

The Influence of Enneagram Type on Communicative Competence

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Introduction

The Enneagram of psychological types is a human trans-cultural model aimed at promoting understanding of one's self and others through the identification and accurate description of emotional, cognitive and behavioural automatic and repetitive patterns that develop from childhood in the process of adaptation to the environment. These automatisms act as a blueprint throughout the successive evolutionary trajectories of the individual, influencing one's personal and professional decisions and leaving a lasting impression on relational and communicative modalities.

For students, the Enneagram can act as a map which represents a coherent framework with which to outline and define recurring patterns of interpersonal communication. As well, it is a tool for deciphering the process of creating one's own identity so as to foster the possibility of making authentic choices for their futures and to orient themselves among interpersonal differences.

This initial phase of our study focused on students, but we believe that knowledge of the Enneagram could be also useful for instructors in order to create a better learning environment. For both students and instructors, the Enneagram facilitates the perception of their relational styles and enhances the ability to understand others' cultural and behavioural characteristics. Consequently, it increases the ability to resolve potential conflicts by positioning them in a meaningful context. As well, it allows improved management of group dynamics and refinement of communication skills.

Each of us perceives the world from a unique perspective. While each perspective is valid, it is limited. Our personality shapes the way we interact with the world: how we teach, learn, work, and communicate. As instructors, our personality types make us more comfortable with certain teaching styles over others and also create a positive or negative resonance with pupils. As students, our personality types make us prefer certain ways of learning, affect our focus of attention and how we react to different kinds of teachers. Teachers interact with many students, most of whom probably see the world differently than they do. Different perspectives, values,

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and preferences sometimes lead to misunderstanding and frustration. When we study the personality types of the Enneagram, we can better understand how and why others see the world differently from us. This awareness leads to greater acceptance of others.

We can apply this knowledge to become aware of how our teaching styles will have an impact on the different learning styles of our students. In general, the Enneagram can help teachers and students connect to be effective partners in education and find a meeting point at a metacognitive level.

Each of the Enneagram types has a different motivation. Our motivation is a powerful force that drives most of our behaviour. When the world around us supports and reinforces our motivation, our energy will be aligned with our aspirations and our learning performance will be increased. At the same time, a student can be driven by the results of many environmental constraints more than by genuine choices. Making students aware of their motivations activates a virtuous mechanism of inner dialogue that will allow better management of their human, learning and professional characteristics.

This preliminary mixed (qualitative-quantitative) study is part of a larger project called *The Enneagram as a tool to develop soft skills*. The goal of the general project is to verify whether student exposure to knowledge of the Enneagram types increases their metacognitive awareness of their identities and motivations and then of their performance in university courses. There are many definitions of 'soft skills', but we will refer mainly to the approach that partially identifies them with the EQ - Emotional Intelligence Quotient, "which represents the set of personal, interpersonal, communication and linguistic skills, as well as personal habits", taking into account that "soft skills have more to do with 'who we are' than 'how much we know'" (Ciappei and Cinque 2014: 137).

This paper investigates the relationship between the Enneagram of psychological types and the study of foreign languages in terms of motivational aspects and objective data on the success in university exams. In particular we attempt to answer three research questions:

1. Is there a link between performance in foreign language learning and belongingness to a particular Enneagram type?
2. Is there a link between performance in intercultural communication exam and belongingness to a particular Enneagram type?
3. Is there a link between students' motivation to study foreign languages and belongingness to a particular Enneagram type?

Enneagram Basics

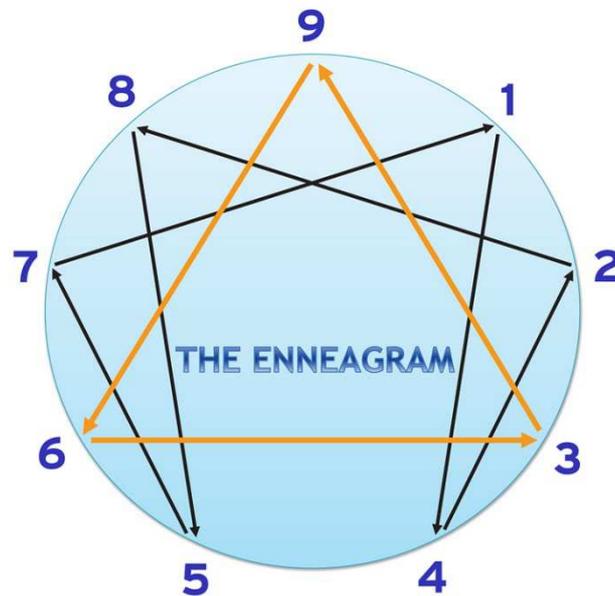


Table 1

The Enneagram of psychological types is a dynamic model of human being that describes automatic personality patterns that are universally recognized as valid. It is one of the few theories of personality whose descriptive and operational principles are generally agreed upon around the world. Nowadays we can benefit from a great deal of international publications among which some texts are worth mentioning: Naranjo 1996, 2006; Palmer 1996; Levine, 1999; Riso and Hudson 1999. In our research, we made specific reference to the work of Mark Bodnareczuk because of “its focus on a naturalistic, scientific view of personality and psychological processes that are linked to modern advances in the neurosciences” (2009:X) and the connections he made between the Enneagram and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1973).

The purpose of the Enneagram is not to classify ourselves into categories, but to show us how we become stuck in automatic patterns. From one point of view, the Enneagram can be seen as a set of nine distinct personality types, with each number on the Enneagram denoting one type.

It is common to find a little of ourselves in all nine of the types, although one of them should stand out as being closest to ourselves. This is our basic personality type. Each of the nine types lives by a core assumption, that is “unquestioned beliefs and autopilot responses to people and

life” (Bodnarczuk 2009:20), that shapes and defines how we see ourselves, others, and the world around us.

A core Enneagram pattern is a deeply ingrained pattern that has been the basis for one's self-identity. We begin to live this way of ‘seeing’ like an ‘inner ‘script’, an ‘embodied individual paradigm’ (Bodnarczuk 2009), and we can become aware of the inner story that we tell ourselves by paying attention to our repetitive modes of behaviour. At that point we can also start acting in order to change it.

THE NINE CORE ASSUMPTIONS

(I must be...)

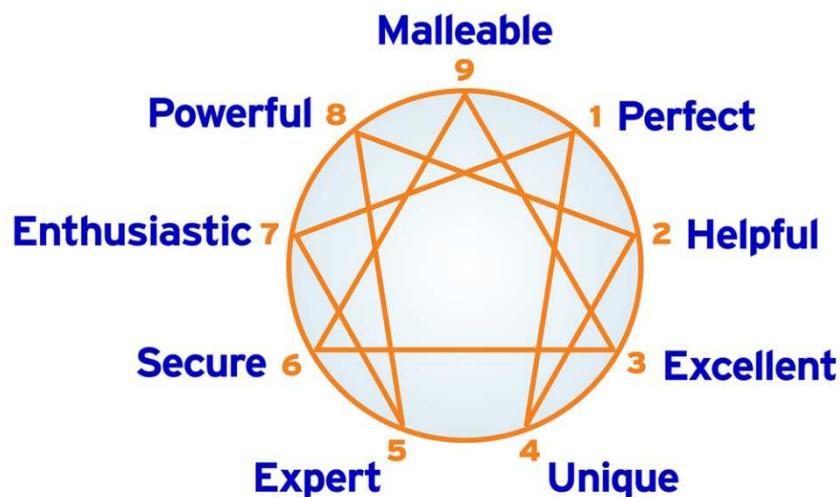


Table 2 (Bodnarczuk 2009:3)

The verb ‘must’ is used because one's enneatype significantly reduces our psychological freedom and compels us to adopt relational patterns that have proved useful for adaptation in childhood, but which are limiting in adulthood.

Our core assumption influences our thinking process and our self-perception which influence our behaviour and our communication style. The Enneagram helps decipher and create a ‘coherent framework’ for outlining and defining recurring patterns in behaviour, thought processes and emotional reactions. Our central belief is our main limitation but also our deepest resource. When unaware of students’ automatic patterns, teachers can inadvertently reinforce patterns that helped the student to become stuck in the first place. A more effective learning must intersect with the core assumption of our Enneagram type so we can transform our

automatic patterns from a negative problem paradigm to a positive resource paradigm because, as previously stated, our central belief is our main limit but also our deepest resource.

The dynamic nature of this system provides precise information on how individuals evolve and devolve. This is a great advantage of the Enneagram personality system because it allows to carry out evaluations and implement training courses that are tailored to the individual characteristics of each student.

In our case, as explained below, we also used the analysis of the students' handwriting, which allows further exploration in the process of knowing one's own potentialities. The connection between the Enneagram and Graphology has been the object of a previous research, carried out on 1,000 handwriting samples and published in the *Journal Enneagram Monthly* (Garibaldi 2005-2007) and in a book (Garibaldi 2016).

The case study: methodology, participants and data collection instruments

The methodology chosen for this research follows both a qualitative and a quantitative approach. A mixed method (Dörnyei 2011) allows the integration of words and numbers to describe both the context of the study and the quantitative data collected from the sample group through the questionnaires.

In our study, a qualitative method was used for analysing the content of students' samples of handwriting. These samples described their self-images and reasons that determined their choice of studying foreign languages at the University.

On the other hand, a quantitative method was applied in the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaires given to the students. This allowed us to quantify students' success in their exams in order to search for a relationship between personal enneatypes and individual performance. Numerical data were collected from the University database related to students' exam marks in two subject matters: foreign languages and intercultural communication. Worth noting is that the intercultural communication final test is an oral exam while foreign language exams consist of three parts: a written test, and two oral sessions (each part counting for 33% of the final grade). This could be considered when analysing students' communicative skill.

Moreover the present study is a case of educational action research (Kemmis 2010) since it was conducted by teachers within their courses with the goal of improving students' self-perception and consequently their capacity to develop an effective intercultural dialogue and, in the long term, to orient them to make more effective choices for their future.

The group of respondents is constituted by 144 second-year students enrolled in the Business Language curriculum of the three-year degree programme in *Foreign Languages and Cultures*

of the University of Urbino. The sample consists of 131 females and 13 males, aged from 20 to 22, coming from all over Italy. Participating students represent a convenience sample (Dörney 2010:28) since they were selected for the purpose of the study among the students attending the course of *Intercultural Communication* held by one of the researchers. Within that course programme the themes connected with the target of the project were introduced and a seminar on *Narrative identity and Enneagram types* was scheduled.

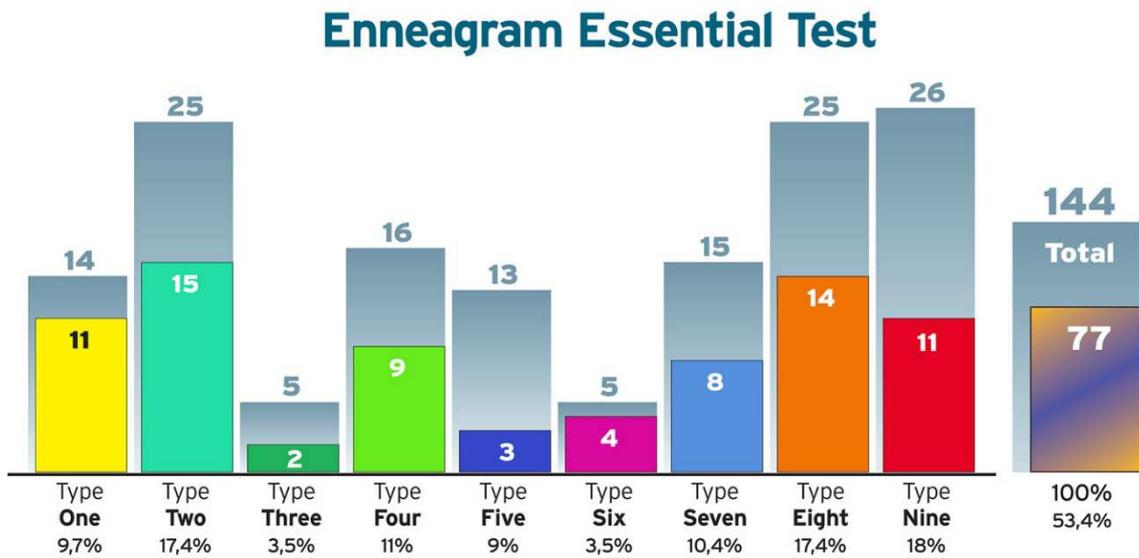
Students were asked to undergo, on a voluntary basis, an individual test regarding self-definition of their profiles in terms of the enneatype (Daniels and Prince 2000). The *Enneagram Essential Test* was available online on the Moodle page of the course.

After this first choice students participated in the above mentioned seminar on *Narrative identity and Enneagram types* and deepened their understanding of this descriptive model of personality. Then they were asked to repeat the test more carefully and with greater self-awareness in order to confirm or alter their initial choice. Lastly, they were asked to release two samples of their handwriting. In the first sample they described their self-image and in the second sample they explained the motivations that determined their choice of an academic path in foreign languages. Therefore, we gathered two freely worded graphological samples for each student: one giving a self-description of one's temper, attitudes, and, in some cases, of communicative style and social habits and a second one mentioning the personal reasons for choosing the *Foreign Languages and Cultures* programme.

The second set of data analysed in the study was collected through the University ESSE3 system. ESSE3 is a virtual secretary system which provides data related to students' performance and academic record. For each participating student we collected the results of both his/her intercultural communication exam and foreign languages exams (English, French etc.) and calculated the means.

The Enneagram survey was processed and the data were analysed and compared with those related to students' grades. The results are reported in the graphs below.

Results



Students of the Intercultural Communication course
who underwent the Enneagram Essential Test = **144**

77 students released their handwriting sample

Table 3

In table 3 the whole sample (144) is reported divided into the nine enneatypes with the inner columns indicating the number of students who released the graphological samples (77= 53,4% of the total). The percentages under the different types refer to the incidence of enneatypes on the whole sample.

Surname	Name	Enneagram Type	Handwriting Sample	Grades Intercultural Communication	Grade E1	Grade E2	Grade F1	Grade F2	Grade S1	Grade S2	Grade G1	Grade G2	Grade R1	Grade R2	Mean	Motivation
C.	A.	1	X	30+	30	30					29	30			29,75	intrinseca (bisogno di competenza)
F.	F.	1	X	30	28	27							29	29	28,25	intrinseca (bisogno di relazione)/estrinseca (regolazione per identificazione)
F.	F.	1	X	25	26	27									26,5	estrinseca
G.	S.	1	X	30	27	30			27	27					27,75	intrinseca (bisogno di relazione)
G.	R.	1	X	26	28	28							27	26	27,25	no risposta
L.	G.	1	X	no	28	27					27	27			27,25	intrinseca (bisogno di relazione)
M.	E.	1	X	30	23	28			26	26					25,75	intrinseca (bisogno di competenza)/estrinseca (regolazione per identificazione)
R.	G.	1	X	30	27	28	26	26							26,75	intrinseca
S.	A.	1	X	24	19	24	20	27							22,5	intrinseca (bisogno di relazione)
S.	A.	1	X	30	24		29								26,5	intrinseca (bisogno di relazione)/estrinseca (regolazione per identificazione)
T.	S.	1	X	30											0	intrinseca (bisogno di relazione)/estrinseca (regolazione per identificazione)
A.	A.	2	X	26	21										21	intrinseca (bisogno di relazione)
A.	R.	2	X	30	27	28							29	27	27,75	intrinseca
B.	S.	2	X	21	23	23			22						22,66	intrinseca (bisogno di relazione)/estrinseca (regolazione per identificazione)
B.	L.	2	X	26	28				21		24				24,33	estrinseca (regolazione per identificazione)
C.	C.	2	X	25	23	25					25				24,33	intrinseca (bisogno di autonomia) /estrinseca (regolazione per identificazione)
I.	R.	2	X	30+	26				26						26	intrinseca (bisogno di autonomia) /estrinseca (regolazione per identificazione)

Table 4

Table 4 reports an example of a spreadsheet which summarizes all the information gathered from the sample: name of participating student, enneagram type, final mark in the intercultural communication oral exam and marks in the foreign language exams classified according to the different languages (E-English; F- French; S –Spanish , R- Russian) and the academic year (first – 1 or second –2). Moreover, we calculated the mean of the grades they received on their language exams. The last column reports the different kinds of motivation described in the handwritten texts. The data were classified according to the Self-Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci (2000) illustrated by a continuum running from absence of motivation (*amotivation*), to *extrinsic motivation* (due to external causes such as external pressure, tangible rewards etc.) to *intrinsic motivation* fostered by the need to feel autonomous, competent or in relation with the other members of the group. More than one type of motivation was listed in the students' handwritten samples, including 2 cases of absence of motivation (*amotivation*) (table 5).

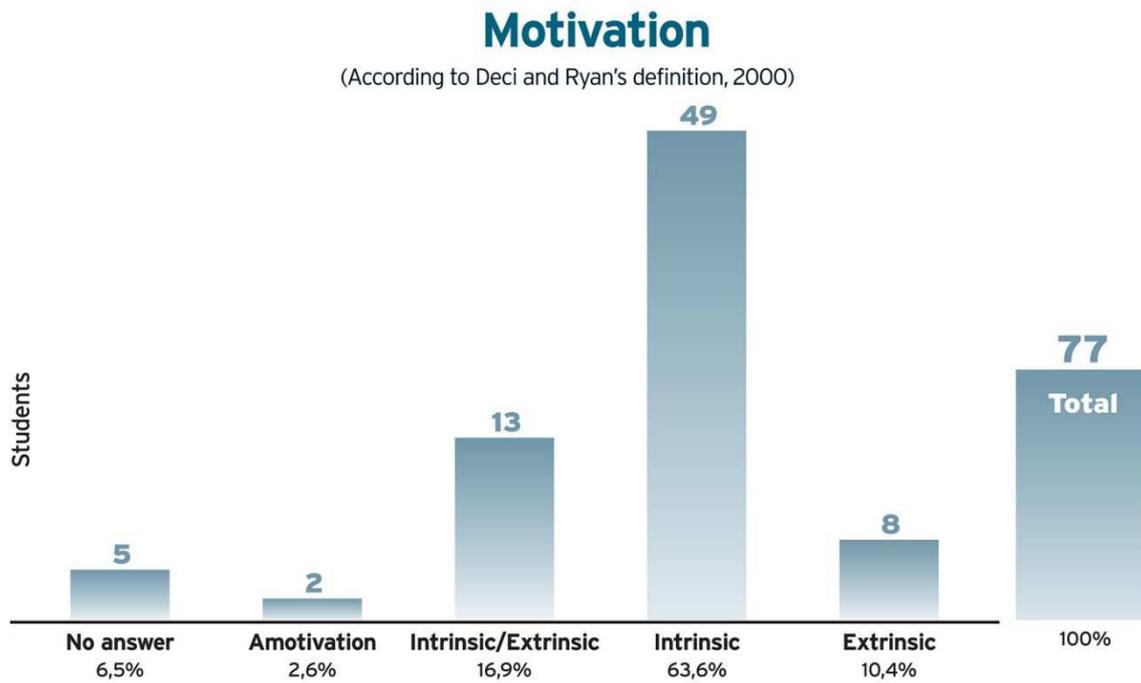


Table 5

At the end of the study the total mean of the grades obtained in the exams was also determined for each enneagram type as reported in table 6 below.

Enneagram Type	Mean of Grades L2	Enneagram Type	Mean of Grades Intercultural Communication
TYPE THREE	27,5	TYPE THREE	29,5
TYPE ONE	26,82	TYPE ONE	28,6
TYPE FOUR	26,43	TYPE FIVE	28
TYPE SIX	26,37	TYPE TWO	27,87
TYPE SEVEN	25,93	TYPE NINE	27,67
TYPE EIGHT	25,86	TYPE EIGHT	27,5
TYPE TWO	25,63	TYPE FOUR	26,67
TYPE NINE	25,52	TYPE SEVEN	26
TYPE FIVE	23,92	TYPE SIX	25

Table 6

The first column refers to the total means related to foreign language grades, while the second to the means calculated for the intercultural communication grades for each enneatype. Since the research took into consideration only the 77 students who released their handwritten samples, the data referred to enneagram types Three, Five and Six are poorer and not really statistically significant.

Discussion and further research

An Enneagram type of personality is a complex structure based on neurobiological and adaptive processes influencing our cognitive, emotional and behavioural style. Exploring how this model of personality impacts on the foreign language learning experience is an innovative field of research which can benefit from the fact that the Enneagram is spreading worldwide. Ideally, our study paves the way for multiple further investigations.

As stated above, our general goal was to expose students to their Enneagram type for the purpose of verifying whether this learning might contribute to increase two main soft skills, that is self-awareness and communication. Many other abilities revolve around these two crucial skills, because they imply the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of human beings.

Many different learning activities should be organized on a theoretical and experiential level: explaining the main concepts of the Enneagram personality system, making an individual assessment through interviews and with the support of the handwriting analysis, and arranging group meetings where students can discover how the Enneagram types function in their own and others' personalities. This overall process is made possible because the Enneagram will be perceived as a common language by which one may name one's own experiences. Since it is a work in progress, it is not currently possible to demonstrate if this approach proves to be useful to students and to their course of study.

Outlining this general frame is necessary in order to define the precise meaning of the work presented here. Through our knowledge of the Enneagram system, we hypothesized that the enneatypes could have an influence on foreign language and intercultural communication learning experience and exams, and that the specific motivation which drives each of them could have played a role in choosing to study foreign languages.

The interpretation of the results is necessarily partial, as we are currently in the first phase of our study and further research are necessary to produce meaningful conclusions. However, it is a fact that we can benefit from the availability of the respondents, who expressed a keen interest in the Enneagram.

Remaining strictly adherent to the numbers that emerged from the test, students who identified themselves as types Three and One got the highest scores on the two exams

considered. We must be very cautious in the interpretation of this result, since many students may have answered the *Enneagram Essential Test* questions quickly, or misinterpreted the meaning of them. This is the reason why individual interviews and a comparison with the results of the handwriting analyses are necessary.

However, we must also admit that the same results did not surprise us because, in general, students belonging to the type One have a strong sense of duty and are extremely rigorous in the things to which they apply themselves and type Three students are gifted with a natural propensity to shine in their field of activity.

Based on these assumptions, it is legitimate to argue that these qualities would emerge even if such students had chosen other fields of study, since these qualities could be defined as natural soft skills for these enneatypes. For now, let us just give a brief description of the characteristics of these two types of students. In future development of our research we will try to investigate whether there is a specific link between the belonging to these two or other enneatypes and a predisposition to the study of foreign languages.

Short profile type One

The type One student is defined 'The Serious Hard Worker'. Students belonging to this group are driven by a basic motivation that 'I must be perfect'. They look for constant improvement and try to avoid mistakes and negligence. They follow rules and standards so closely that they will meet all expectations. Their main quality is self-discipline, but they are uncomfortable to be spontaneous, playful and emotional. Being very attentive at lessons, taking thorough notes, wanting to know the rules, proceeding step by step in a logical manner and meticulous attention to details characterize their learning style. They need to plan their studies and they have very high standards in maintaining the dead-lines. Their Inner Critic points out every mistake, and they become irritated when they don't get things right. They tend to notice when the teacher is off track.

Their speaking style is precise, direct, exacting, concise, and detailed. They use words such as should, ought, must, correct, excellent, good, wrong, and right. They react quickly to ideas. They are defensive if criticized. The blind spots of their communications style concern the fact that they do not realize that they appear critical, impatient, preachy, and opinionated. The ideal educational environment values hard work, fairness, where rules are constantly enforced, the work is well planned and organized, and the teachers are responsible, self-disciplined and conscientious. The type One students flourish in such an educational context (Fitzel 2011).

Short profile type Three

The type Three student is defined 'The Brilliant Achiever'. Students belonging to this group are driven by a basic motivation that 'I must be excellent'. They focus on visible results and accomplishments in order to win the admiration and esteem of others. They are driven to excel

and may become role models. Their learning style is characterized by the desire to improve skills and abilities in order to obtain success. They reduce lessons to key concepts and like an experiential approach. They challenge themselves, work quickly and need to produce all the time. They enjoy competition but carefully avoid areas in which they know they won't excel.

Their speaking style is clear, efficient, logical, and well-conceived. It avoids topics that reflect negatively on them. They are impatient with lengthy conversations. The blind spots of their communication style concern the fact that they do not realize to appear dismissive if the information interferes with their goals and that their focus is to look good and not the authenticity of their feelings. The ideal educational environment should be dynamic, pragmatic, characterized by a visible reward system of achievements, where the expectations are clearly defined and the whole system is permeated by competency (Fitzel 2011).

We then took a further step, to connect the results of the students' *Enneagram Essential Test* with the classifications of the Self-Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci (2000). This theory explains how important it may be for personal growth and self-esteem not only to carry out activities in which we feel good and competent, but also and above all to choose to do something we like, based on personal values and goals to be achieved. Connecting the two theories is totally innovative, and our premise is that motivations linked to the Enneagram type have a stronger and deeper influence on personal values. We can say that the motivations expressed by the enneatypes are even more 'intrinsic' and that becoming aware of the inner dynamic of our type can, as stated above, allow us to be active agents of our choices.

We have included a chart (Table 5) that shows the quality of the motivations expressed by the 77 students who provided their handwriting and related to the choice of studying foreign languages. At present, no interpretation would be significant, because we need to deepen the investigation through individual interviews with students in order to encourage them to make some reflections on the automatic patterns of their enneatype. To build a bridge toward further investigations and the field of educational affective neuroscience (Immordino 2017) it would be interesting to relate the message each enneatype's heart longs to hear (because it wasn't sufficiently perceived in childhood) to the motivations outlined in the Self-Determination Theory (Table 7). In perspective, trying to integrate the two models can give interesting results.

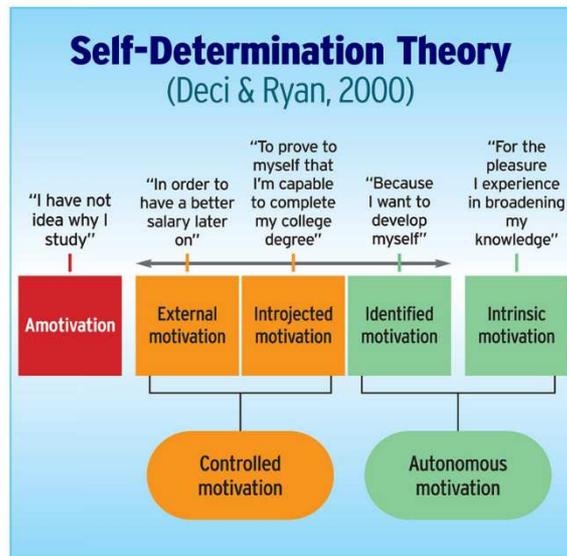


Table 7 (Noordzij 2013 - Your Enneagram Coach, <https://www.yourenneagramcoach.com/>)

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