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## INSIDE A RURAL LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL IN POLAND: FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH

Różnice indywidualne w uczeniu się języków obcych  
w wiejskiej szkole gimnazjalnej

School achievement in foreign languages is often reported in mean scores, or on normalized scales, where schools are compared with each other and against a national average. This has led to the common belief that rural lower secondary schools in Poland are 'worse' than schools in larger centres of population. This paper sets out to demonstrate that such a view is erroneous as it fails to take into consideration the context, either at the level of the school as a whole, or at the level of individual learners. Based on data obtained from the first two years of a large scale longitudinal research project, "Teaching and Learning Foreign languages" (BUNJO 2012, 2013), this case study describes the context of one lower secondary school in a village in the east of Poland and profiles four teenage learners (aged 13-14) who attend this school and their achievement in English over the period of one year.

Keywords: individual learning differences, rural school, learner-in-context

**Słowa kluczowe:** różnice indywidualne, szkoła wiejska, uczeń w kontekście

### 1. Introduction

Gardner's (2010) revised socio-educational model of education takes into consideration both the cultural and educational contexts of learning. These, filtered through the learner's orientation to learning the foreign language (FL)

and their attitudes to the learning situation contribute to the motivation to learn the FL. The “cultural context is expressed in terms of one’s attitudes, beliefs, personal characteristics, ideals, expectations etc....” (Gardner, 2006:6). With reference to learning the FL, these attitudes, beliefs and values relate to the significance of learning the FL for the learner and these in turn colour their expectations of success. Attitudes, beliefs, values and expectations in the young language learner come from the home, the school, the peer group, significant others, personal experiences and contact with the language. In the world today much of this contact is virtual, through the internet, and concerns use of the FL as a tool for communication with an imagined community (Norton, 2001), or as a medium to search for information, rather than as a means of contact with native speakers. The educational context covers not only the micro-level of the FL classroom, interaction with the teacher, classmates and learning materials, but also includes the climate for learning fostered by the teacher, and more generally the climate in the school. Some of this is influenced by the perceived importance of FLs in the curriculum, a fact which is indirectly communicated through the number of contact hours allocated and to the status of the subject in national external examinations. The inclusion of FLs as a subject in the national external examination at the end of lower secondary school, together with a mandatory FL in the school leaving certificate, sends a message to learners of the importance of FLs both as a school subject and for their future.

Each learner, however, is an individual sentient being who has agency (Ushioda, 2009). This means that they decide for themselves, on the basis of complex and interrelated factors, how much effort they will expend on learning a FL, depending on their personal interpretation of its significance for them. Dweck (2006) describes this bundle of factors as the learner’s “mindset” and these include the learner’s perceptions of their own ability and whether they consider language learning as something in which it is worth investing effort and hard work. A “growth mindset”, where the learner believes that language can be learnt through continued effort, leads the learner to set themselves goals, find strategies for successful achievement and gives them the “grit” (Duckworth et al., 2007) to persevere (Ryan & Mercer, 2011:164). Such a learner is self-regulated and takes responsibility for their own learning process. This is contrasted with a “fixed mindset” where the learner tends to attribute success in language learning to innate talent, which one either has or does not have. Such a learner may easily fall into a self-defeating pattern of behaviour, where they fail to make an effort in the belief that as they are not talented this will not help them to improve. When consequently they find their performance was unsuccessful they take this as affirmation of

their belief that they are not good at learning languages and in this way they justify to themselves that effort is not worthwhile.

Dörnyei (2005, 2009), by contrast, takes an alternative view. He adapts the theory of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1987) and sees second language (L2) learning motivation in terms of the self the learner would like to become ("the Ideal Self"), which gives the learner a vision of what they would like to achieve and leads them to set themselves goals, versus the avoidance of what they do not want to become. This negative side gives rise to the "Ought-to-Self", which serves as a guide, and driven by perceptions of how the learner believes they should act to learn the FL, either pushes them to promote success or to prevent failure (Higgins, 1998).

Ushioda (2009, 2011) urges a more holistic view of learner achievement, encouraging us to see motivation as an individual response to a large number of factors. Rather than following the more prevalent approach which reduces the importance of the individual in the pursuit of the identification of trends and patterns in large populations, or the empirical testing of factors in motivational models, she proposes a "person-in-context relational view" (2009:215) of motivation, where the subject is not simply viewed as an anonymous language learner, but as a person in a specific context. This broadens the sphere of interest to the whole identity rather than simply its language learning aspect. While research on motivation has examined the context of learning this has mainly been done with the aim of discovering which aspects of the context impact on motivation, rather than investigating how the individual in that context interacts and responds in that context or shapes it for their own purposes (ibid.). Thus context becomes "the mutually constitutive relationship between persons and the contexts in which they act- a relationship that is dynamic, complex and non-linear." (p. 218)

## 2. Context of the research

All the data in this study are taken from a larger set, gathered during the project "Teaching and Learning Foreign languages" (BUNJO) conducted by the Educational Research Institute, Warsaw from 2012-14, on a representative sample of lower secondary schools throughout Poland. From the main data set one school was chosen, selected on the basis of scores of tests of language proficiency (grammar and vocabulary) conducted in year one of the study. While the national average for the first part of the test, which comprised 45 items at levels A1, A2 and B1 on the Common European Framework, was 23.23 (SD 9.42), the school in question had a mean score of 16.24 (SD 6.58), one of the lowest results.

The data which are the focus of this article were obtained from a school in a village in the east of Poland, in the Podlaskie voivodship, which is classified as an economically disadvantaged region. The school, attended by just 188 pupils, is the only lower secondary school in the *gmina* (administrative area), and lies 40 kilometres from a larger town. As an indicator of the socio-economic status (SES) of young people attending the school, the number of students who qualify for free school meals was calculated and was found to be 31%. Free school meals are considered a robust predictor of SES and have been found to be associated with lower school achievement (Sutherland et al., 2015). According to the director, the school is situated in a low-income area, a fact borne out by desk research, which showed above average unemployment in the catchment area. The size of the school means that classes in year one number 24 and so fall below the threshold for mandatory division into groups for foreign language lessons (26), meaning teachers must cope with large classes.

The philosophy of the school is indicated by the mission statement given in a written questionnaire completed by the school head:

Nasze gimnazjum to instytucja edukacyjno-wychowawcza, w której robimy wszystko, co możliwe do stworzenia i wykorzystania w najwyższym stopniu optymalnych warunków i szans rozwoju oraz sukcesu każdego ucznia.

Our *gimnazjum* is a caring educational institution, in which we do everything we can to create and maintain the best possible conditions to give opportunity for each and every student to develop and succeed.

This is consistent with the school's motto, attributed to Gandhi: "It's not important to be better than others. The most important thing is that you are a better person than you were yesterday."

### 2.1. Impact of external exams in foreign languages

Asked in interview about the results of external examinations the school director expresses her feelings:

Nasze wyniki są niezadowolające. Staramy się, ale do tej pory nie za bardzo nam to wychodziło... generalnie wyniki nasze znacznie odbiegały od tej średniej krajowej, to był... jeżeli średnia krajowa to był stanin piąty, tak my byliśmy w trzecim bodajże, w zeszłym roku, mówię o zeszłym roku, to jest bardzo nisko.... Pomimo tego, że jesteśmy środowiskiem wiejskim to np. okoliczne szkoły, te sąsiadujące miały wyniki lepsze, więc tutaj to nie jest dla nas żadne usprawiedliwienie.

Our results leave a lot to be desired. We're trying, but so far it's not really working... In general our results differ from the national average... If the national average was stanine 5, we were in, I think, stanine 3\* last year, I'm talking about last year and that's very low... Although we're from a rural area the other schools round about, the ones nearby, had better results, so there's no excuse for us.

(\*Stanine 3 on a Standard Nine scale indicates scores between 1.25 and 0.75 below the national average.)

In response to these results, the director undertook several initiatives designed to increase the effectiveness of FL teaching. The school obtained EU funding to finance a multimedia language classroom with an interactive whiteboard and an e-learning platform. The director, in co-operation with primary schools in the district, arranged that in June 2011 all class six primary learners took a placement test, prepared by her teachers. This, together with results of the national external primary school exam (*sprawdzian*), was used to divide learners into classes according to ability, meaning that although the small size of the classes did not allow sub-division into language ability groups, the classes themselves were already streamed on entry to the school in September 2011. Thus teachers had more homogeneous classes for English, although still with 24 pupils. The director reports that the results of the mock exams in English suggest this may be having a positive effect:

ten egzamin próbny w tym roku, teraz akurat wyniki mamy, to jest na poziomie średniej, czyli już nie jest poniżej tylko jest na poziomie tej średniej krajowej. Nie mówię, że to już jest och i ach, ale jest postęp, tak że, mam nadzieję, że będzie z roku na rok coraz lepiej. Przynajmniej, mówię, żebyśmy nie odbiegali tak znacznie, bo nigdy nie dogonimy miast, gdzie dzieci uczęszczają dodatkowo na zajęcia, gdzie mają kontakt z językiem od początku, od przedszkola, mają większe możliwości po prostu niż my, niż nasze dzieci.

The mock exam this year, we've just got the results and they're on the average, which means that they're not lower, but they're just at the level of the national average. I'm not saying that it's wonderful, but it's progress and I also hope that from year to year they'll get better. I mean, at least that we'll not be too behind, because we'll never catch up with the cities where children take part in extra lessons and have contact with the language from the beginning, from kindergarten, and simply have greater opportunities than us, than our children.

It is interesting to note how deeply the director identifies with the pupils, in her initial use of "us", which she then corrects to "our children". Throughout both the open responses on the written questionnaire and in the fifteen minute interview, the director is revealed as strongly committed to giving all the children in the school the best possible opportunities for learning.

## 2.2. School leadership

Strong school leadership has been found to be an important indicator of school effectiveness. In a large meta-analysis of studies of school leaders over a thirty year period, certain characteristics of school leaders were found to have a strong effect size (Waters et al., 2003). These were: "culture", defined as how the director "fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation" (0.29) (ibid.:9), acting as a "change agent," seen as how much the director "is willing to and actively challenges the existing status quo" (0.30) (ibid.:11), and "situational awareness" which is regarded as the "extent to which the principal is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems" (0.33) (ibid.:12). The data from this school indicate that the director demonstrates these practices. It also appears that the school head's decisions and actions are accepted by the staff. One of the three teachers of English in this school, asked in interview about individualization of work with students, expresses support for the decision to stream:

Dobrym pomysłem jest właśnie to, co nasza szkoła wprowadziła wydaje mi się teraz w pierwszych klasach, czyli to poziomowanie. Poziom pierwszy: najlepszy, najlepsi, poziom drugi: średni, poziom trzeci: uczniowie naj słabsi. To szalenie indywidualizuje pracę. Bo jako nauczyciel nastawiam się na grupę słabą, zmieniam formy, metody pracy, zmieniam koncepcję czasami pracy z nimi, zawężam materiał do materiału podstawowego, żeby ich nie przeciążać. I to jest chyba najlepsza forma indywidualizacji.

A good idea is what we actually have, what our school has introduced, I think now, in the first classes, I mean streaming. The first stream, the best, the next stream the average, the third stream the weakest learners. That really individualizes the work. Because as a teacher I focus on the weakest group, I change the form of the work, and the methods, I sometimes change the idea of the work with them, I narrow the material to the basics so as not to overload them. And that is perhaps the best form of individualization.

We have seen that the school head has responded actively to the situation in her school in an effort to provide good conditions for learning, through provision of a modern classroom and through organizing streamed groups, despite local constraints.

## 3. The study

The subjects of this paper are four students, aged 13-14, studying in the first class of this lower secondary in 2011-12 and tracked into the second year of

study in 2012-13. The data used to create profiles of the learners came from tests of grammar and vocabulary administered in March 2012; a questionnaire on the learners' home background, language learning experience, school results, and access to and engagement in language learning outside school, a second questionnaire on learner attitudes to foreign language learning and opinions of learning English in school (March 2012) and interviews, lasting about 10 minutes, where learners responded to questions about their opinions on and experiences of language learning in school (March 2012). In April 2013 learners completed a battery of tests, including Use of English, Reading and Listening.

The learners were selected on the basis of the grades for English which they reported having received for the first semester of Year 1 lower secondary. Two of the learners were high achievers (5), (one male, one female), one average (3) (female) and the fourth a borderline student (2), (male).

The study aimed to

- build detailed profiles of the learners-in-context
- examine the learners' test results from year one and year 2 in the light of the profiles and so attempt to answer the question: Which factors impact on the learners' levels of language achievement?

### 3.1. Learner profiles

Data to draw up the profiles is a compilation of responses from questionnaires and interviews. Opinions and attitudes were measured by responses to statements on a 5 point Likert scale. Quotations are taken from learner interview transcripts, translated from Polish by the author. Students A and B attend the same class, (designated as the top stream) while C and D are also together, but in a different class (the middle stream).

#### Student A

The first learner comes from a home environment where both his parents have completed tertiary education and both work as teachers. However, the student claims that only his father has knowledge of English and that this is minimal. The learner appears to have academic ability, as seen in a high score on the primary external examination and in the high grades (5) he reports both for English and Polish. He claims that he did not begin learning English until class 4 primary school and has had no additional lessons outside school at any point. He has a positive attitude both to English and to German, his second foreign language, and not only enjoys learning, but likes his class, his English teacher and the course book being used. He reports that language

learning is easy and that he copes well with both the languages he is learning. Perhaps this is why he says he would like to be required to do more and face greater challenge. Despite this, he states that he is embarrassed to speak English in class. While he is aware that learning an FL requires effort, practice and independent study, he also believes that to learn an FL you need to have a good teacher. This, together with his desire to be faced with greater challenge, suggests that he is not yet fully self-regulated in his language learning, which appears to be supported by the fact that, although having a computer and internet at home, he only occasionally watches films or listens to music in English via the media, never reads books or magazines and very rarely plays computer games in English. Similarly he claims to spend very little time on homework. However, he does claim that he talks and writes in English to friends via the internet. His plans for the future include English and he recognizes the importance and usefulness of English in future work, study, getting a job, travelling and making contact with foreigners, thus indicating extrinsic motivation and positive international posture (Yashima, 2002).

#### Student B

This student comes from a very different home background. Her father farms and her mother is a housewife and both of them completed secondary education. She claims her mother speaks a little English, but not her father. She has academic ability, as seen in a high score on the primary external exam and high scores on English (5) and Polish (4) at the end of the first semester, thinks that she is coping quite well with learning both English and German and finds English quite easy.

Despite this, her attitude to learning two FLs in school is negative. While she likes her English class and finds the book and pace of lessons appropriate, she reports that English lessons are boring and heavily grammar focused and she is negative about learning English in the current year. She is also negative towards her English teacher, who she regards as not particularly friendly or helpful. She considers that the teacher corrects her frequently. In interview the learner claims she "sits unconscious in English lessons." Although she reports that she enjoyed learning English in primary school, where she started from class 1, and that she liked her teacher, she found learning difficult and received poor grades. She has had no additional lessons at any stage. She is neutral towards whether learning an FL needs effort or practice and this is reflected in the fact that she claims she spends little time doing homework. While she considers foreign languages could be quite useful for getting a good job, or for further study, she states that in her personal life and for using the computer, reading or entertainment they are not helpful and in the second



questionnaire rates "Learning foreign languages are useful" as 2/5. Her future plans do not require good knowledge of English. This ambivalence is underlined in interview, where she explains that if you have a job which needs English then it is important, but if you do not need it, then it is "unnecessary study."

### Student C

This student's father works in the construction industry, while her mother, although at present a housewife, is seeking work. Both completed secondary school. She claims that her father speaks no English, while her mother speaks a little. This learner appears to be less academic than the previous two, with an average result on the primary external examination and 3 for both English and Polish at the half year. She reports that she is coping quite well with English, but very well with German, which is her second foreign language. In interview, however, as we will see below, she qualifies her response on her self-efficacy in English. When in primary school she attended additional language courses from classes 4-6, wanting to improve her grades in school. Despite this, she claims to have enjoyed learning English in primary, where she began in year 1, and to have found it relatively easy.

The learner shows a very positive attitude towards German and declares that she finds learning new words by heart highly enjoyable. Her attitude to English is more reserved. In interview she says that sometimes she finds things difficult, depending on the topic or material, and that learning requires tremendous effort. On the whole she decides "it's not that hard", but stresses that she needs to be motivated, work things out and practise. This opinion is reflected in responses on the questionnaire, where she states that foreign languages are difficult to learn, require considerable practice and individual work. She also claims that she spends a lot of time doing homework.

Her opinion of her teacher of English is critical. In interview she explains that the teacher spends more time "with those who like to talk", while those "who aren't the best at English" get less attention, although the learner hastens to say that this does not happen all the time. Her attitude to the group learning English is positive, but she finds lessons boring, thinks the teacher is always correcting her and would like the teacher to explain more. Interestingly, the girl is aware that her grades depend on the amount of effort she puts into preparation and the intensity of her learning and she directly attributes progress to this. "If someone works and wants to be better, they can be better." She claims her level is below that of the group and that the course includes "awfully difficult things" which the class is not sure "if it depends on the teacher or the programme, but it's difficult and you need to work very

hard." While she is fairly pleased with her grades for English, she feels they could be better and wants "to get the best grade" she possibly can.

She is aware that English is useful for future employment, study and getting a good job, but is neutral (3/5) about whether her own plans for the future include English. "It's not needed for everyone, but if you want to go abroad you need it to communicate." Outside school she watches films in the original version with Polish subtitles, claims she talks in English online every week and plays computer games.

## Student D

This student's father is a bricklayer and his mother a sales assistant in a shop. Both completed secondary education. Unlike the other parents in this study, the father is said to know English quite well, while the boy's mother speaks a little. The learner studied English from class one primary and has a very positive attitude to the experience, claiming that English was enjoyable and that he had good grades. He has not had any additional classes in English outside school at any stage.

Like Student C, Student D could be described as less academic, with an average score on the primary external examination, a borderline (2) grade in English and an average grade in Polish (3) at the half year.

His attitude to learning two FLs at school is negative, although he claims to be coping quite well with his second language, which is German, and also quite well with English. In the questionnaire he expresses neutral opinions (3/5) towards learning English at school, his English group, the course book and the pace of the lesson, but is quite positive (4/5) towards his teacher of English. By contrast, in interview he contradicts himself, saying that he likes English and his group. "I learnt a lot of English last year. This year I'm learning even more." He appears highly aware of the learning process: "English is difficult as there are lots of words you have to learn by heart. It's a different sort of subject." He underlines that memorizing words is hard for him. He appears to have developed learning strategies:

The teacher speaks to us a lot in English. In the course book there are lots of English words and pictures you can learn a lot from. We write things down in our exercise books, which we can then use to learn from at home.

This is consistent with his claim that he spends a lot of time on homework. He appears to be quite ambitious: "we would like there to be a higher level in our group for those who learn more" and would like the teacher to "teach us more words and give us more tests developing our skills in English."

### 3.2. Learner proficiency and achievement in English

Proficiency in English was measured on two tests of grammar and vocabulary taken at the beginning of the study in March 2012. The first test included 45 items at levels A1, A2 and B1 on the Common European Framework (2001), while Test 2 covered levels A2, B1 and B2. In order to qualify for test 2 learners were required to score a minimum of 16 points (approximately 35%) on Test 1. The reason for this was so as not to demotivate learners by facing them with a more demanding test if their performance on the first test was weak. Items were all multiple choice, closed tasks and the test had undergone extensive field trialling and revision before being used in this study. It was expected that scores on Test 1 would be higher than those on test 2, as it contained a higher proportion of items at A1 and A2. The curriculum target level for the end of class 6 primary is A1 and learners are expected to reach A2+ (between A2 and B1) by the end of class 3 lower secondary. Thus it was expected that learners would be between A1 and A2 by the second semester of Year 1 lower secondary.

Test 1	A 73	B 66	C 42	D 29
Test 2	A 38	B 40	C 31	D –

Table 1: Proficiency tests: Scores on Test 1 and 2 in percentages for the four students.

The mean score on Test 1 (from the whole sample of approx. 4500 students) was 51.62%. From this we can see that Students A and B performed strongly, while C was below average and D failed to reach the threshold required to take the second part of the test. The mean score for Test 2 on the whole sample was 39.4%. Both students A and B scored well on items at A2 and B1 levels and even had several correct answers at B2. Student C's score was more erratic, suggesting some guessing, with no correct answers at A2 but good scores at B1 and several at B2. Student D did not take this part of the test.

The test scores show that Students A and B have a solid foundation of grammar and vocabulary, above the level expected for this point (second semester class one) in this educational stage, as they can be said to be already at or nearing A2+, the target level for the end of class three. Student C's performance is less easy to evaluate, due to her erratic scores, but the fact that she was able to achieve 31% on Test 2, despite some guessing, suggests that her recognition, at least, is at or near A2. Student D has a limited language resource, scoring low both on grammar and vocabulary, even on A1 level items. This suggests that there are gaps in his knowledge from primary school and that he is below the target level for this point in the educational stage.

Achievement was measured a year later (April 2013) on tests of Reading, Listening and Use of English. These were organized in two papers, the first containing reading and listening and the second use of English, which comprised vocabulary, grammar and functions. Each test included items at levels A2, B1 and B1+ arranged in order of increasing difficulty. Test contents were based on linguistic material covered in course books most commonly used in the schools in the study, checked against inventories in *Waystage*, and *Threshold Level* and against word lists in *English Profile* to validate their level on CEFR, and against the National Core Curriculum and inventories in the syllabus for the lower secondary external examination in English to ensure compliance with the National Curriculum. All the tests underwent extensive field trialling and revision before being used in this research.

Reading	A 100	B 69	C 7	D 54
Listening	A 92	B 77	C 77	D 38
Use of English	A 83.5	B 70	C 42	D 40

Table 2: Achievement tests: Percentage scores for the four students.

Immediately after each of these test papers students completed a questionnaire designed to gauge their perception of the test, their level of engagement and the amount of effort they had expended on it. These are quite revealing. For the reading and listening paper Student A claims he did his best, despite some of the tasks being unfamiliar and felt he had adequate time. Student B “tried quite hard” but also felt there was enough time. Student C, by contrast, claims she “did not really try”, “felt unprepared” and states that “some tasks were boring so I did not try them.” This can be seen in her scores where, despite doing well on the first part of paper one, which was listening, she answered only the first question on the first reading task and then made no further attempt, leaving the paper blank. On the second paper, Use of English, she appears to have taken a similar approach, completing only the closed items, claiming she did not want to try the semi-open questions, which required her to think of what to write, rather than selecting from ready choices, and that she did not try at all. Clearly, as these tests were of no importance to her personally, she felt there was no need to make any further effort. This is one of the drawbacks of tests as components of research projects. Student D, despite finding the test “quite hard,” claimed he did his best and had enough time.

### 3.3. Learner achievement after one year

If we look across the project from year one to year two we can begin to get a picture of the progress these learners were making. We must be careful in how we

interpret the scores, as the tests are different in nature, with the first year being a proficiency test, based on general language knowledge, while the second year are achievement tests, based more closely on material which has been covered in the course, although representing a cross-section of material from several course books used at this level and not exactly on the one used in this school. However, despite this, it is possible to see some trends.

Student A, after a strong start in year one, has continued to build and develop his language, showing very strong performance in the receptive skills of reading and listening. His score on Use of English is also good, with very strong scores on the receptive items in grammar, vocabulary and functional language use. While he scores well on productive items testing vocabulary, he does slightly less well on productive grammar items and scores notably less on functional use of language, where he is required to complete longer pieces of language in context. Despite this, his overall score is high, indicating a level of at least B1. This suggests he has progressed well from the previous year.

Student B, also began from a strong foundation, particularly in grammar, which was higher than her scores in vocabulary. In Year 2 in tests of listening and reading she does well on the parts of the test which are at levels A2 and B1, but has difficulty beyond this, suggesting that she has reached her ceiling at B1. She scores higher on listening than reading. In paper 2, Use of English, she does very well on the receptive items in vocabulary and functional use of language and notably less well on receptive grammar items. While she is able to do the productive vocabulary items, she has very weak scores on both grammatical and functional productive items. This, together with the solid reading and listening scores, suggests her receptive knowledge is well in advance of her productive knowledge. If we recall, her attitude to learning English in school and towards her teacher was rather negative, she did not make much effort with homework and her plans for the future did not include English. It is possible that these factors may account for the fact that, although she has been able to maintain a good level, her scores appear to be beginning to flatten out, with production well behind reception. It may be that she does not perceive greater effort is necessary for her needs.

Student C in Year 1 appeared to have a reasonable language base, although she performed erratically on the tests, probably guessing rather heavily. We see that she has carried this attitude to tests forward into Year 2 and attempted only those parts of the test she wanted to, namely listening, (on which she did very well), receptive tasks on the Use of English paper and some of the easiest (A2) productive tasks. Her scores on receptive items on vocabulary and functional use of language are satisfactory, but her receptive grammar scores are weaker, although she makes more attempt at the productive

items in grammar than in the other sections. As she did not attempt all parts of the test it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about her progress, but the opinions she expressed about the course containing difficult things and lessons being boring seem to be evidenced in her approach to the Year 2 tests, where what is perceived as “boring” or “difficult” is not attempted. The suggestion is that she has ability, given by the score on listening, and by the fact that, despite not really attempting the productive items, she manages to score 42% on Use of English. It does appear that she has issues with motivation and engagement, perhaps caused by the fact that she is not decided about whether English will play an important role in her future. Equally, it may be that she typifies a fixed mindset and justifies lack of effort by the fact that learning English is difficult for her.

Student D started with a clear disadvantage in Year 1, having a very limited language resource. We saw, however, that he appeared to be aware of the learning process, was prepared to work hard and was conscious of learning strategies. It would seem that this has paid off. His scores on reading, in particular, are of note, if we bear in mind the fact that his vocabulary resource a year earlier was very limited. He also attempts the tasks at all levels, even the B1+ task, and is able to get some correct answers. With listening he does better on the two lower level tasks, but appears to find this skill harder than reading. On Use of English, his scores across the receptive and productive tasks for vocabulary are similar, but with grammar, reception leads production and with functional use of language, all but one of his points come from the receptive tasks. It is of note that in interview in Year 1 he placed particular emphasis on the importance of learning words and this appears to have been a successful strategy, in that it has supported his reading and is reflected in his vocabulary score. It would appear that he now needs to focus on language in context and beyond the single word to support development of production and listening. Undoubtedly, however, he has made considerable progress, developing from pre-A1 to A2 in a year.

#### 4. Conclusions

This case study has attempted to show, as Ushioda (2009) suggests, that the factors impacting on motivation and here on learner achievement, are highly complex and individual. We see here how four learners in the same cohort of the same school respond quite differently to learning English and have different levels of achievement after a year. Students A and B, in the same class and starting with comparable levels of language, show different levels of achievement after one year. We can only speculate as to which of the many factors

identified in the profiling is responsible for these differing outcomes. We do not know if in the end it is the different home backgrounds which exert more influence, or whether perhaps Student A's progress can be attributed to his stronger belief in the importance of independent study and his more positive attitudes to the classroom learning situation. He also declared that English is part of his plans for the future, contrary to Student B. Student B, with negative attitudes to her English teacher, reported lack of engagement in lessons, and no plans to use English in her future, appears to take a more *laissez-faire* approach, which may account for her more limited progress. In the second group we again see considerable difference between Students C and D. While D started well behind, he appears to have made up for his shortcomings, most likely through consistent hard work. Student C, by contrast, seems to have issues with attitude and motivation which limit her engagement. Exactly where these issues come from is unclear, they may be the result of misunderstandings with her teacher, ambivalence towards the demands of the course, or feelings of inadequacy caused by her feeling below the level of the group, but we do not know. Suffice it to say that these two learners have quite a different approach from one another towards learning English in school and that this appears to be reflected in their levels of achievement, with the proviso that, as Student C declined to take part in some of the test tasks which negatively affected her scores, available information about her is biased.

Within the larger BUNJO data set the mean scores of this school led it to be ranked below average. It also fell below the national average on results of the national foreign language examinations. Too often reporting of large scale tests, or research, leads to gross generalization and conclusions that low ranked schools are "worse" than others. Rural schools are often tarred with this brush. With detailed analysis of the context of learning we have seen how the school principal responds innovatively to the challenges facing her school, taking action to improve the effectiveness of the teaching of foreign languages, despite local constraints. In-depth profiles of the four learners have allowed us to examine the many factors at work in their home environment, in their attitudes, beliefs and opinions about learning foreign languages and about learning English in their school. While it is impossible to pinpoint which of these factors is responsible for their levels of achievement after a year, the fact that there is such considerable variation between the learners opens our eyes to the importance of difference *within* a school, rather than looking at differences *between* schools. If we follow Ushioda's person-in-context relational approach (2009) to its logical conclusion, our focus should not be on the differences between learners, but rather on how the teacher can respond to the challenges of helping each learner reach their potential, while bearing

in mind that not only does each learner have different goals and aspirations, but that they also differ in the amount of investment in learning each is willing to make. Individualization of learning in this respect takes on a deeper meaning than simply offering targeted activities, it calls for a better understanding of the learner-as-a-person and a more holistic response.

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