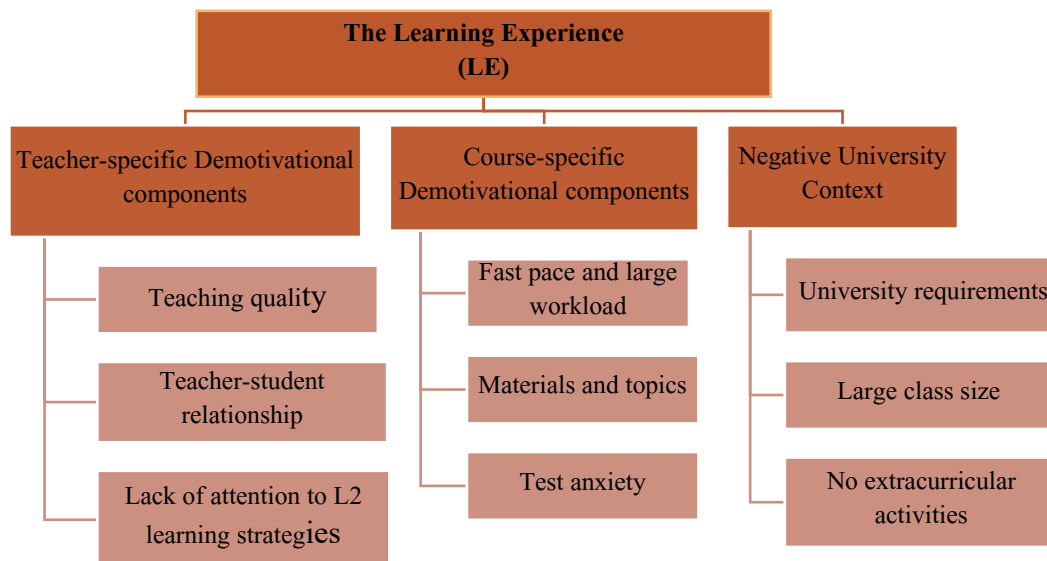
At the meso level, most of the themes' recurrences were linked to Course-specific Demotivational Components. Research participants considered the pace of their classes too rapid and the amount of material studied too large. Demotivated students, mainly discontinuing students and quitters, could not keep up with the L2 course program. These demotivators became more influential in the second semester when the course workload increased and students encountered higher levels of difficulty, as observed at the micro level of analysis. As a result, they obtained lower marks, which triggered test anxiety. The choice of materials and topics was a demotivator when students were not interested in the content delivered during L2 classes and expected to improve their L2 oral skills to use in daily-life settings.

In terms of Teacher-specific Demotivational Components, students who encountered major difficulties often complained that they were not informed by their teachers about the most effective L2 learning strategies. Students who were learning an L2 for the first time in their life (almost 20% of the sample in the first semester) struggled to keep up with the course pace. Such a demotivational

variable was not frequently recurring in the second semester, as most of the interviewees declared that they managed to capitalize on the L2 learning experience in the first semester and reached higher levels of performance in the second semester.

To a much lesser extent, teachers' inability to create an engaging environment, manage students' individual differences, and provide feedback were considered demotivating. Whenever teachers did not show high competence in teaching an L2 and struggled to build rapport with their students, students acknowledged a decrease in their motivation. Students expected to see empathy and understanding from their teachers when not able to keep up with the large amount of content in the L2 course.

A strong demotivator belonging to the LE was represented by the Negative University Context, when L2 classes were too crowded and not much support was provided by universities in learning the L2 outside of the frontal L2 class. In addition, discontinuing students and quitters who started to learn an L2 only to collect credit points for their study plan felt demotivated once they fulfilled their university requirements both for compulsory language subjects and/or optional/elective language subjects.

Negative University Context was also identified as the main demotivational factor in responses provided by quitters to SQ3 and by discounting students when answering one multiple-choice question which asked them why they intended to discontinue learning an L2, i.e., lack of credit points to include an L2 in their study plan for a second or third semester. Data also reveal that a small portion of discontinuing students and quitters were obliged to stop studying an L2 due to personal circumstances; e.g., they finished their university career or they encountered personal problems which were not related to the three factors under analysis, which Martín et al. (2016) identified as practical reasons.

In regard to the SCE, no particular differences in theme types were observed among responses provided by continuing and discontinuing students and quitters. Qualitative data reveal that demotivated students were not encouraged by the context where they were living (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Most frequently recurring themes for the SCE factor at the macro level
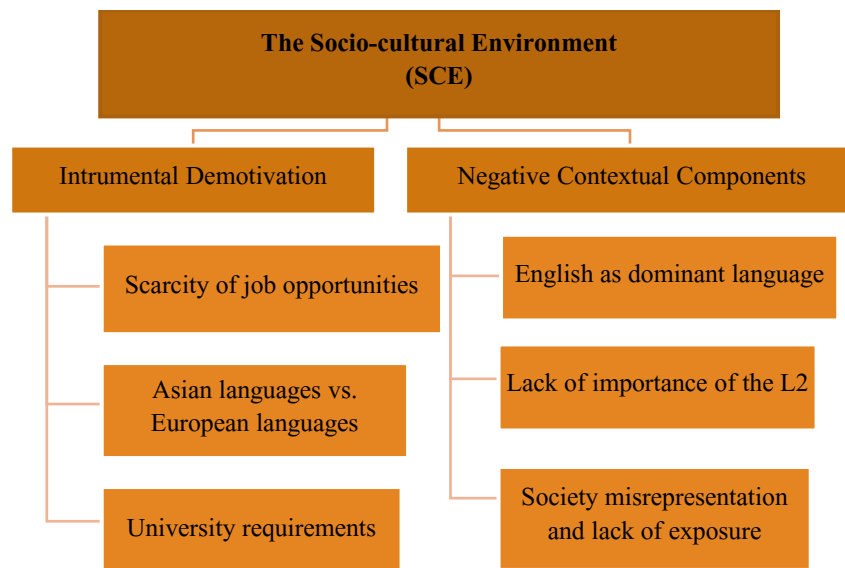
Students emphasized the dominant role of English around the globe as a deterrent for them to learn an L2. They also contextualized the lack of importance of French, German, Italian, and Spanish within the Australian context. Those students who were demotivated by the Australian SCE underlined how Australians do not generally value European languages, which would provide them with fewer job opportunities compared to Asian languages, given the close proximity of Asia to Australia and the trade and diplomatic relations between the two geographical regions. Therefore, they experienced Instrumental Demotivation. Data also reveal that among students instrumentally demotivated, there were also students who acquired the necessary amount of university credit points for optional/elective subjects and they did not have any other practical goal to pursue.

The lack of opportunities to practice an L2 was related to Negative Contextual Components, which mostly affected discontinuing students and quitters. Overall, research participants did not feel supported by the environment where they were embedded. Since only a minority of students declared a cultural background from a country where their L2 is spoken, many students did not have family members who speak the L2 that they were studying. This led to a lack of exposure to people and, consequently, cultures from countries where the four L2s are spoken. However, a large number of continuing students stated that they managed to find their own strategies to practice their L2 and find native speakers to communicate with over time.

Since it might be possible that only the most motivated students agreed to complete a second round of questionnaires and being interviewed for a second time, fewer frequently recurring themes related to the SCE at the macro level emerged from the qualitative data collected in the second semester. Students who continued learning an L2 for a second semester appeared to be tendentially less demotivated by the SCE than students in the first semester.

Discussion

Quantitative and qualitative data show that beginner students of French, German, Italian and Spanish at Australian universities were demotivated by all three factors considered for this study at the same time but to different extents over time. Such a result confirms Dörnyei's (2020) argument that "student motivation is not constant but displays continuous ebbs and flows as well as steady 'leaks', which is, a tendency to peter out with time" (p. 61). In Australia, Campbell and Storch (2011) also highlight the fluctuation of students' motivation, which is never steady. Demotivators at the three levels of analysis differently affected students' interest in learning an L2. This influenced their decision to continue or discontinue learning an L2 from one semester to another.

Statistical analysis suggests that the three factors at the micro, meso and macro levels are interconnected with each other. Indeed, demotivators cannot be studied in isolation, but as part of a system (cf. Dörnyei et al., 2015; Hiver & Papi, 2020). The strong relationship between the three factors is validated by statistical analysis, which detected positive and statistically significant correlations between the three factors at the three levels of analysis. In particular, the PLL was found strongly interrelated to the LE and, to a lesser extent, to the SCE. Qualitative data analysis partially echoes the statistical analysis, providing more evidence that students were concurrently demotivated by the PLL, the LE and the SCE. Furthermore, relatively low means suggest that a large portion of research participants were on average motivated by the PLL and the LE factors across the three categories of students. This outcome sheds light on the simultaneous coexistence of motivators and demotivators, given the complexity of L2 learning motivation and demotivation. Kim and Kim (2015) summarize these dynamics, asserting that "it cannot be assumed that demotivation is the opposite side of the motivation coin" (p. 132).

Demotivators' Appearance Over One Year of L2 Studies

In regard to the first research question – what demotivates beginner L2 students at Australian universities – quantitative data suggest that the SCE at the macro level demotivated more students than the micro level PLL and the meso level LE factors. However, qualitative data analysis reveals that the LE factor at the meso level was the most demotivating factor.

The difficulty of an L2 as a different system of grammar rules, vocabularies, and expressions affected students with weaker cognitive abilities, which consequently translated into lack of self-confidence following prior literature examples (see also Cai & Zhu, 2012; Trang & Baldauf, 2007) and dislike of the challenge stemming from the L2 learning task. Since learning an L2 appeared to become more and more difficult over time, students tended to perform poorly in class and struggled to control their emotions, as already discovered by Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) and Falout et al. (2009). Research participants were frustrated by their slow progress in acquiring an L2 (cf. Dewaele et al., 2008). Students who could not keep up with the pace maintained during both semesters felt demotivated (see Falout & Maruyama, 2004) and "became frustrated with the slow rate of their progress," in line with Nettelbeck et al.'s (2007, p. 15) results.

Strong correlations between the PLL and the LE factors demonstrate that dynamics experienced in class were strongly related to students' psychology. Qualitative data suggest that whenever teachers did not create a comfortable class learning environment, class anxiety emerged (see Dewaele et al., 2019). Negative emotions especially contributed to demotivating students who had no prior experience learning an L2. Therefore, this demotivator specifically appeared at the very beginning of an L2 learning process when students felt "lack of support from teachers" (cf. Thorner & Kikuchi, 2020). At the same level, but to a lesser extent, teachers were also deemed responsible for not delivering high quality classes and lacking effective teaching approaches, in line with Dewaele et al.'s (2019) and Kikuchi's (2019) findings (see also Afrough et al., 2014). L2 learners expected more communicative activities to improve their speaking skills. However, this last aspect was not entirely under teachers' control, as their agency was limited by external aspects belonging to their university structure (cf. Crozet & Díaz, 2020).

More cultural topics were also suggested by those students who felt demotivated by the content and material proposed during lessons (see Kikuchi, 2015; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009). Students expected more extracurricular activities offered by their language departments and universities to increase their opportunities to practice. Large cohorts in L2 classes reduced students' opportunities to communicate in class, reflecting previous research results in Australia (Nettelbeck et al., 2007) and in other contexts (Daif-Allah & Alsamani, 2013).

The combination of demotivating variables stemming from the micro and meso levels contributed to building an image of a Feared L2 Self characterized by students' inability "to perform linguistically as [they] had hoped" (Fryer & Roger, 2018, p. 164) before they started to learn an L2.

Quantitative data reveal that the SCE factor at the macro level demotivated a large number of students. However, qualitative data demonstrate that the SCE was a demotivator depending on students' specific personal conditions, which changed over one year. Students less exposed to L2-speaking people encountered major difficulties in finding opportunities to practice their L2 and immerse themselves in a multicultural environment, given the current increase in Asian immigrants rather than European and South American immigrants in Australia (ABS, 2017). Demotivated students lamented the unavailability of exposure to L2s, in line with a bourgeoning number of studies on Australian monolingualism (e.g., Hajek, 2001; Hajek & Slaughter, 2014; Mascitelli & O'Mahony, 2014; Scarino, 2014), where English as the dominant language plays a detrimental role for L2 learners,

following other English-speaking countries' dynamics (cf. Lanvers & Chambers, 2020; Ushioda, 2017). These demotivators pertinent to Australian society were commonly shared in the first semester, but they became less of a problem in the second semester when students found more ways to practice their L2 and decided to invest more time and energy in the L2 learning experience.

To a much lesser extent, some students, especially in the first semester, were demotivated by the few career opportunities available to Australians who can speak one of the four European languages under analysis. Policies adopted by the Australian government are in line with current economic and strategic tendencies to prioritize Asian languages rather than European languages (see Baldwin, 2019; Commonwealth of Australia, 2012; Lo Bianco, 2016).

Different Trajectories of Demotivation

With respect to the second research question – how demotivation differs across continuing students, discontinuing students and quitters – most frequently recurring themes of demotivators experienced by the three categories of students did not differ. The main difference of demotivation lies in the intensity of demotivators encountered by students and on the number of students who lost their motivation across the three categories of research participants.

Nevertheless, quantitative data analysis reveals that discontinuing students were the most demotivated by the three factors considered in this analysis. Statistical tools confirm that the largest differences across the three categories were related to the PLL factor at the micro level. Indeed, qualitative data suggest that discontinuing students and quitters felt higher levels of frustration for their poor performances and more frequently experienced negative emotions, as identified by Martín et al. (2016). In the case of quitters, a loss of interest prevented them from enrolling in a further semester of L2 studies, which would be devoted to subjects "more important than their [L2] studies" (Martín et al., 2016, p. 136). Csizér (2020) refers to Lyon's (2014) work in which students created an Idyllic Self which, for the purposes of this study, became a Feared L2 Self and Anxious Self unable to succeed in the L2 learning process (cf. Fryer & Roger, 2018; Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017). Continuing students were less scared by the idea of failing and "their expectations about the difficulty of learning a language [were] more realistic" than the other two categories of students (Martín et al., 2016, p. 135). Indeed, quantitative data analysis shows that the majority of continuing students were motivated by the PLL in both semesters, while discontinuing students shared problematic cognitive weaknesses in the first and more often in the second semester.

Important differences were also detected for the LE factor at the meso level. Discontinuing students were the most demotivated by this factor in both semesters, while quitters appeared to be less demotivated by the LE when quantitative data were analyzed. Qualitative data helped to expand on quantitative analysis results. Discontinuing students and quitters with weak aptitude and lack of exposure to the L2 received low grades. Hence, the risk of jeopardizing their university marks average deterred them from continuing to learn an L2.

Teachers, course materials, and topics demotivated students who expected more communicative activities. Nevertheless, Course-specific Demotivational Components were much stronger than Teacher-specific Demotivational Components, as found by Christophel and Gorham (1995) and Zhang (1997) in previous studies. Indeed, Nettelbeck et al. (2012) argue that students appreciate the generally high level of preparation of L2 teachers at Australian universities.

The main reason for both discontinuing students and quitters to withdraw from an L2 course was related to the lack of credit points to devote to L2 subjects. Discontinuing students and quitters also lost their motivation when they obtained the sufficient number of credit points required for their

university study plan. In particular, a large number of quitters and discontinuing students enrolled in an L2 subject only to satisfy optional/elective subject requirements rather than core subject requirements, in line with Martín et al.'s (2016) results. As a consequence, they were unable to include an L2 course in their degree structure, in line with Nettelbeck et al.'s (2007) findings where students experienced issues of timetable planning and "other structural problems" (p. 3) or "many students [took] up a language as an elective late in their courses, for fun, or to try it out, or because they want[ed] to use it for travel […]; even if they enjoy[ed] it and would like to continue, they [had] no room left in their programs" (p. 15).

To a lesser extent, the SCE factor at the macro level demotivated students of all three categories who did not have an L2-speaking heritage, exposure to the culture(s) attached to the L2, and specific instrumental goals. Discontinuing students and quitters had a great lack of exposure to opportunities to practice their L2, but continuing students were also widely affected by this demotivator, predominantly in the first semester. Using Martín et al.'s (2016) words, continuing students were "more likely to have a family background in the language they [were] studying, or to have studied the language previously" (p. 135), but such dynamics were not always observed when analyzing data elicited from continuing students. In the second semester, continuing students found more ways to immerse themselves in their L2 environment and consider their L2 an asset for their future career compared to discontinuing students, who continued to experience the same issues over time and were affected by (a) the low consideration of European languages in Australian society (cf. Baldwin, 2019; Lo Bianco, 2016) and (b) the role of English as a dominant language (cf. Ushioda, 2017). Indeed, continuing students imagined different ways "to use the target language in their work life" (Martín et al., 2016, p. 135) and in other different settings.

Conclusions

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from beginner students of four European languages (French, German, Italian and Spanish) at the Go8 universities in Australia. Data analysis results suggest that all three factors affected student motivation to different degrees. Indeed, "students' decision to discontinue appeared to be characterised by a cumulative combination of reasons rather than one or two reasons alone" (Martín et al., 2016, p. 77). The PLL and the LE factors were the most interrelated factors. More discontinuing students and quitters experienced frustration for language proficiency due to the difficulty of the L2 itself and the class learning dynamics, which became more demotivating over time and triggered negative emotions. Continuing students, discontinuing students, and quitters were similarly demotivated by the SCE factor at the macro level, which did not generally support university students in their goal to learn an L2. As a result, "an underlying monolingualism" (Baldwin, 2019, p. 184) was observed, given the lack of exposure to L2s and support for learners of European languages from Australian society. Nevertheless, the SCE became less demotivating for continuing students in the second semester, because they found their own strategies to cope with the obstacles they faced in Australian society, where English is the dominant language (cf. Lanvers & Chambers, 2020). Motivated L2 students acknowledged the critical position of L2s in Australia "with respect to improvements in trade, career pathways, international mobility, research capacity" (Nettelbeck et al., 2009, p. 9).

Discontinuing students and quitters lamented the lack of credit points which were needed to include an L2 subject in their study plan. As a result, universities should inform their students on how to include L2 subjects in their study plan during their first year of university studies given the "late take-up of languages by students" noticed in the Australian context (Nettelbeck et al., 2007, p. 3). Thus, they would be able to continue learning an L2 in further years if they like the L2 learning process.

Quantitative data confirm that more quitters and discontinuing students than continuing students disliked their whole L2 learning experience. Hence, students should be more supported in understanding how to learn an L2 effectively, for instance, "encouraging students to write about negative experience may itself promote adaptive explanatory thinking in place of mere rumination" (Thorner & Kikuchi, 2020, p. 382).

Future research might investigate pedagogical implications based on the results of the empirical research in order to (a) support remotivation as advocated by Lamb (2020) and Song and Kim (2017); (b) guide teachers in their choice of the most appropriate teaching approaches to increase students' learning enjoyment (Dewaele et al., 2018); (c) apply communicative and task-based activities to increase students' oral skills and boost self-confidence (cf. Celce-Murcia, 1991; Ehrman et al., 2003; Lambert, 2010). Such forms of research might lead to "more extensive collaboration among institutions so that successful practice can be shared" (Nettelbeck et al., 2007, p. 3).

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Appendix One

Eigenvalue coefficients and factor distribution of the 51 five-point Likert scale items of questionnaire one conducted with the statistical software *SPSS* as in Author (2020). Items with factor loadings lower than .40 are crossed out. One distinct questionnaire was created for each L2 cohort (French, German, Italian and Spanish) with the online survey software *Qualtrics*.

Structure Matrix	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
The facilities in class are perfect to stimulate my learning.	0.681			
My teacher makes me feel comfortable during lessons.	0.675			
My teacher's explanations are easy to understand.	0.665			
My teacher focuses on all main language abilities (speaking, reading, listening and writing).	0.615			
The material used in class is useful to learn (L2).	0.608			
I get along well with my teacher.	0.599			
The pace of lessons is appropriate for learning (L2).	0.596			
I often have the opportunity to communicate in (L2) in class.	0.585			
(L2) language content we study for the course is easy to interpret.	0.566			
The time spent in (L2) classes is enough to learn properly.	0.553			
The class size is appropriate to learn the language.	0.521			
My teacher focuses on translation.	0.453			
My university organizes many activities where I can learn more on the culture of (L2)-speaking countries and practice the language.	0.448			
I like my classmates.	0.447			
Visual and audio materials (such as videos and DVDs) are used during lessons.	0.447			
The amounts of hours I need to study for tests/ assessments and final exams satisfies my initial expectations.	0.443			
Cultural topics covered in lessons are interesting.	0.421			
I really enjoy learning (L2).	0.405	0.716		
I like the intellectual challenge of learning (L2).		0.684		
I find it exciting to be able to communicate in (L2).		0.661		
Being able to converse in (L2) is an important part of the person I want to become.		0.601		0.436
Learning (L2) is one of the most important aspects of my life.		0.577		
It would be great to be part of the (L2)-speaking community in my city.		0.545		
I like meeting people from (L2)-speaking countries.		0.542		
If my dreams come true, I will use (L2) effectively in the future.		0.54		0.476

I am studying (L2) because I want to improve my (L2).		0.527		
I find it easy to memorize words and expressions.		0.496		
I like to spend time in (L2)-speaking countries.		0.481		
I am getting high scores on tests and assessments, e.g. homework, class tests, mid-term assessments.		0.475		
I can imagine myself as someone who is able to use (L2) well.		0.451		
I feel comfortable when I have to speak (L2) during lessons.		0.417		
I consider learning (L2) important because the people I respect think that I should do so.			0.748	
People around me (e.g. family members, partner, friends...) believe that I ought to study (L2).			0.694	
I often have opportunities to practice (L2) with native speakers outside university.			0.562	
I learn (L2) because I want to communicate with my family members.			0.555	
If I fail to learn (L2), I will be letting other people down.			0.526	
I feel an affinity with people who live in (L2)-speaking countries.		0.451	0.522	
Speaking (L2) is very important in Australia.			0.415	
The (L2) subject was advertised during the orientation sessions before starting university.			0.409	
Knowing (L2) will help me to obtain a better job.				0.83
Studying (L2) to a high level of proficiency will allow me to earn more money.				0.802
I think (L2) will help in my future career.				0.767
The knowledge of (L2) would help me finding a job in the public service.				0.656
I think knowing (L2) will help me to become a more knowledgeable person.				0.421
I would like to become more like people from (L2)-speaking countries.				0.419
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis				
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization				

Appendix Two
Screen plot extracted by the principal component analysis