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Students' Voices: A Qualitative Study on Contextual, Motivational, and Self-Regulatory Factors Underpinning Language Achievement

Ioannis Katsantonis * and Ros McLellan

Faculty of Education, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 8PQ, UK; rwm11@cam.ac.uk
* Correspondence: ik388@cam.ac.uk

Abstract: A lack of qualitative studies examining adolescent students' voices regarding the contextual, relational, and self-regulatory factors that drive their language achievement has been observed. Therefore, the present study aimed to address this issue. Sixteen face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with secondary school students in Greece to document and analyse their perceptions of the factors that influence language achievement. The study was guided by social-cognitive theory and models of self-regulated learning. Computer-assisted thematic analysis was performed using abductive open coding followed by refinement of codes. Three overarching global themes were identified in line with theoretical expectations, namely personal factors (motivation and self-regulatory strategies), relational factors (teachers' practices, parental achievement expectations, peer influences), and structural factors (the educational system). Afterwards, an abductive thematic network analysis was conducted to explore and theorise about potential relationships between the emergent themes in the data. It was found that parental expectations for higher performance and the teachers' behaviours were associated with students' language achievement. Task-related characteristics and peers influenced students' regulation of effort in learning. The students believed that they were not objectively graded and frequent summative assessments created test anxiety. The findings are discussed in light of existing empirical evidence and in terms of educational implications.

Keywords: metacognitive self-regulation; motivation; academic achievement; parental expectations; educational system; teachers; feedback; test anxiety; self-regulated learning; thematic analysis

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1. Introduction

Students live in a rapidly changing world where the ability to understand and produce written text is becoming more challenging and necessary [1]. Our mental representations, learning, and cognition are heavily reliant on language [2,3]. Yet, many adolescents lag behind in the acquisition of language-related competencies nowadays [4]. Considering the fact that academic motivation and student engagement decline in adolescence [5], whilst metacognitive self-regulatory capabilities become more refined, we aim with this study to gain deeper insights into the factors that enhance or hinder adolescent students' self-regulated learning, motivation, and language achievement.

Quantitative studies on the motivational, self-regulatory, and relational factors explaining academic achievement abound. However, there is a paucity of qualitative studies exploring students' own perceptions of the factors that drive their learning and language-related achievement. This is a major limitation since qualitative studies can provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence language achievement.

Therefore, we need more qualitative studies to examine in greater depth students' perceptions of the plausible factors related to their school language achievement by considering both external, relational, and contextual (i.e., peers, parental expectations, teachers)

and internal (i.e., motivational, self-regulatory) psychological learning factors. By conducting such studies, we can acquire a holistic and comprehensive understanding [6] of the reasons for students' engagement with learning activities and the strategies they employ.

1.1. A Social-Cognitive Perspective on Students' School Language Achievement

Social-cognitive theory [7,8] can serve as a possible explanatory framework of the factors that influence school language achievement. Specifically, this theory suggests that humans' experiences, actions, thoughts, and emotions are co-determined by personal factors, environmental factors, and behaviour through reciprocal interactions [9,10]. An applied example of this hermeneutic framework is that (language-related) achievement, as a behavioural process [9], is influenced by students' self-regulated learning (SRL) (a personal process) and by teachers' instructional behaviours and parents' performance expectations (i.e., environmental processes). In turn, teachers' instructional behaviours, parental expectations, and students' SRL may also be influenced by (language-related) achievement and effort due to the reciprocal relations.

In this qualitative study, the primary objective is to elicit responses from students in order to gain a deeper understanding of how key environmental processes and SRL are associated with their language achievement in school. To this end, given the existing quantitative evidence [11–15], the focus was narrowed down to specific personal processes (i.e., motivation and self-regulatory strategies) and environmental factors (i.e., teaching quality (feedback and support), parental influences, and peer influences).

1.2. Personal Processes: Self-Regulated Learning

Students' SRL is widely considered a critical antecedent of academic achievement [16]. SRL encompasses a range of cognitive and metacognitive strategies deployed by students to direct, monitor, and control their cognition and motivation [17,18]. The cyclical model of SRL, which has social-cognitive foundations, posits that students need to activate their motivation prior to the application of self-regulatory strategies during the task processing [19].

Students' academic motivation concerns what makes students engage with academic tasks and why they think the way they do about academic matters [5]. The other important component of SRL is self-regulatory strategies, with frequently occurring self-regulatory strategies being task-specific and general metacognitive strategies (e.g., organisation, time management, help-seeking, self-evaluation, etc.) [20,21]. Hence, in this study, students were asked about their motives for engaging with school language class homework and schoolwork, as well as the reasons they wanted to achieve good grades in school language class. Some frequently discussed SRL strategies postulated by the cyclical SRL model are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Self-regulatory strategies and definitions.

Self-regulatory strategies	Definitions
Task strategies	Use of specific strategies and techniques related to mastering and completing the task at hand
Imagery	Graphical (mental) representations to organise the information and assist learning and information retention (e.g., making an outline)
Time management	Strategies for completing tasks on time (e.g., using a timer)
Environmental restructuring	Techniques to improve the effectiveness of the proximal environment (e.g., using a computer to speed up writing)
Social help-seeking	Seeking social assistance while learning or performing a task

Note: These strategies were derived from the cyclical SRL model [18,22].

As students progress to their secondary school years, reading and writing processes become interwoven [23]. Thus, we asked students to reflect on and report the task-specific and general self-regulatory strategies they employ whilst writing a summary of a text. In the case of writing a summary of a text, several task-specific strategies have been reported in the literature. For example, one approach indicated that students begin the summarisation process by reading and assessing the task, reflecting on the reading topic, and analysing the

text to identify the main arguments and ideas. Afterwards, they actually write the summary, and evaluate the completed task [24]. Another model of summarisation suggested that students deploy four types of strategies [25]. Firstly, the students use planning strategies, such as making outlines, making notes, and brainstorming. Secondly, evaluation strategies are needed, involving checking flow, grammar, spelling, paraphrasing, and keeping track of the structure [25]. Thirdly, students also use discourse synthesis strategies, such as connecting knowledge and ideas, and selecting main arguments and ideas [25]. Finally, students utilise the text as a source by paraphrasing and quoting sentences and ideas [25]. Another approach involves strategies such as constructing a hierarchical informational structure, creating an outline according to headings and subheadings, summarising the main idea, and writing the summary [23].

However, one could argue, in line with social-cognitive theory [9], that SRL by itself does not suffice to explain students' academic achievement. SRL, as a critical antecedent of students' learning [12,19,26], is contextualised [27,28]. Therefore, we need to reflect also on the contextual factors that drive students' motivation and strategies to learn (collectively called SRL) and achieve.

Yet, most quantitative studies exploring the effects of contextual factors on students' achievement [29–31] tend to neglect to 'listen' to students' opinions and perceptions of these factors. They also rely heavily on standardised questionnaires that preclude an in-depth evaluation of students' 'lived experiences' of the factors that drive achievement and SRL. This signals the need for multi-layered perspectives on the factors that drive students' SRL and achievement.

1.3. Contextual Process: Teachers' Instructional Practices

Quantitative research has shown that teachers' actions and what occurs in classes are strongly related to students' academic outcomes and the development of metacognitive capabilities [11]. Teaching quality, which is a critical component of students' academic achievement, is typically defined in terms of effective classroom management, cognitive activation, and support [32]. Teaching quality research indicates that competent teachers can cognitively activate students, provide support, and manage their classroom [33]. Such teachers more effectively promote students' achievement and motivation [33]. Amongst the many teacher support practices, evidence has shown that teachers' feedback is a powerful predictor of students' success [34,35]. Yet, feedback does not always have a positive influence on academic achievement since students may not understand the feedback cues appropriately [36] or may lower effort in the presence of affirmative feedback [37]. Thus, it becomes clear that we need to gain greater insights into students' perceptions of teachers' feedback and support.

1.4. Contextual Process: Parents and Students' Academic Success

Parents play a significant role in influencing their children's academic achievement [38]. Research studies have shown that parental involvement in children's education is very critical, since reasonably high expectations of success have been connected to better academic outcomes [14]. High parental expectations have also been linked to better academic engagement, educational persistence, and higher educational aspirations [39]. Therefore, students were also asked to explain what their parents thought about their progress and grades in the language class. This permitted a greater understanding of how parental expectations are associated with school language achievement.

1.5. Contextual Process: Classmates and Students' Academic Success

Peers are an important aspect of positive adolescent development since positive relationships with peers facilitate identity development [40]. Peers are considered to be another important feature of learning in schools since they can be sources of motivation (through self-efficacy, self-concept) and can serve as an additional feedback source [34].

Cross-country research has also indicated that having classmates with higher past academic achievement was related to greater academic achievement [41]. Comparisons with classmates' achievement are an additional important factor associated with students' achievement. However, studies have failed to fully identify the processes through which classmates' characteristics are related to higher achievement [41]. Social comparison approaches in the classroom have noted a link between the ability to compare with other students and increased academic achievement [42,43]. Specifically, studies have shown that students who believed they were better achieving than other classmates and were comparing their academic achievement with that of other students, who were good performers, actually had greater academic achievement [42,43]. The social comparative process is a source of information for building self-efficacy beliefs (i.e., self-confidence in capabilities) in an academic domain [7,44,45]. It is noted that Greek schools do not cluster students according to ability level [46] and, thus, normative achievement comparisons between students are feasible.

Nevertheless, peers can also have a negative effect on learning since it is known that distraction by peers or observing peers' maladaptive behavioural learning habits are linked with academic procrastination [47,48]. Hence, a question was included in the interview schedule to tap into students' comparison to classmates. Another question was included to elicit responses regarding peer influences on students' learning behaviour.

1.6. Related Qualitative Studies on Students' Motivation, Self-Regulation, and Factors Affecting Academic Achievement

No doubt in recognition of the potential of qualitative approaches in the study of contextualised SRL, a few qualitative studies have been conducted on students' motivation, strategy use (SRL), and contextual factors [49–53]. However, it is noted that most of these studies focused on higher education learning (e.g., medical college students) [50,51]. A few other studies with adolescent student samples were interested in the role of specific contextual processes in promoting SRL strategies and motivation only, but did not specifically examine language achievement in secondary schools, which is the focus of the present study [49,52]. This additional argument highlights the novelty of the current qualitative study.

A qualitative study [54] with observations and interviews of teachers of young children (kindergarten through Grade 3) reported that young students were able to engage in specific metacognitive self-regulatory strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating, as well as problem-solving, whilst processing complex reading and writing tasks. However, this study focused more on teachers' voices and age-appropriate tasks for young children. In contrast, the current study focuses on skills and perspectives of students in adolescence when academic motivation declines [5] and metacognition becomes more refined [55]. Egbert [56] examined the links between language learning and student motivation in the secondary school foreign or second language classroom. This study found that students learning a second or foreign language were able to display flow experiences, such as interest in language learning activities, and were able to overcome any difficulties by striking a balance between the challenges and their capabilities [56]. Nevertheless, the current study has more finely tuned questions that tap into the native language learning experiences in school settings and language achievement, going, thus, beyond just the motivational aspects of learning.

Another study conducted with adolescents using (semi-/un-) structured interviews reported, amongst other findings, that students simultaneously held multiple motivational beliefs (e.g., intrinsic, mastery and performance goals) [57]. Students were also found to report multiple self-regulatory strategies such as outlining, paraphrasing, memorising, and self-evaluation strategies [57]. Additionally, poorer students were reported to be more influenced by environmental/contextual factors, such as teachers and peer behaviours [57]. Yet, that study was focused on learning in general, whilst the present one is devoted to native language learning, language achievement, multiple contextual factors, and task-

specific language strategies. Although conducted with higher education second language learners, a qualitative study revealed the importance of having good relationships with peers and teachers for students' engagement, in addition to ascertaining that there is a match between the task, the supportive environment, and the learning objective [58]. However, that study [58] does not provide in-depth information on adolescent students' SRL, and contextual factors in native language learning and achievement.

Another relevant qualitative study on parents and adolescent students' SRL indicated that parents involved in students' learning via structuring the learning environment and assisting with homework, amongst others, could facilitate students' SRL development [52]. A similar qualitative study explored adolescents' SRL strategies and found that teachers were most frequently associated with SRL strategy use, followed by parents, and then peers/siblings [49]. Despite the above, these two qualitative studies were aiming to identify factors associated with SRL specifically, whereas the current study places a major emphasis on language achievement. Finally, another study with university students found that family could play both a supervisory and a supportive role in the SRL of students, whilst peers could act either as positive or negative sources of SRL [50]. It is clear from the above that the connections between the occurring themes on SRL, contextual factors, and school language achievement, are understudied.

1.7. The Present Study

Many studies exploring the connections between SRL and academic achievement adopted quantitative perspectives focusing on exploring hypothetico-deductive associations and effects [59–61]. However, there is less qualitative research on adolescent students' perceptions of and beliefs about SRL and the factors that influence academic achievement. Qualitative approaches can bring many advantages to the study of SRL and the contextual factors that drive academic achievement [62]. Specifically, qualitative approaches can be used to derive finely-grained information not only about students' SRL but also about the contextual factors that drive their achievement since they enable an in-depth understanding of the intricacies between the phenomena of interest in the context of interest [63].

Given the paucity of qualitative studies with young adolescent students (aged ~14 years old), the present qualitative study had two main objectives. Firstly, to explore what are the common contextual factors underlying students' language achievement and fostering their SRL, and, secondly, to identify plausible theoretical relations between the emerging themes through an abductive thematic analysis. This educational research objective is more timely than ever considering that recent data have also shown that more than 25% of Greek adolescent students achieved below the "minimum level of proficiency" that should be acquired by the end of secondary education [64]. Thus, the following research questions guided the present research:

RQ1: What are the students' perceptions about the common contextual teacher-related, parental, and peer-related factors underlying students' school language achievement?

RQ2: What are the plausible relationships between the emerging factors influencing school language achievement?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

Participants were sixteen young adolescent students with an average age of 13.94 years old (thirteen girls) from seven urban state-sector (i.e., publicly funded) schools. Students were recruited from multiple schools because we wished to document a variety of opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. Additionally, these schools accepted to participate in this study. All public secondary schools in Greece are obliged by law to follow the same textbooks and the national curriculum [36]. Assessment practices in language lessons are common across schools, as stated in the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education [65]; however, teachers have their own teaching styles. Thus, there are not significant differences in the structural characteristics of the schools and differences in terms of instructional material

and assessment practices. Sixteen interviews were considered adequate since thematic saturation usually occurs at twelve interviews [66,67], and code saturation at nine interviews [68]. Students were recruited on a strictly voluntary basis. All students in the schools were informed by the headteacher about the research and its aims and had the opportunity to sign up for the study. The students exhibited a mix of achievement levels and came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds but most were from families with a low to average background. All students were native Greek speakers and belonged to the Greek ethnic group.

2.2. Interview Protocol

In semi-structured interviews, the topics and question prompts are predefined and open-ended. However, the sequence and wording of the questions may be adapted to the needs of each interviewee [69]. Thus, semi-structured interviews were considered an appropriate and flexible method of data collection.

The interview protocol was designed according to past research on social-cognitive theory [7,70], Zimmerman's SRL model [18,22], and teaching quality models [33,71]. Given the importance of teachers for academic success, three questions were asked to identify what the students believe the role of teachers is in promoting or hindering their learning and academic achievement. A different set of questions were designed to elicit responses on motivational beliefs (e.g., self-efficacy, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation), parental expectations about achievement, peer influences, grading, and self-regulatory strategies. The questions on self-regulatory strategies were designed loosely based on the Self-regulated Learning Interview Schedule [21]. Students were asked to report on the task-specific and broader self-regulatory strategies they deploy while writing a summary of a text. Hence, we were expecting several self-regulatory strategies (for an overview see Table 1, Section 1.2) to emerge, always in line with the cyclical model of SRL [18]. The full interview protocol is presented in the Supplementary Materials accompanying this study.

2.3. Procedure

This study's data collection protocols received ethical approval by the Psychology and Education Research Ethics committee at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, UK (29 July 2022). Parents/legal guardians of the students provided written informed consent and the students assented to participate. The face-to-face interviews took place between late 2022 and mid-2023, in Greek secondary schools, wherein the lead researcher served as the interviewer. Each interview's audio was recorded by permission of the parents/caregivers and the interviewed students assented to the recording. Permission to conduct the research in schools was obtained by the Greek Ministry of Education (REF: 145640/Δ2/23 November 2022). Each semi-structured interview had the following format. They began with an introduction (off-record) outlining who the interviewer was, what the purpose of the interview was, how the data would be used, and to obtain permission to record the audio of each discussion. Next, the main interview questions were asked followed by some background questions. Finally, the interviews closed by asking if the students had any further queries or concerns they wanted to share.

2.4. Qualitative Data Analysis

Given that interviews produced very rich discursive texts [72], the Atlas.ti 23 computer software was utilised to implement a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis [73]. Each interview's audio recording was transcribed in Greek. Afterwards, interview transcripts were imported into the Atlas.ti 23 software. Thematic analysis (TA) of the transcripts [74] was performed with the assistance of the software. TA is a well-known analytic technique dedicated to the identification of explicit and tacit themes within the data corpus that are represented by codes [75].

Subsequently, open coding was used, whereby the transcribed segments were coded using an abductive approach following the Abductive Theory of Method [76,77], which

endeavours, guided by ongoing theory and research, to detect phenomena and to infer potential relations explaining the underlying mechanisms. In qualitative research methodology, this kind of TM is called "abductive thematic analysis", whereby both existing theory (hypothetico-deductive coding) and data (inductive coding) inform the coding process and theme identification [78]. The codes were then refined, which means that some were merged to form overarching themes or some were discarded. Several examples of the coding procedure and organising theme identification are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of coding and organising theme identification.

Organising Theme	Code	When to Use?	Sample Excerpt
SRL strategies and motivation	Self-efficacy	Apply this code when students report their capabilities in language class	"[I am] very confident that I can do well in the language course. If I want to, I can do every-thing. I base this on my abilities and my intelligence."—D08
Peer influences	Normative peer comparison	Apply this code when students report that they were able to compare their achievement with that of their classmates	"I'm doing very badly because my classmates give greater importance, but I'm also trying to build a foundation to go a little higher."—D16
Assessment practices	Test anxiety	Apply this code when students report psychological states that could be mapped onto the cognitive or emotional components of test anxiety	"It's a bit stressful at the beginning [to take exams and tests]. [However,] when you sit down and read carefully what the exercise asks of you, I believe that, even if you have studied a little, you will succeed [in the exam]."—D16
Teaching practices	Teacher support	Apply this code when students report that their teachers offer support during class	"She always explains it [the assignment] to us. And she generally does during class sessions. Words that we don't know, she generally explains them on her own."—D01

Afterwards, the open codes were iteratively evaluated for similarities using word frequencies and text search tools, and were further refined. It is noted, however, that the current study goes beyond the conventional abductive TA by utilising a thematic network analysis (TNA) [79]. The analysis procedure begun by clustering the basic themes (i.e., groups of themes derived from discursive text), which described the characteristics of the data into organising themes (i.e., groups of basic themes with shared features). These were then refined to result in the final overarching "global" themes (i.e., core summaries of the principal metaphor that captures the main issue) [79]. Hence, global themes are supported by organising themes, which comprise several basic themes [80]. Lastly, abductive TNA, facilitated through Atlas.it, was utilised in the last step to suggest potentially explanatory mechanisms of school language achievement, though without the intention of making broad generalisations [81].

2.5. Trustworthiness of the Data Analyses

To ensure the trustworthiness and the credibility of the analyses, a native Greek-speaking experienced teacher with a masters and two bachelors' degrees, who was certified and proficient in English language, audited the data and the interpretations. This lent credibility to our interpretations. Additionally, the authors discussed any discrepancies in the data interpretations and resolved these amongst themselves. Given that the participating students were sampled from multiple schools and areas, we met the transferability criterion to a great extent. Dependability was achieved through the logical and clearly described steps in data analysis and through the auditing process, as recommended in the

literature [82]. Thus, we could be confident that the present data analysis approach meets the trustworthiness criteria as outlined in the literature [83].

3. Results

As mentioned earlier, the TNA begun by creating clusters of basic themes into larger organising themes [79]. Following the iterative refinement of the codes, five organising themes were identified, namely self-regulated learning, teachers' practices and parental achievement expectations, peer influences, and assessment practices. The details of each organising theme and indicative students' responses are presented and analysed in the section below. These five organising themes map onto the three component processes outlined in social-cognitive theory [70], namely personal processes, contextual/environmental processes, and behavioural (i.e., language achievement). The thematic network is presented graphically later and the TNA is summarised in detail in Section 3.6.

3.1. Organising Theme 1: SRL Strategies and Motivation

Students exhibit, to some extent, agency in their learning and have their own motivational self-beliefs that underlie their school engagement, independent from contextual influences. From the students' own words, it becomes apparent that students are able to deploy several metacognitive self-regulatory strategies when they are faced with a language lesson task.

The task-specific strategies are comprehensively presented in a thematic map in Figure 1. As shown in the thematic map in Figure 1, we observe that students utilised a wide variety of task-specific strategies. The several task-specific strategies identified involved significant metacognitive self-regulation (e.g., planning via making an outline; critically reflecting on the topic of text; revising; monitoring to stay on topic). Other recurring task-specific strategies were those revolving around organising and transforming the information through making headlines, subtitles, and creating a draft of the abstract. Discourse synthesis strategies were also very prevalent, since students mentioned that they identified the main ideas of the text by underlining and combining the headlines to write the full abstract. The most frequently recurring strategies before setting out to approach the learning task (performance phase of SRL) were memorising through underlining and organising and transforming the knowledge through making headlines. Very few students also mentioned making an outline. It appeared, though, that students had a limited repertoire of metacognitive self-regulation strategies while engaging with the task since the majority of the interviewees reported only the strategies appearing in Figure 1. Indicative excerpts from the interviews are presented below.

> *"If it were a large text with paragraphs, I would add an extended heading and then try to write the summary and include some sentences that could enrich it."—D02*

> *"I usually underline the important parts from each paragraph and write a heading."—D09*

> *"I would first make a diagram so that I know roughly what will be included in the text."—D10*

> *"I will make something like a diagram. [I will think about] what to put first, how to start it. Some words to connect the sentences together."—D07*

However, most students were engaging in a range of information- and help-seeking behaviours to find the information they needed in the case of an unknown word. The two recurring basic themes were information retrieval through the internet and through significant others (e.g., parents, siblings, teachers).

> *"Since technology is now an important part of our lives, I would search for it [the unknown word(s)] on the internet."—D12*

> *"I would use a dictionary or ask my teacher if I were in school. (Even though the teacher doesn't [usually] answer, she tells us to think about it)."—D03*

"If there were any words I didn't know, I would first ask my parents and if they didn't know either, I would search the internet to find out."—D06

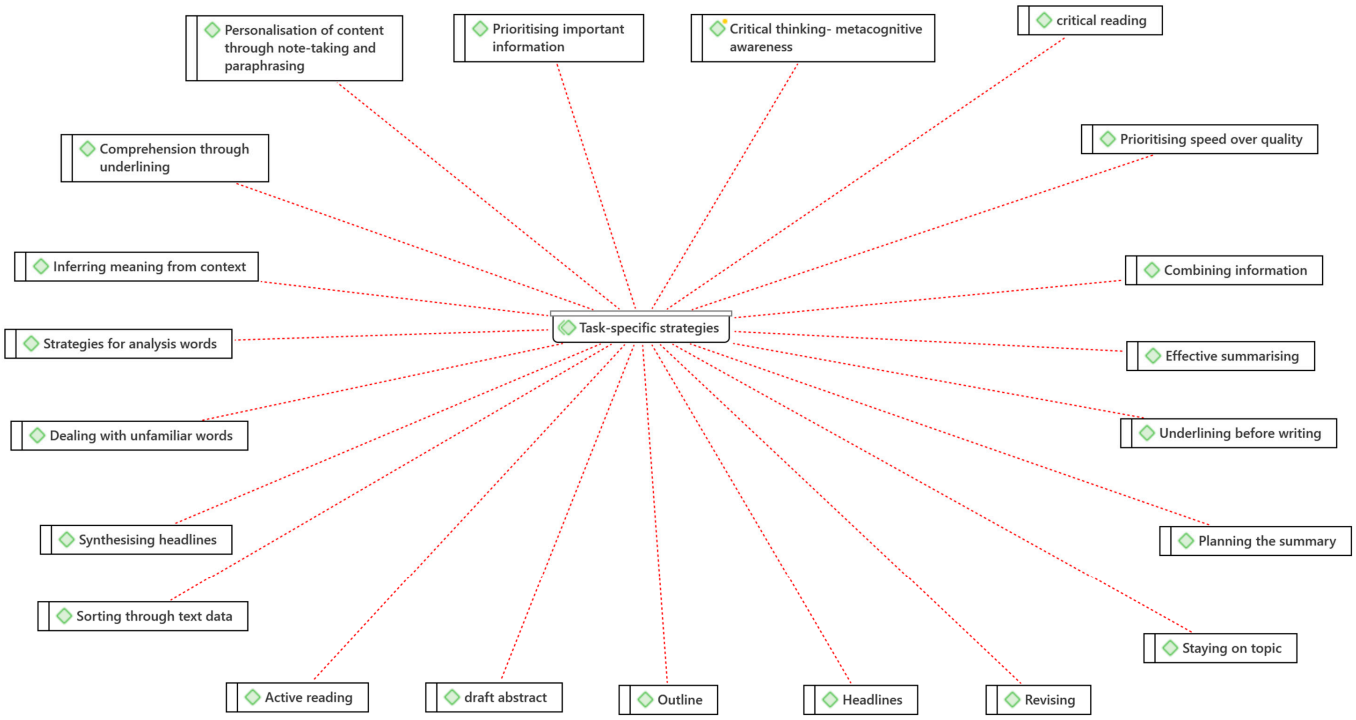


Figure 1. Thematic map of task-specific self-regulation strategies deployed by students in making a summary of a text for school language class.

Having completed the task, two recurring strategies were deployed, namely self-evaluation and other-evaluation. The first self-regulatory strategy was achieved through re-reading and making corrections to the produced summary, whereas the second involved a help-seeking behaviour whereby students asked other people for assistance.

"Many times, when I write something, I may not capture the meaning 100% or use the perfect words, so if I read it again after 10 min—you know—I might find some mistake and improve it. Sometimes I take a short break and then reread it [the text], and, if there is something wrong, I correct it."—D05

"Usually, I read it [the written text] and consult with my parents because they know how to judge."—D09

"I would read it [the text] again and check if I added something extra that shouldn't have been there or if I left out something that should have been included."—D14

Another important aspect of students' self-regulation was the regulation of effort. Students linked their effort with self-concept. That is, a lot of students mentioned that they would persist and invest enough effort in the exercise even if it was boring because they did not wish to hurt their self-concept.

"I would do them [my exercises] so as not to seem like I'm not doing my exercises and not interested in the lesson. I would do them to tell the teacher [that I did the exercises]."—D15

"I never postpone anything for later. Generally, I start with the difficult tasks to finish them. I would do it to finish and feel good about myself."—D09

However, many students found it challenging to self-regulate their effort and persist in the task, if the latter was boring. Academic procrastination was also a recurring basic

theme either due to peers' influence (i.e., invitation to meet or play) or due to the boring features of a task.

"I would try to do it, if not at that moment, then some other time."—D06

"I would either give it to my sister to write or simply tell the teacher "Sir, I didn't have time to write it."—D16

"I would go out, play for an hour or so and then come home and continue."—D15

"I might not have done it, if I couldn't do it at all. Otherwise, it would definitely have taken me a lot of time. That is, I would start, stop, take a walk, come back, and try again."—D07

Students' motivational beliefs regarding learning tasks were also critical for engaging with a homework assignment. In most cases, students engaged with a homework assignment because of extrinsic reasons.

"I do them—I try. Of course, if there is a test that day or if I don't have time, I won't do them, which is rare. And maybe I do them for my grade, so that I am not unfairly evaluated. It's not difficult, and it's good for practice."—D01

"I always complete them because first of all, I want to be consistent and through the assignments, I also gain knowledge myself. They will certainly be useful to me in the future, so this is a motivation."—D12

Students also expressed a range of emotional responses (both positive and negative) with regards to the language lesson that were usually related to teachers' teaching style. Most recurring academic emotions were positive, but a few negative emotions occurred. Positive academic emotions included interest, liking, satisfaction, and enjoyment of the lesson, whilst negative academic emotions included mostly boredom. We observed that individual differences in academic emotions are tightly linked with the contextual factor of the teachers.

"As a subject, it's quite interesting, but the teachers with whom I take this course don't make it more interactive so that all the students show their interest. So, personally, during class, I don't show the interest I would like to show."—D13

"The language lesson is generally very relaxed. But with the teacher we have, it becomes boring because she talks a lot. The lesson is not interesting."—D03

"So, we express ourselves and learn to speak with arguments and the like. So, I really like it, and I generally participate a lot in the conversations because the lesson is based on our opinion and not on the book."—D05

Some participating students reported that they were modestly to highly *confident* in their capabilities to achieve in the school language lessons. Nevertheless, there was a minority of students who mentioned that they were less confident to succeed in language lesson. These few students based their self-efficacy judgements on previous academic challenges.

"[I am] very confident that I can do well in the language course. If I want to, I can do everything. I base this on my abilities and my intelligence."—D08

"With the language lesson I'm not really sure I'm going to do well because it takes a lot of studying. I'm already doing what I need to do for homework, so I think I'll do well but not as well as I'd like."—D10

"I feel like I don't think I'm going to do very well because I'm struggling with the lessons that we need to show more dedication to."—D16

"Not really, [I am not confident] because I think I have enough gaps [in my understanding or knowledge] in this course that I could hardly fill them."—D12

3.2. Organising Theme 2: Teaching Practices

The importance of teachers' strategies was revealed through mainly three basic themes, namely 'feedback from teacher', 'teacher support', and 'teaching style'. These basic themes were thought to reflect the overarching organising theme labelled "teaching practices". Feedback from the teacher refers to the extent to which teachers offered information regarding how students were progressing and learning. Some illustrative answers provided by the students are presented below.

> *"Usually, the teacher will ask us a question to raise our hand and express our opinion. Even if some students don't raise their hands, their teachers will say "tell us your opinion." Then the teacher will say "that's a very nice answer. Do you agree with such and such?" Or the teacher will say that it doesn't quite match the topic."—D04*

For example, we see in the response of student D04 that teachers offer some form of corrective feedback to students when they pose a question in class. Another student (D09) also reported that the language teacher was a source of information regarding their progress in class.

> *"I understand it [my progress] on my own from the exercises. But even our teachers tell us if we're not doing very well, they inform us."—D09*

> *"My teacher also gives me feedback on my essays, on what I need to improve and what not, but he doesn't tell us our grades."—D14*

Sometimes, though, it became apparent that the students had to ask the teacher for feedback, as in the case below.

> *"I ask the teacher to tell me how she sees me [performing] in class, whether I participate and if I need to participate more."—D10*

Nevertheless, when students were asked how they learnt about their progress in class, the vast majority of students did not report through teachers' process-oriented feedback. Rather most students reported that grading through exams was the main source of progress feedback. This is a form of 'knowledge of results' type of feedback, instead of formative feedback [84]. Sample excerpts are presented below.

> *"When I feel I can participate in the lesson. Usually by the grades [I learn that I'm doing well]."—D06*

> *"There are tests and quizzes that let you know your progress and if you have understood some part of the [learning] material. After that, the teacher's words [let me know], especially if it's someone you trust and then comparing everything to the rest of the classmates."—D07*

> *"[I learn] either from homework if I get it right, or when there is a parents' meeting, and from tests and quizzes."—D11*

Beyond teachers' feedback, teachers' supportive attitude was also an important feature that was identified. As in the case of student D01, school language teachers were usually supportive and offered help when needed.

> *"She always explains it [the assignment] to us. And she generally does during class sessions. Words that we don't know, she generally explains them on her own."—D01*

> *"[The teacher] makes us think, we discuss more, she gives us our time, [and] if we don't understand something, we ask her."—D04*

> *"The teacher will try to make me understand the subject with simple words."—D12*

However, it appears that not all teachers are that helpful and mindful of students' needs. Some students reported that their language teachers were unresponsive or unwilling to offer help, perhaps with the intention to make students work out the answer/solution themselves.

"Usually, when I ask about a word, she may hesitate to tell me its meaning, which means that I have to find it on my own. Of course, if I insist, she may give me either the exact meaning of the word or give me some hints to find it."—D13

"I can ask him [the teacher] and sometimes he can answer me, but sometimes it can be a very easy word and he may not tell me."—D14

An engaging and stimulating teaching style is also an important feature of effective learning in class, according to the students. As can be seen from the excerpts below, teachers may serve as "role models" and "inspire" some students. Another student indicated that there is a good classroom climate, wherein they can be comfortable with the teacher without being anxious about the teacher's response. It also appears to be important to let students express themselves and speak their minds.

"Certainly, after so many years of teaching, [the teacher] has experience and knows how to handle certain issues better than us. [They] inspire us and serve as a role model."—D07

"Generally, we feel comfortable with our teacher, we tell him if we don't understand something and if we say something wrong, he doesn't correct us. In exercises, because some kids may only write one sentence, he doesn't judge them, he takes note of what they did. He encourages us."—D09

"So, this year with this specific teacher, we have many discussions. We don't rely so much on the book, he gives us handouts, we have discussions, and that's the best part. We express ourselves and learn how to speak with arguments and so on."—D05

3.3. Organising Theme 3: Parental Achievement Expectations

In general, two basic themes emerged regarding parents, namely 'perceptions of parental expectations' and 'parental emotional responses'. These basic themes were clustered under the broader organising theme called "parental achievement expectations". As will be shown below, students were aware of what were their parents' expectations and, thus, either invested more effort or were more easy-going with the class expectations.

"In tests, if I don't do well, I don't tell them [my parents] my grade, so they can only know from the report card. However, I think that they [my parents] want me to be a bit more studious."—D08

"I believe that all parents always want something more for their children, and especially my mom would like something more from me—she has very high goals. My dad is satisfied, especially since he knows that it's not a subject that I lean towards. So, it's logical that I'm not that interested."—D07

"My parents believe that I can do much better, so they are not very satisfied, but it's okay, they won't cry over it."—D12

"[My parents] are proud of me because they want me to be my best and they reward me for that as well. They don't have any complaints because I'm doing well."—D11

3.4. Organising Theme 4: Peer Influences

Normative comparisons usually occur within classrooms. Students attempt to understand their progress and performance by comparing their language class achievements with those of the rest of the students. From the interviews, it became apparent that students are able to draw inferences from normative peer comparisons.

"I'm doing very badly because my classmates give greater importance, but I'm also trying to build a foundation to go a little higher."—D16

"I think I'm better than some, worse than others."—D06

From the words of students above, we understand that students are able to gauge whether they are underperforming in school language class compared to their classmates. Nevertheless, students also exhibit an understanding of the reasons why the rest of the

students in class are performing, as is the case of student D12 and D07 below. Therefore, normative peer comparison can serve as a form of "peer feedback".

> *"There are some students who don't try at all, so obviously I'm doing better than them because they don't try, but there are others who either like the subject more and attend more, and so they do better, or they may be better students on their own. So, I think I'm average."—D12*

> *"I think well because there are many students who are not interested in the lesson at all, which is not nice at all because the classroom atmosphere changes completely. That is, when very few students are interested, it makes you feel a bit awkward and it is also disrespectful to the teacher, to the class itself, to me."—D07*

When students were asked what they will do if their friends called them to meet or play, some students struck a balance between social and academic activities. Nevertheless, academic procrastination due to peer influences (mainly distraction) was also quite a prevalent topic, as shown below.

> *"I think creating [pleasant] 'memories' is better than just doing a summary, so I would create the 'memories' with my friends and then I would definitely make time for the summary."—D12*

> *"It's not a sure thing. It depends. I mean, sometimes when I start something there's no way I can stop it, which is the most likely. But if I was able to go out with my friends, meet them, and then come back and finish it, then I don't think that would be a problem."—D07*

> *"I'd either do it a little faster to finish it or go out and do it later."—D06*

As we can see from the above excerpts, peer influence is a significant factor that is associated with students' levels of regulation of academic effort. That is, some students may decide to delay the educational activities, whereas other students may give priority to the academic task before socialising.

3.5. Organising Theme 5: Assessment Practices

Another important major organising theme identified was related to the assessment practices used in schools. According to the students' responses, the assessment practices mostly placed pressure on the students. Direct pressure is conceived through test anxiety. Take, for example, the excerpts from the students below. We can observe that (frequent) mandatory tests make students anxious about language class and achievement.

> *"I believe that exams at the end of the year are a bit unnecessary because essentially you are judged by a written test, and at that moment you may have anxiety and can affect your performance. So, a simple written test that causes you a lot of anxiety just because of the name "exams" will not show what kind of student you are."—D12*

> *"It's a bit stressful at the beginning [to take exams and tests]. [However,] when you sit down and read carefully what the exercise asks of you, I believe that, even if you have studied a little, you will succeed [in the exam]."—D16*

> *"I believe that students should not be so stressed, but since I myself get anxious, I cannot express a different opinion. I think that, if the education system or the school worked a little more smoothly and did not pressure the children so much and had high aspirations and expectations for them, then I believe we would not care so much about the grade and we would not be so anxious at school."—D11*

Nevertheless, some students also believed that the educational system's assessment and grading procedures were also important features, but grades were not objective. That is, students' official grades are inflated.

> *"Generally, I believe that there should be evaluation that is objective and not subjective, which is not [objective] just because we get good grades. That is to say, those who get 13 points may deserve 4. Those who get 18 may only deserve 16."—D01*

> *"I believe that grades are necessary, i.e., it is not possible to go through an entire school year without being graded in order for you to see for yourself what your abilities and strengths are. On the other hand, I do not believe that they accurately reflect the student's overall image."—D07*

3.6. Solving the Puzzle: How Are the Emergent Themes Connected?

Last but not least, by utilising an abductive theory of method [76,78], an attempt was made to make plausible theoretical linkages between the themes and school language achievement. This is presented graphically in the abductive TNA in Figure 2.

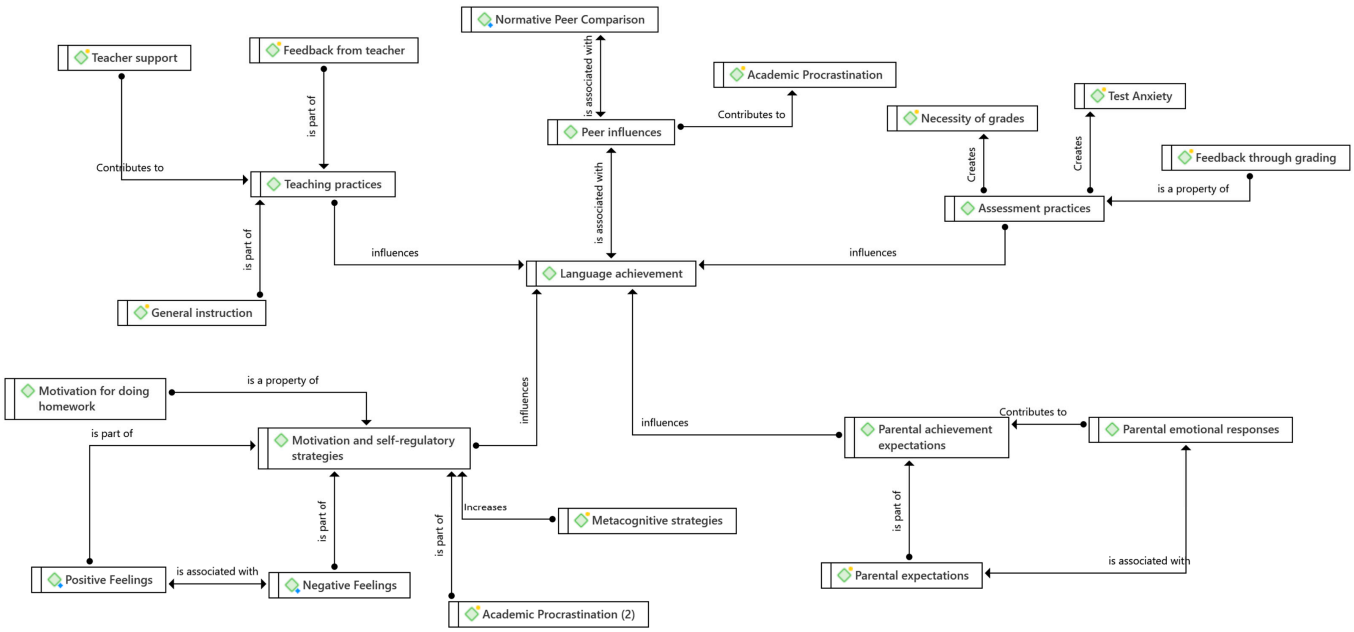


Figure 2. Abductive thematic network analysis of the organisational themes underpinning academic achievement.

According to social-cognitive theory and in line with the present research objectives, it is assumed that students' motivation and cognitive and metacognitive strategy use (SRL) influenced achievement. The basic themes reflecting personal motivation and SRL strategies were the following: academic emotions, students' motivation for doing homework, task-specific and general self-regulatory strategies, and academic procrastination. These components were clustered together to form the organising theme labelled "SRL strategies and motivation".

Language achievement in schools is also assumed to be associated with teachers' teaching practices. Teaching practices were another organising theme which included the following basic themes: perceptions of feedback provision, teachers' support during class, and general instructional practices. From educational effectiveness studies [11,15], it is known that teaching practices are associated with students' achievement and metacognition. Therefore, teaching practices were linked with language achievement.

Another important organising theme was labelled "peer influences". This broader theme subsumed normative comparisons with classmates' performance in language class and academic procrastination due to peer influences. Given the importance of peer comparisons for achievement [43] and building self-concept [85] and self-efficacy beliefs [45], we assumed that peer comparisons would be associated with language achievement. Since peers can distract from academic work [48], it was hypothesised that peers would influence the regulation of effort invested in school- and home-work.

The fourth organising theme was called "parental achievement expectations". This theme revealed the importance of parents through short-term parental expectations about academic achievement. High expectations were assumed to be associated with achievement,

in line with past evidence [38]. Parental achievement expectations also induced emotional responses in terms of satisfaction with students' achieved standard of performance or being proud.

Finally, the last organising theme was called "assessment practices". This theme reflected students' perceptions of the assessment practices. In Greece, the national law has specific provisions regarding the frequency of students' assessment [86]. In general, the students believed that the educational system, through its frequent grading and assessment procedures, was unfair and created test anxiety, which was assumed to influence language achievement in schools.

In conclusion, all the above are compatible with the basic tenets of social-cognitive theory [7,10]. In other words, this means that the five organising themes could be arranged in three global themes, namely personal, relational, and structural factors. As personal factors, we define students' motivation and SRL strategies. Relational factors include parental achievement expectations, teachers' practices, and peer influences. Finally, structural factors referred to assessment practices that are required by the educational system. Relational and structural factors were assumed to reflect contextual/environmental processes in line with social-cognitive theory. Hence, the study shows how personal and contextual processes could be linked theoretically with language achievement, which is considered a behavioural outcome [9].

4. Discussion

Given that many adolescents lag behind in language-related competencies [4], and acknowledging the reduced language achievement of Greek adolescent students compared to other countries [64,87], the present study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the environmental and personal processes underpinning language achievement in schools. To this end, sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted to address the two research objectives. To the best of our knowledge, this might be one of the first studies exploring these issues through a qualitative lens focusing on adolescents. Below, we situate our findings in the wider literature and discuss the educational implications arising from the findings.

4.1. Self-Regulation Strategies and Academic Motivation

From a social-cognitive perspective [9,70], the findings underscore the importance of both environmental/contextual and personal factors as explanatory mechanisms of students' school language achievement (i.e., a behavioural outcome). Through the TNA, five major organisational themes were identified, namely the teachers' practices, parental achievement expectations, peer influences, assessment practices, and SRL. To unpack the critical role of these explanatory factors, both preceding evidence and the data are concurrently considered.

Regarding the personal SRL processes identified through the interview data, the present data confirm that the students employed both cognitive (e.g., making an outline/diagram) and metacognitive (e.g., critical thinking, revising) SRL strategies. Students were usually utilising organisation and transforming SRL strategies by making outlines, headlines, sorting through the text's data, and synthesising the information by combining headlines. However, students did not display a variety of SRL strategies and mostly relied upon similar and limited SRL strategies. For example, some other strategies reported in the SRL literature [18], such as time management strategies (i.e., keeping track of time), specific goal-setting (i.e., setting clear goals of what they are expected to achieve), environmental restructuring (i.e., using a computer to write the abstract, or preparing writing materials), self-monitoring (through self-questioning), or self-consequences (i.e., promising rewards), were not mentioned at all when students were confronted with the learning task. On the one hand, these findings appear similar to past evidence suggesting that students deploy few strategies when studying [88]. On the other hand, this might indicate that students

were very focused on completing the task and had automated the specific task strategies. There is some support for this in the SRL literature [89].

Amongst the potential SRL strategies, students were particularly engaged in social assistance/help-seeking behaviours, whereby they tended to ask parents, siblings, and/or teachers about unknown words. Through this strategy, it becomes apparent how important others are in the learning process. The students also faced some challenges in the regulation of their effort and persistence in learning task, if the task was boring. This finding is closely related to the academic procrastination literature, whereby unpleasant, boring, and aversive tasks may result in unnecessary delays in task completion [90]. Finally, given the critical role of both cognitive [91] and metacognitive [61,92] SRL strategies for improving academic outcomes, the students appeared to hold sufficient SRL strategies but there was still room for improvement in terms of variety of strategy use.

Regarding students' academic motivation, it was found that students had a tendency to mention both intrinsic (i.e., enjoyment, interest) and extrinsic (i.e., instrumental reasons) motives. This reinforces empirical evidence that students hold multiple motivational beliefs at the same time [93,94], despite the fact that the extrinsic motives (e.g., to be fairly graded, for the sake of appearances) appeared to be slightly more prevalent. This is further supplemented by the students' responses when asked about effort and persistence in the task, where they linked effort and persistence with maintaining a positive self-concept. This finding might suggest some form of cultural specificity since maintaining a reputation is an important aspect of Greek culture [95].

Previous studies with college/higher education student samples found significant variation in students' capability to employ a range of SRL strategies to be effective learners [51,53]. However, the current findings indicated that students reported quite similar task-specific and general SRL strategies when confronted with a language class task. Although other studies with college [50,53] and younger [49,52] students placed emphasis on the importance of contextual processes and factors for promoting or inhibiting SRL strategies, we go beyond this and underscore the importance of contextual factors for both SRL and language achievement in secondary schools. Additionally, in this study, we examined students' perceptions of a range of factors, whereas other studies focused only on specific contextual factors. The different contextual processes associated with language achievement are discussed below.

4.2. Teaching Practices: Teachers' Support, Feedback, and Teaching

The findings from the thematic analysis revealed that teachers played an important role in fostering engagement and persistence with the language class activities. The three main basic themes identified, namely teachers' feedback, teachers' support, and teaching style, were relevant for students' school language achievement.

Regarding feedback, which was noted to be negatively associated with science achievement in Greece [36], it was found that feedback was more oriented towards understanding rather than actual assessment during class time. However, the vast majority of students mentioned that they ascertained their progress in language class through grades from exams and quizzes. A rather recent meta-analysis connected this kind of 'knowledge of results' feedback with practically no learning and achievement gains [96]. This might also suggest that process-oriented feedback is not very prevalent. From the data analyses, it became apparent that few students received feedback aiming to improve strategic learning, which is significantly related to greater motivation and achievement [97].

The importance of the teachers has also been noted in the teaching quality and effectiveness literature [11,33]. Nevertheless, the present findings elucidate how much weight students give to the quality of the teaching practices for the whole class. Students also noted the importance of teachers for the classroom climate and for fostering engagement in discussions with them beyond utilising prescribed textbook materials. Although not the main focus of the present study, it seems likely that cognitive activation teaching strategies (i.e., critical thinking, reasoning beyond the curriculum content) are more preferred by

some students. This is in line with teaching styles research [98]. Additionally, a supportive teaching style was also found to be very important for students' learning according to their own reports. Quantitative research has shown that having a supportive teacher is connected to higher achievement, even though teacher support is rather low in Greek secondary schools [99].

4.3. Parental Achievement Expectations and Language Achievement

Parents also play an important role in nurturing students' achievement [38] and SRL [100]. The current findings also corroborate this and suggest that parents tend to have high academic expectations for their child. However, students are also aware that their progress may not satisfy their parents, which means that parents clearly communicated to their children their expectations about achievement. Although students reported that their parents expressed their satisfaction or dissatisfaction or pride with their academic progress, other important aspects of educational expectations were not mentioned by the students. For instance, parental educational expectations also include aspects such as conveying an enjoyment and a value of learning, as well as linking current progress with later career aspirations [101]. Despite the fact that parental expectations have been linked in the past with increased academic achievement [14,38], we can see from the interview excerpts a 'stationary effect', whereby some students, despite being aware of their parents' high expectations, did not seem particularly motivated by these.

4.4. Peer Influences and Academic Work

The thematic analysis findings also confirmed that students were able to make self-referent assessments of their ability in school language class based on a social comparison process. This is an important finding since self-concept and self-efficacy in an academic situation serve as motivational sources and might be necessary before deciding to engage in an academic task [89]. Although not presented in the findings above, it was noticed that students with comparably high self-concept usually also had high self-efficacy and mostly positive emotions in class. This latter finding indicates a positive association between self-concept, self-efficacy, and affect. The ability to compare with classmates' level of performance is quite important since this social comparative process fulfils the psychological needs for self-enhancement, self-evaluation, and self-improvement [102]. Quantitative empirical evidence has highlighted that upward comparisons (i.e., with better achievers) can boost achievement [42].

The thematic analysis also revealed another important link between peers and learning. Even though the need for belonging in a peer group, time spent with peers, and the need to socialise as typical developmental features in adolescence [103–105] cannot be discounted, a likely hypothesis is that peers (friends) can also influence students' learning since they can distract them from academic work. Past quantitative studies have discussed peer influences in terms of 'role models', whereby having procrastinating peers was linked with greater self-procrastination [48,106]. However, in the present study, we found a another way through which peers influenced students' academic procrastination; that is, peers could be a significant factor that leads to academic procrastination by detracting from persisting with academic work. Nevertheless, most students seemed to be able to strike a balance between social needs and academic demands, whereby procrastinating by deliberately delaying working on the academic task for the sake of meeting friends would not lead to failure to complete the learning task, even though it probably does not guarantee successful completion.

4.5. Assessment Practices and Test Anxiety

An interesting theme that emerged through inductive coding was that most students were dissatisfied with the current assessment practices implemented in schools as prescribed by the educational system [86]. Although there exists significant literature on students' dissatisfaction with the assessment system in higher education [107,108], this

phenomenon is rather understudied in secondary schools. Students characterised the examination system as "horrible" and reported that it was creating test anxiety. These findings highlight that what pre-occupies students is the cognitive aspect of test anxiety, namely worrying over a prospective exam [109]. Research has shown that the cognitive component of test anxiety is negatively associated with academic achievement [110,111] and, therefore, we need to take steps to reduce students' exam stress and test anxiety.

Many adolescent students highlighted that they were worried about their prospective performance in exams, but, at the same time, they found that formal assessment was needed to evaluate how well they were progressing in their learning and studies. This formal assessment through testing indicated, to some extent, that students were getting significant progress feedback through formal procedures of summative assessment rather than formative teacher feedback. Nevertheless, as several studies have noted [96,112], knowledge of results (i.e., grades) is not a good form of feedback since it does not provide students with details about their strengths and weaknesses and fosters potentially unfair comparisons. An emphasis on formative assessment, rather than summary feedback through grades, is highly desirable in education [84].

A unique feature that has also emerged through the interview data is the subjectivity of assessment. A lot of students complained that summative assessment through grades did not objectively capture their effort and achievement. Even though the teaching materials, curriculum, and teaching and assessment guidelines are quite standardised in Greece [113], teachers have a degree of flexibility in terms of setting exam topics. Thus, students' summative grades capture effort and participation during the classes [86]. This may be the reason why students are displeased with the current exam and grading practices. Although grading variability is observed in other schooling contexts too [114], this is a widespread issue in the Greek educational system from our experience.

4.6. Implications for Policy and Practice

Given that thematic and code saturation was reached, since students tended to repeat similar answers to the questions asked, we could be confident that the present qualitative findings shed more light onto the contextual and individual processes underlying students' school language achievement. Although the study design does *not* permit far-reaching generalisations, several key findings are concerning and should be considered in future educational research aimed at educational practices in classrooms and policy-making decisions. First of all, parents are encouraged to have high expectations regarding their children's academic progress, but also to make sure that their children invest more effort in homework and schoolwork. Having high expectations without following up on these may not be productive. Secondly, teachers should attempt to give more constructive formative process-oriented feedback during class sessions, to inform students about their strengths and weaknesses by going beyond official grading practices, and to provide both individualised and generic support while students work on academic tasks. Educationalists need to reconsider the role of grading since this creates a 'league table mentality' and can harm students' self-concept when inaccurately comparing with classmates. Moreover, teachers should take steps to alleviate students' test worry over prospective tests and exams, which could increase students' performance. Finally, the present findings suggest the need for formulating multilevel and multi-layered theories of students' SRL and language achievement.

4.7. Limitations

Although the study produced some important qualitative evidence on the factors underpinning students' school language achievement, it is noted that the findings might not be broadly generalisable. Furthermore, we recognise that sampling on a voluntary basis may have added some bias to the findings, given that some particularly vulnerable students and specific demographic groups may not have signed up for the study. Another limitation due to the voluntary nature of the participant recruitment is that there were fewer

male participants than female, which may skew the perspectives presented. However, the few boys that participated appeared to have similar experiences to the girls. Finally, we recommend a future replication of the findings with greater sample sizes, even though the sample size was adequate for this type of ideographic research since the objective was to gain in-depth insights into students' perceptions and 'lived experiences' of learning, and the contextual factors that affect them. This would not have been possible with a larger sample size and a more quantitatively-oriented design.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study aimed to gain deeper insights into the contextual, self-regulatory, and motivational factors associated with adolescent students' language achievement. Through sixteen semi-structured interviews with adolescents, we examined students' perceptions and beliefs about self-regulation strategies, academic motivation, teaching practices, parental achievement expectations, peer influences, and assessment practices as factors contributing to students' language achievement. The findings revealed that students adequately employed a range of task-specific and general self-regulatory strategies in language tasks; however, there was still room for improvement in terms of acquiring a range of strategies. Students' academic motivation encompassed both intrinsic and extrinsic motives and the most prevalent academic emotions were enjoyment and interest, though some students reported being bored in language class. Teachers and teaching practices appeared to be a crucial factor for students' motivation in class and language achievement. We found mixed support for the importance of parental achievement expectations, since some students did not appear particularly motivated by their parents' expectations. Classmates' achievement as a comparison standard and peer influences on the regulation of effort were also noted. Finally, assessment practices in schools in terms of frequent tests and exams were a matter of concern, since students reported that the current models of summative assessment were inducing test anxiety and were permitting subjective grading in Greek schools. Overall, the current study contributes valuable insights into the factors associated with language achievement.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/educsci13080804/s1. The full interview protocol is attached as supplementary materials.

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