

Boundary Conditions of Dormitory-Based Peer Influence on L2 Engagement: A Qualitative Exploration Among Chinese University Students

Yichen Wang^{1*}, Jean-Louis Berger¹

¹ Department of Education Sciences, Faculty of Education, University of Fribourg, PLEMOS
Lab, Fribourg, Switzerland

Yichen Wang: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8318-6819> | Jean-Louis Berger:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2629-2622>

*Correspondence: yichen.wang@unifr.ch

Preprint. This paper has not been peer reviewed.

Abstract

Research on motivation regulation has primarily focused on individual strategies, leaving undertheorized how peer processes shape second language (L2) engagement in co-residential settings. This qualitative study investigated dormitory-based peer influence on L2 engagement among Chinese university students majoring in French. Drawing on focus group discussions and weekly learning journals from 25 students across six dormitories and three year levels (Y1–Y3), the analysis identified (i) five boundary conditions recurrently associated with variations in engagement, (ii) a predominant mechanism of peer modeling conditioned by collective norms, and (iii) contextual configurations under which this mechanism emerged or receded. Peer influence appeared to operate primarily on the behavioral dimension of engagement (effort, time, and exposure) rather than on learners' motivational orientation, and a preliminary pattern of positive asymmetry emerged. Cross-case comparisons suggested that the mechanism depended on the joint presence of several enabling conditions and that it weakened as the shared academic structure diminished. The findings suggest a process of socially triggered motivation regulation, although this designation remains a working concept pending replication and further investigation. The

study's primary contribution is to specify how contextual boundary conditions configure the emergence and receding of peer influence on L2 engagement in co-residential settings, and to identify preliminary evidence of metamotivational monitoring among participants.

Keywords: motivation regulation; L2 engagement; peer influence in dormitory; boundary conditions

Research on second language (L2) motivation has produced extensive work on individual-level constructs: learners' goal orientations, self-efficacy beliefs, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, expectancies of success, and subjective task value (Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2020; Boo et al., 2015; Dörnyei, 2005; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Engagement, understood as the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional investment learners direct toward learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2004; Hiver et al., 2021; Reeve, 2012), has served as a key outcome variable in this literature. It has commonly been examined in relation to instructional practices, motivational beliefs, and task design. Here, motivational orientation refers to the relatively stable directional component of a learner's motivation, in contrast to the more situationally variable forms of engagement examined in this study (cf. Dörnyei, 2005). However, within L2 learning research, motivation and engagement have been treated predominantly as properties of the individual learner, with comparatively little attention to the situational and social conditions under which everyday engagement fluctuates. A systematic review of L2 motivation research found that studies overwhelmingly focus on individual-level variables, such as attitudes, self-efficacy, and goal orientations, with social-contextual factors receiving comparatively limited attention (Boo et al., 2015; see also Ushioda, 2009). Although recent work has begun to examine L2 motivational dynamics as socially situated and context responsive (e.g., Li, 2023), the role of proximal social environments, especially peers with whom learners share sustained daily contact, remains

under-examined in co-residential settings within L2 motivation research. One framework that explicitly addresses how learners sustain or adjust their motivation is motivation regulation (Wolters, 2003). Within the self-regulated learning tradition, Wolters proposed that learners do not merely possess motivation; they actively regulate it through deliberate strategies when initial motivation wanes. Building on Wolters's framework, Schwinger et al. (2009) operationalized motivation regulation into eight strategy types: self-consequating, environmental control, interest enhancement, performance self-talk, mastery self-talk, proximal goal setting, efficacy management, and emotion regulation. Recent studies have confirmed the psychometric properties and predictive validity of measures of motivation regulation strategies in Chinese L2 contexts (Luo & Gan, 2026; Luo et al., 2026) and examined how such strategies relate to writing performance and achievement emotions (Huang et al., 2024; Zhang & Dong, 2022). However, a scoping review of research on motivation regulation strategies in English-as-a-foreign-language contexts (Vereshchahina et al., 2026) found that the literature, though growing—particularly in Chinese and Asian settings—remains emergent, predominantly quantitative, and concentrated on writing competence. Notably, all strategies identified across these studies presuppose that motivation regulation is a fundamentally individual process. While some strategies, such as environmental control, indirectly involve a social component (e.g., choosing to study in a place where other students are revising), no existing strategy category explicitly captures a social source of regulation as a distinct dimension. As another example, performance-avoidance self-talk may involve imagining how others would perceive one's failure, such as the disappointment a poor result would cause family members. In such cases, the social dimension remains embedded within an individual strategy rather than operating as an external environmental trigger. The difference is consequential: A social component embedded within an individual strategy (e.g., choosing where to study) is not the same as

theorizing the social environment itself as a source that triggers, modulates, or sustains motivation regulation. Recent work by Berger and Cosnefroy (2026) has advanced the measurement of motivation regulation by developing the Motivational Regulation Strategies Inventory (MRSI), which includes a “Seeking Support from Others” dimension that explicitly integrates a social aspect. However, this extension operates at the level of strategy categorization. The process-level question of how shared social environments trigger, modulate, or sustain motivation regulation—and under what boundary conditions—remains unspecified, particularly in naturalistic peer co-residence contexts. The scoping review itself acknowledges that peer interactions have played a significant role in shaping how students use motivation regulation strategies (Vereshchahina et al., 2026), yet this dimension has not been systematically investigated.

Moreover, even within the same learning context, individual differences in activated motivational beliefs can lead to varying self-regulation processes (Boekaerts, 2001), suggesting that peer influence may operate through context-sensitive pathways. A separate line of research has demonstrated that peers influence academic outcomes. Using random dormitory assignment at Dartmouth, Sacerdote (2001) provided causal evidence that roommates affect grade point average (GPA). Subsequent research has extended this line of work to other institutional contexts (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2006; for a review, see Sacerdote, 2011), including Chinese university settings (Cao et al., 2024; Ha, 2016; Pu et al., 2020). These studies establish that residential peers can shape academic outcomes, but do not examine how such influence operates. Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory offers a theoretical basis for one key mechanism—observational learning, or peer modeling—through which such influence may operate. However, the peer effects literature and the motivation regulation literature have largely developed in parallel and remain unconnected. Quantitative peer effects studies have established that influence exists but treat the process as a black box:

they measure the outcome (e.g., GPA change) without examining the conditions under which influence operates or the socio-interactional mechanisms through which learners experience it. Conversely, motivation regulation research provides a process-level account of how learners manage their motivation but restricts this process to individual strategies, largely ignoring the social environment. The bridge between these two bodies of work—specifying under what conditions peer influence acts on the process by which learners regulate their motivation, and how this manifests as observable changes in engagement—has not yet been specified. This gap persists despite the growing recognition that motivational processes are socially situated. Vauras et al. (2009) proposed a triadic model in which motivational orientations develop through interpersonal dynamics among students, teachers, and peers, explicitly positioning peers as constitutive of the motivational system rather than as external influences upon it. Volet (2001) advanced a multi-level cognitive-situative perspective in which the affordances of the learning context, including the behavior of other students, shape whether and how learners engage. She argued that motivation is best understood as a dual psychological and social phenomenon. Within self-regulated learning specifically, Zimmerman (2000) discussed the social sources of self-regulation, including modeling and social feedback. Research on co-regulation (e.g., Hadwin et al., 2018; see also Volet & Järvelä, 2001) has further examined how learners regulate one another's cognitive and metacognitive processes during collaborative tasks. However, these contributions have primarily examined classroom-based interactions, such as teacher–student scaffolding, collaborative learning episodes, task-based peer interaction (Sato & Ballinger, 2016), and instructional contexts, rather than the sustained, non-collaborative co-living arrangements examined here. Moreover, co-regulation research has been predominantly cognitive rather than motivational in focus. The present study therefore addresses a distinct phenomenon: not how learners co-regulate cognition during

tasks but how the everyday social environment of shared dormitories is associated with variations in L2 engagement.

This disconnection between the motivation regulation literature and the peer effects literature constitutes the theoretical problem addressed in the present study. Existing research leaves unexplained a set of interrelated questions: Under what boundary conditions does peer influence in shared living environments become consequential for learners' engagement? Through which socio-interactional mechanisms do learners experience this influence? Why does such influence emerge in some shared living contexts but not in others? This gap is not merely empirical. Without specifying boundary conditions and socio-interactional mechanisms, peer influence remains descriptively acknowledged but theoretically underdeveloped in L2 engagement research. If the process through which peer influence affects engagement can be understood as a form of motivation regulation—one triggered by contextual conditions rather than by individual strategies—then current motivation regulation frameworks may inadequately account for socially situated regulatory processes in naturalistic settings. More broadly, the capacity of learners to reflect on their own motivational states, distinguishing stable orientations from situational fluctuations, connects this inquiry to metamotivational monitoring (Miele & Scholer, 2018) and the metacognitive and affective model of self-regulated learning (MASRL; Efklides & Schwartz, 2024; Efklides et al., 2026). Preliminary evidence for this connection is reported in the Results.

In Chinese public universities, on-campus dormitory residence is the default arrangement for full-time undergraduates, institutionally regulated as part of the university's student management system (Ministry of Education, 2017, Art. 48; see also Ha, 2016; Pu et al., 2020). National policy further positions university dormitories as sites for holistic student development beyond mere residence (National Development and Reform Commission et al., 2024). Students are typically assigned to shared rooms of four to six residents for the duration

of their studies, creating a largely nonvoluntary co-living arrangement with sustained face-to-face interaction, timetables, and common academic demands. Unlike Western residential settings, where students typically choose roommates and living arrangements, Chinese dormitory assignments are compulsory and centrally administered, with no ordinary provision for roommate selection, room transfers, or off-campus residence. Recent qualitative research has documented the relational complexity of this shared living arrangement, including how roommate dynamics shape students' everyday experiences and social negotiations (Xu, 2023). This naturalistic setting, characterized by nonvoluntary co-residence, provides a particularly apt context for investigating the boundary conditions and mechanisms through which peer influence operates on L2 engagement.

Aims and Research Questions

This study aimed to identify the boundary conditions under which dormitory-based peer influence on L2 engagement operates, the socio-interactional mechanisms through which it is experienced, and the contextual conditions under which it emerges or recedes. Drawing on focus group discussions and weekly learning journals collected from 25 French-major students across six dormitories at a Chinese university, spanning three academic year levels (Y1–Y3), this study addresses the following research questions. As used here, boundary conditions (hereafter BC) refer to contextual factors that participants identified as shaping whether and how dormitory-based peer influence operated on their L2 engagement:

RQ1: Which boundary conditions are associated with variations in L2 engagement among Chinese university students sharing dormitories?

RQ2: Through which socio-interactional mechanisms do participants describe these BC–engagement associations as operating?

RQ3: Under what contextual conditions do participants describe dormitory-based peer influence on L2 engagement as emerging or receding?

RQ1 provides a descriptive mapping of boundary conditions. RQ2 constitutes the central thread of this study, examining the socio-interactional mechanisms through which these conditions operate. RQ3 explores the contextual conditions under which peer influence on L2 engagement emerges or recedes across dormitories with contrasting dynamics.

Method

Participants

The participants were 25 Chinese university students (21 men and 4 women; aged 18–21 years) majoring in French at a major research university in eastern China. All lived in on-campus shared dormitories—typically four to six residents per room—throughout their studies. At this institution, dormitory assignments are compulsory and centrally administered. Students typically do not choose roommates, transfers are not ordinarily available, and living off campus is generally restricted. These arrangements produced a sustained co-living arrangement with daily face-to-face interactions.

The French major program comprised 12 dormitories at the time of the study. All 12 were contacted through the program administrator, who distributed the researcher's invitation to participate. Eight dormitories volunteered (four at Y1, three at Y2, and one at Y3). From these, six were selected to maximize variation in year level and gender, with scheduling availability considered a secondary constraint: three first-year dormitories (D1–D3; four residents each), two second-year dormitories (D4 and D5; four residents each), and one third-year dormitory (D6; five residents). D5 was the only female dormitory; the remaining five were male. Participation was voluntary at both the dormitory and individual levels, and students could decline or withdraw without penalty. All 25 residents of the six selected

dormitories took part. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, including audio recording. Participants were informed that they could remain silent during the discussions and skip any journal item without consequence. Consent was obtained both orally and in writing. All data were pseudonymized and accessible only to the research team. Table 1 summarizes the participant distribution by dormitory, year level, group size, age, and gender.

Table 1

Participant Distribution by Dormitory, Year Level, Group Size, Age, and Gender

Dormitory	Year Level	n	Age	Gender
D1	Y1	4	18–19	Male
D2	Y1	4	18	Male
D3	Y1	4	18–19	Male
D4	Y2	4	19–20	Male
D5	Y2	4	18–19	Female
D6	Y3	5	20–21	Male
Total		25	18–21	21M, 4F

Note. Y1 = first year; Y2 = second year; Y3 = third year; D1–D6 = Dormitory 1–6; n = number of participants; M = male; F = female. Age = age range in years at the time of data collection.

Including dormitories from Y1 to Y3 was intended to capture potential differences in peer influence across stages of academic progression. The overall gender composition of the French major program at this university is approximately equal; the predominance of male dormitories in the present sample (five of six) thus reflects a selection effect among volunteering dormitories rather than the program’s demographic structure. The unequal distribution across levels (three dormitories at Y1, two at Y2, and one at Y3) and the gender

imbalance (one female dormitory out of six) are acknowledged as limitations and are discussed further in the Discussion section.

In the French major curriculum at this institution, shared French coursework decreases substantially across year levels, with later-year students attending progressively fewer common instructional hours. Specific figures are reported in the Results.

Instruments

Data were collected during the fall semester of the 2025–2026 academic year (September–late January) using two instruments administered sequentially: focus groups and weekly learning journals.

Focus groups.

Six semi-structured focus group discussions were conducted approximately three months into the semester, one per dormitory, with all residents present. Discussions were held over six days via Tencent Meeting, an online videoconferencing platform, due to the geographic distance between the researcher and the participants. Each discussion lasted approximately 90 minutes and was conducted in Mandarin Chinese by the researcher. The focus group guide comprised five phases: (a) introductions and rapport building, (b) general exploration of motivation for French learning, (c) individual self-regulation strategies, (d) collective dynamics and the dormitory context, and (e) summary and closing. The core questions in the collective dynamics and dormitory context phase included the following: “In your dormitory, is there anything related to your French learning or your motivation to learn?” (Q8) and “When you think about your motivation, how much of it comes from yourself and how much from living together?” (Q14). All thematic domains were covered in each group. However, question order was adapted to the flow of discussion, and follow-up probes were adjusted based on the participants’ prior responses. These probes were used to elicit concrete

examples, clarify the circumstances under which peer influence was experienced, and prompt the participants to articulate how and why such influence affected their engagement. All discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed using automated speech recognition, and verified by the researcher through a systematic speaker-identification procedure to ensure accurate attribution of all turns. The complete focus group guide is available in Supplementary Material, Part A. Focus groups were selected as the primary data collection instrument because the research questions required socially situated accounts of peer influence; group discussions among roommates allowed not only retrospective narration but also real-time negotiation of shared experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Morgan, 2019). Focus groups were particularly suited to RQ2, which required access to participants' articulations of socio-interactional mechanisms, and to RQ3, which drew on cross-case contrasts that emerged through group-level interaction.

Weekly learning journals.

Immediately following the focus group phase, the participants completed individual online journals in Mandarin Chinese over five consecutive weeks, administered via Wenjuanxing, a widely used Chinese online survey platform comparable to Qualtrics. Each weekly entry comprised seven to ten items, combining Likert-scale ratings and open-ended questions, with a different thematic focus each week: critical incidents (Week 1), general motivational reflection (Week 2), self-regulation strategies and roommate interactions (Week 3), longitudinal comparison with previous weeks (Week 4), and meta-motivational awareness and overall review (Week 5). A recurring item across all five weeks asked the participants to rate their weekly motivation levels on a 7-point scale (1 = very low to 7 = very high). A recurring open-ended item asked whether and how roommates had influenced the participants' French learning that week. A designated item also asked the participants to rate the perceived impact of roommate interactions on a 7-point scale ranging from -3 (strong negative impact)

to +3 (strong positive impact). The 25 participants produced 125 journal entries (25×5 weeks) with no missing data. Weekly learning journals were chosen as a complementary instrument to capture how individual engagement varied over time, as group discussions alone cannot track such fluctuations. Structured journaling has been shown to elicit reflective accounts of motivational processes over time (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Schmitz & Wiese, 2006). The journals were particularly suited to RQ1, which required tracking temporal boundary conditions (BC1) across consecutive weeks, and provided individual-level data that complemented the group-level accounts elicited through focus groups. The complete list of journal questions is provided in Supplementary Material, Part B (English and Mandarin Chinese).

The two instruments served complementary analytical functions: The focus groups yielded narrative data on mechanisms and conditions through retrospective accounts and interactive dynamics among roommates, while the journals yielded temporal data on individual patterns through week-by-week tracking. Convergence across the two data sources supports the validity of the conclusions, although the sequential administration (focus groups preceding journals) raises the possibility that convergence partly reflects sensitization rather than independent confirmation. Divergences revealed what each method captured more effectively.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis followed a two-stage qualitative process. Stage 1 consisted of a codebook-based qualitative content analysis: Boundary condition categories were first derived inductively from a data subset, consolidated into a codebook with operational definitions, and then applied deductively to the full corpus (broadly aligned with the directed approach described by Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Stage 2 consisted of a mechanism-oriented cross-case analysis: Coded segments were reexamined for the socio-interactional processes

the participants narrated, organized into condition–mechanism–outcome (CMO) sequences, and compared across dormitories. These CMO sequences are used here as an analytical heuristic for organizing qualitative data into interpretable sequences of antecedent, process, and consequence, rather than as a component of a realist evaluation design (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The two stages were sequential rather than parallel, with each stage primarily serving a distinct research question: Stage 1 mapped which contextual conditions the participants associated with variations in L2 engagement; Stage 2 examined how the participants described those conditions as operating; and cross-case comparisons drawn from Stage 2 addressed the conditions under which peer influence emerged or receded. Both stages were conducted using MAXQDA (version 2024), with intercoder reliability established through independent coding by a trained second coder (detailed below). All coding was performed on the original Mandarin Chinese transcripts. English quotations presented in the Results were translated by one of the researchers, a native Chinese speaker with professional proficiency in English and French, and lightly edited for readability. Culturally specific expressions (e.g., colloquial terms for academic competition or disengagement) were rendered to preserve the participants' register without sacrificing comprehensibility for an international readership. The original Mandarin Chinese excerpts are provided in Supplementary Material, Part C to enable verification.

Stage 1: Identification of boundary conditions.

The analytical framework comprised five boundary condition categories (BC1–BC5), developed through a hybrid inductive-deductive process. Following initial descriptive coding of the focus group transcripts for familiarization purposes, a cycle of open coding was applied to a subset of 50 journal responses (Weeks 1 and 2) to identify recurring contextual factors associated with variations in L2 engagement. This produced 14 initial codes, which were then grouped by conceptual similarity into five categories, each corresponding to a

distinct dimension of contextual variation: temporal conditions (BC1), spatial and co-presence conditions (BC2), virtual and digital conditions (BC3), autonomy and self-positioning conditions (BC4), and task and study mode conditions (BC5). Although the BC categories originated from an initial inductive coding cycle, they are presented here because, once stabilized, they functioned as the analytical codebook applied deductively to the full corpus. The outcomes of this application are reported in Table 3 and in the narrative findings below. A definitive codebook was established with operational definitions, inclusion indicators, and exclusion criteria for each category (see Table 2).

Table 2*Codebook: BC1–BC5 Operational Definitions, Inclusion Indicators, and Exclusion Criteria*

Code	Type	Operational Definition	Inclusion Indicators	Exclusion Criteria
BC1	Temporal	A temporal marker that explicitly modifies the intensity, valence, or existence of peer influence on L2 engagement	Exams (考试), end of semester (期末), holidays (放假), initial weeks, temporal change described	Calendar mention without articulated link to engagement change
BC2	Spatial/co-presence	A change in physical location that modifies co-presence with roommates and thereby alters exposure to peer influence	Library (图书馆), absence from dormitory (不住宿舍), home (在家), shared study spaces	Co-presence described without indication of spatial change
BC3	Virtual/digital	A digital channel serving as a substitute for or complement to physical co-presence in mediating peer influence	WeChat group (微信群), online sharing (在线分享), shared digital resources	Phone or internet use without mention of peer interaction
BC4	Autonomy/self-positioning	A personal plan or rhythm that reduces or neutralizes sensitivity to peer influence on L2 engagement	Own plan (自己的计划), own rhythm (自己的节奏), not following blindly (不盲目跟从)	General autonomy statements without articulated link to modulation of peer influence
BC5	Task/study mode	A type of pedagogical activity that constrains or facilitates exchange among roommates regarding L2 learning	Oral exam (口语考试), dialogue practice (对话练习), script writing (剧本), note review (看笔记)	Activity mention without articulated link to type of peer interaction

This definitive codebook was then applied deductively to the six focus group transcripts and to the 175 roommate-related journal responses. These 175 responses comprised 150 open-ended text responses and 25 rating-scale responses. They were drawn from seven designated items per participant—six open-ended questions and one rating-scale item—that explicitly elicited roommate-related influence across the five weekly journals. The

coding unit for the focus group data was a thematic segment, defined as one or more consecutive speaker turns addressing a single BC-related theme. Overlapping codes (e.g., BC1 × BC2) were permitted when a participant explicitly linked two conditions within the same segment. A BC code was assigned only when a participant explicitly articulated a link between a contextual condition and a change in their L2 engagement; segments without such articulation were excluded. Among the five categories, BC1–BC3 and BC5 capture changes in contextual exposure (e.g., temporal proximity, physical co-presence, digital connectivity, and task demands), while BC4 captures the participants’ self-positioning relative to peer influence. Unlike the other categories, BC4 reflects susceptibility rather than exposure—whether the individual remains receptive to or distances themselves from the peer environment as a source of influence. In the Results, BC2 is discussed under the broader label of “co-presence” to convey its theoretical significance, although the coding threshold remained the narrower criterion of a reported change in physical location. This procedure yielded 95 coded segments from the focus group data and 31 from the 150 open-ended journal responses. The 25 rating-scale items were used to corroborate valence but did not generate coded segments.

To establish intercoder reliability, a trained second coder independently coded a stratified sample from each data source: 20 focus group segments (21% of the 95 FG segments, with representation across all six dormitories) and 35 individual journal responses (23% of the 150 open-ended roommate-related responses, stratified across all weeks and dormitories). The second coder received the codebook, five annotated examples (one per BC category), and three exclusion examples, and then completed a calibration session on 10 practice responses prior to independent coding. Coding agreement was assessed on two decisions: whether a response contained a BC (yes/no), and if so, which category applied.

Overall, Cohen's kappa across both data sources was .82, indicating high agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Stage 2: Process analysis.

Building on the coded segments, both coders conducted a second analysis examining the socio-interactional mechanisms through which boundary conditions were narrated to operate. This stage was inspired by Saldaña's (2021) causation coding framework, which was adapted to the present data. For each coded segment, a CMO sequence was reconstructed by identifying three elements where discernible in the participant's account: the antecedent condition (which BC was activated), the mediating mechanism as narrated by the participant (e.g., peer modeling, normative conditioning, and collaborative synchronization), and the reported outcome on engagement. These CMO sequences were reconstructed from the participants' own accounts. When the mechanism was not explicitly stated by the participant, it was flagged as an analytical inference and marked accordingly in the coding matrix to distinguish participant-articulated mechanisms from researcher-inferred ones. Unlike the categorical coding of Stage 1, CMO reconstruction involved interpretive synthesis rather than assignment to predefined categories. Intercoder agreement was therefore ensured through joint discussion and consensus coding rather than independent categorical assignment, in line with established qualitative practice (Saldaña, 2021). This process yielded 17 CMO sequences across the six dormitories. Cross-case comparisons were then conducted using a CMO $\times$ dormitory matrix to identify the conditions under which peer influence on L2 engagement appeared to emerge or recede, with particular attention to dormitories with divergent dynamics (notably D1 vs. D3 and D5 vs. D6). In summary, Stage 1 coding addressed RQ1 by identifying the boundary conditions associated with engagement variations. The CMO reconstruction in Stage 2 addressed RQ2 by identifying socio-interactional

mechanisms, and the cross-case comparisons addressed RQ3 by examining the contextual conditions under which peer influence emerged or receded.

Results

The results are organized by research question. Verbatim excerpts from the focus group discussions and learning journals are presented in English translation (see Supplementary Material, Part C for the original Mandarin Chinese excerpts). All translations follow the procedure described in the Method section. Participants are identified by anonymized codes (P1–P25), with dormitory membership indicated by D1–D6.

Throughout this section, engagement refers to the amount of effort, time, and exposure that the participants reported devoting to French learning—that is, the behavioral dimension of engagement. Although emotional and cognitive dimensions of engagement occasionally surfaced in the participants’ accounts, they were noted where relevant rather than systematically analyzed.

RQ1: Which Boundary Conditions Are Associated with Variations in L2 Engagement?

Across the two data sources, five boundary conditions were recurrently associated with variations in the participants’ L2 engagement. As reported in the Method section, the analysis yielded 95 coded segments from the focus group data and 31 from the journals. Five FG segments received overlapping codes (e.g., BC1 × BC2) when the participants explicitly linked two conditions within a single account. In Table 3, overlapping segments are counted under their primary boundary conditions.

Table 3

Distribution of Coded FG Segments and Journal Responses by Boundary Condition and Dormitory

		D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	Total
BC1 Temporal	FG	4	1	1	5	5	6	22
	J	3	1	1	1	4	2	12
BC2 Spatial/co-presence	FG	7	4	2	3	7	4	27
	J	1	0	1	0	1	5	8
BC3 Virtual/digital	FG	4	0	0	1	3	3	11
	J	1	0	0	0	0	2	3
BC4 Autonomy/self-positioning	FG	2	1	1	2	2	4	12
	J	1	0	0	0	2	0	3
BC5 Task/study mode	FG	6	3	1	4	5	4	23
	J	1	0	0	2	2	0	5
Total	FG	23	9	5	15	22	21	95
	J	7	1	2	3	9	9	31

Note. FG = focus group segments; J = journal responses meeting the BC coding threshold. Five FG segments received overlapping codes (BC1 $\times$ BC2 in D1 and D4; BC1 $\times$ BC5 in D4; BC1 $\times$ BC4 in D5; and BC1 $\times$ BC4 in D6) and are counted under their primary codes. Primary codes were assigned to the boundary condition most elaborated within the segment; ties were resolved by the first-mentioned order.

The most salient boundary conditions in the focus group data were spatial co-presence (BC2), task/study mode (BC5), and temporal conditions (BC1), which together accounted for over three-quarters of the 95 coded segments. Autonomy (BC4) and virtual/digital conditions (BC3) were less frequently articulated. The salience of BC2 is consistent with the centrality

of physical co-presence in the participants' accounts: "When I see P19 reviewing vocabulary, it suddenly hits me—oh, I haven't studied French yet" (P18, D5; Excerpt 1). BC5 similarly reflected how task type shaped peer interaction: "We had the role-play assignment, a video—I wrote the script. [...] I could feel that I was producing something with this language. I felt very motivated to learn" (P4, D1; Excerpt 2). These two conditions—co-presence and task structure—figured centrally in the mechanisms examined under RQ2.

The two data sources yielded different BC rankings—BC1 > BC2 > BC5 in the journals versus BC2 > BC5 > BC1 in the focus groups—consistent with the distinct affordances of each method: The journals captured temporal fluctuations on a weekly basis, while the focus groups more readily elicited accounts of spatial co-presence and task-related dynamics. Density also varied across dormitories: D1 (23 FG segments), D5 (22), and D6 (21) produced the richest accounts, while D3 generated only 5. D2 produced only 1 journal segment but 9 FG segments. This disparity likely reflects differences in how this dormitory's dynamics were articulated across methods rather than differences in the presence of peer influence itself. BC4 was notably more prevalent in D6 (4 FG segments) than in D1–D5 (1–2 each), a contrast examined further under RQ3.

A contextualizing observation concerns the distribution of the journal responses as a whole. Of the 150 open-ended text responses within the 175 designated journal items (excluding the 25 rating-scale responses), 58 (39%) explicitly reported no roommate influence on French learning that week (e.g., "no" and "none"). A further portion described interactions, such as studying together for exams or sharing resources, but without articulating a link to a change in engagement. Only 31 responses (21%) met the coding threshold: an explicit connection between a contextual condition and a reported change in engagement. This distribution indicates that peer influence on engagement, as reported on a weekly basis, was the exception rather than the norm. The boundary conditions identified in

this study thus describe a conditional process—one that emerged under specific configurations rather than operating as a constant feature of dormitory life. This pattern is consistent with the emergence and receding dynamics examined under RQ3.

RQ2: Through Which Socio-Interactional Mechanisms Are These BC–Engagement Associations Narrated to Operate?

The 17 CMO sequences identified across the six dormitories converged on three interrelated patterns: the predominant mechanism itself, the dimension of engagement it was narrated to affect, and the directionality of its reported effects (Table 4).

Table 4

Mechanism Types Identified Across the 17 CMO Sequences

Mechanism Type	Description	Dormitories
Peer modeling	Observing a roommate’s engagement prompts behavioral adjustment in the observer.	D1, D2, D4, D5, D6
Normative conditioning and social comparison	Collective norms and social comparison shape whether and how the modeling signal is responded to.	D1, D2, D5
Collaborative synchronization	Shared routines, mutual reminding, resource exchange, or emotional support sustain collective engagement.	D1, D4, D5

Note. D3 produced no identifiable CMO sequences. Peer modeling was the predominant mechanism, with the remaining two types typically operating in conjunction with it.

Peer modeling conditioned by collective norms.

The predominant mechanism across the dataset was peer modeling: The participants described observing a roommate engaged in French-related activity and subsequently adjusting their own behavior. This mechanism appeared in five of six dormitories (all except D3, where no co-presence–based studying was reported). However, the strength of the reported response varied in ways that the participants linked to the prevailing norms of their dormitory. In D4, in which the collective orientation was described as low-effort—“My

baseline is not wanting to study—I want to slack off, I want to sleep” (P14, D4; Excerpt 3)—the effect of observing a studious peer was reported as temporary: “The guy next door grinds every day. Seeing him grind, I feel like I should grind too—so I study for one hour and go back to slacking off” (P14, D4; Excerpt 4). In D5, in which the participants described a shared orientation toward French learning, the same mechanism was reported as recurring and reciprocal (P18, D5; P17, D5). In D6, in which the participants expressed high individual autonomy, the effect was acknowledged but described as marginal: “Living alone, there wouldn’t be much difference. [...] But with roommates, seeing others doing it gives a bit more drive” (P21, D6; Excerpt 5).

The participants in D2 added a further nuance. P6 (D2) described the process as involuntary and moderate: “Without thinking about it—say he’s studying while I’m eating or lying in bed—seeing him study gives my own studying a certain boost” (P6, D2; Excerpt 6). P8 (D2) specified that the response was mediated not by imitation but by unease: “Seeing others study while I’m resting—it makes me uneasy, and that pushes me to study” (Excerpt 7). Across these accounts, the mechanism was consistent—visual co-presence of a studying peer was narrated to prompt a behavioral response. However, the magnitude of that response and the affect mediating it were described as conditioned by the dormitory’s collective orientation.

Variations in engagement rather than motivational orientation.

Among the 95 focus group segments, the vast majority described variations in engagement rather than in motivational orientation. Only one participant, P17 (D5), described a change in her motivational orientation, and this was narrated as having accumulated over multiple semesters of shared living rather than arising in response to a specific boundary condition: “My roommates’ influence is more about how I see learning. [...] Before, as a

commuter student, learning was a duty. [...] But with my current roommates, seeing them study so seriously, I've come to feel that learning might be an interest" (P17, D5; Excerpt 8).

While most participants' accounts implicitly described variations in engagement without explicitly drawing the orientation/engagement distinction, two participants articulated it explicitly. In the same passage cited above, P6 (D2) differentiated between what he termed motivation-direction (动机) and motivation-intensity (动力): "My motivation-direction is basically unaffected, but my motivation-intensity is often influenced by the dormitory atmosphere" (Excerpt 9). P20 (D5) described a similar pattern: "Who I live with doesn't determine how I am during exam periods—I study no matter what. But it determines my study behavior during the less pressured times" (Excerpt 10). These accounts suggest that the boundary conditions identified in this study, particularly BC2, were associated primarily with the behavioral dimension of engagement rather than with the participants' motivational orientation.

This distinction was further reflected in the Week 5 journal data. Several participants, when asked to reflect on what they had learned about their own motivation over the five-week period, showed an ability to distinguish between stable and fluctuating aspects of their motivation. P4 (D1, Week 5 journal) distinguished between the timescales on which external and internal motivational influences operate: "Both internal and external factors have important effects, but comparatively, external factors tend to produce large, temporary impacts, while internal factors manifest as gradual accumulation and change" (Excerpt 11). P16 (D4, Week 5 journal) reported discovering that his motivation was almost entirely externally driven: "I discovered that my motivation for learning comes almost entirely from external, unavoidable factors, such as exams" (Excerpt 12)—a realization that identified the source structure of his own motivational experience. Most strikingly, P2 (D1, Week 5 journal) articulated a metacognitive awareness about the social basis of what he had previously

attributed to self-regulation: “My ‘self-discipline’ is actually based on the performance of people around me” (Excerpt 13). While these reflections were not generated through the BC coding procedure, they provide converging evidence that the participants possessed a capacity for metamotivational monitoring (Miele & Scholer, 2018)—that is, the ability to reflect on their own motivational states and to discriminate between components that are dispositional and those that are situationally responsive. This capacity is examined further in the Discussion.

Positive asymmetry.

A recurring pattern, documented most explicitly in D4 and with supporting accounts in D2 and D1, was that peer influence was described as capable of increasing engagement but not of reducing it below a participant’s individual baseline. P16 (D4) stated this most explicitly: “If I don’t want to study, that’s because of me. [...] I won’t stop studying because everyone else is gaming. [...] But if I see others working hard, I will go study” (P16, D4; Excerpt 14). P13 (D4) corroborated this: “When others are working, I work too. When they’re slacking off, I just keep doing my thing” (Excerpt 15). One account offered potential counter-evidence: P18 (D5) described losing an hour to unplanned conversation when her roommates were chatting. However, this concerned a loss of attention rather than a decrease in engagement as such. Given that this pattern was documented in several dormitories and that the counter-evidence was limited, positive asymmetry is treated here as a preliminary observation rather than as an established finding.

The patterns identified under RQ2—peer modeling conditioned by collective norms, engagement rather than motivational orientation, and a tentative positive asymmetry—raise a further question: Under what contextual conditions do such patterns of peer influence emerge in some dormitories but not in others?

RQ3: Under What Contextual Conditions Is Dormitory-Based Peer Influence on L2

Engagement Described to Emerge or Recede?

To examine the conditions under which peer influence on L2 engagement was described to emerge or recede, cross-case comparisons were conducted between two pairs of dormitories. The pairs were selected on two criteria: same year level with divergent BC density (D1 vs. D3), and different year levels with comparable density but qualitatively distinct patterns (D5 vs. D6).

D1 versus D3: Emergence conditions.

D1 and D3 shared the same structural features: Both were first-year male dormitories with four residents each, enrolled in the same courses with the same instructors. Yet D1 produced 23 coded segments and four CMO sequences, while D3 produced only 5 segments and no identifiable CMO sequences within the coded corpus. The density contrast between D1 and D3 does not demonstrate that peer influence was absent in D3; rather, it indicates that D3 residents articulated fewer BC-related accounts—a finding consistent with, but not proof of, fewer emergence conditions.

D1 residents described a dormitory life in which French learning was collectively enacted: They studied together at the library (BC2), shared VIP accounts and WeChat-based resources (BC3), and collaboratively produced role-play scripts and exercises with a sense of mutual accountability (BC5). Relationship quality was sufficiently high that spontaneous invitations and reciprocal encouragement occurred routinely. D3 presented a contrasting picture across all four conditions. Residents described studying in four separate locations with minimal overlap (BC2), reported no digital sharing (BC3), and treated the same role-play assignment as an individual rather than as a collectively enacted activity, as described by P10 (D3). P9 (D3) characterized dormitory interaction as minimal: “Our conversations are limited to no more than five sentences” (Excerpt 16).

These contrasts suggest that peer influence on L2 engagement, as described by the participants, was not a mechanical consequence of physical proximity. Rather, it was narrated to emerge more readily when four conditions were jointly present: regular co-presence in study-conducive settings, a relational quality sufficient for mutual observation to be tolerated, at least one collectively enacted task, and a shared academic structure providing common reference points. D1 met all four; D3 met only the last. These conditions are proposed as candidate emergence factors to be tested with larger samples in subsequent phases of the research.

D5 versus D6: Contrasting influence patterns across year levels.

D5 (Y2, female) and D6 (Y3, male) both produced rich datasets (22 and 21 FG segments, respectively), but the nature of the peer influence described differed qualitatively. This comparison also involves a difference in gender composition, as D5 was the only female dormitory in the sample; the observed contrasts therefore cannot be attributed to year level or shared academic structure alone. In D5, influence was described as motivational: The participants reported that observing roommates' engagement affected their own motivation and engagement in French learning (BC2), narrated as motivational in nature. In D6, where peer influence was described at all, it appeared to operate at an informational rather than motivational level: Roommates served as sources of practical information (“查缺补漏,” checking one another's gaps; P24, D6) rather than as motivational catalysts.

Three structural differences accompanied the D5–D6 contrast. The most prominent was the presence or absence of a shared academic structure: D5 residents described still attending common French courses (reduced, according to their accounts, from 16 to 8 hours per week following their return from a semester exchange in France), whereas D6 residents reported that they no longer shared French courses and that several had already passed the B2-level examination. P25 (D6) articulated this directly: “For French, it's mainly self-driven.

[...] Now there are no French classes, no shared study environment. So their influence on me—to be honest, I think right now there is none” (Excerpt 17). A second difference concerned the locus of collective norms. P24 (D6) drew an explicit distinction: “This kind of thing exists. But it’s not a dormitory consensus—it’s a class consensus. Our course format is like high school; everyone attends together, so our study rhythm is collectively aligned” (Excerpt 18). A third difference concerned the dormitory’s social function: In D5, it was described as a space of shared academic life; in D6, P23 (D6) characterized it as a space of withdrawal: “For communal living, the fewer people, the better. Every day I come back to the dorm, say nothing, and lie down” (Excerpt 19).

When the class structure described by the participants as underpinning collective alignment was no longer present in Y3, the dormitory was generally no longer described as a site of motivational influence in the participants’ accounts. The D5–D6 contrast is thus consistent with the interpretation that peer influence on L2 engagement may recede when a shared academic structure disappears. However, this pattern is drawn from a single Y3 dormitory and cannot be disentangled from year-level effects with the present data. Whether this contrast reflects a broader pattern of year-level progression or is specific to this dormitory’s composition remains unresolved and warrants further investigation.

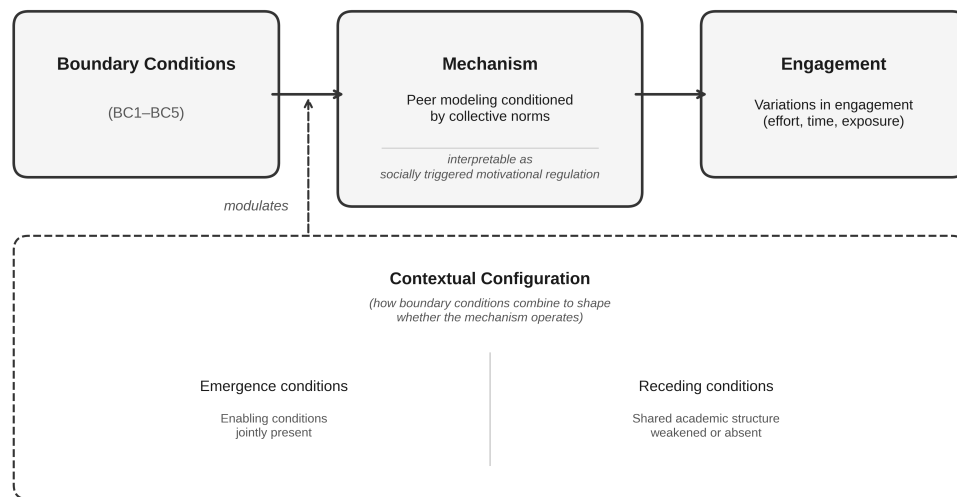
Discussion

This study set out to identify the boundary conditions under which dormitory-based peer influence on L2 engagement operates, the socio-interactional mechanisms through which it is experienced, and the contextual conditions under which such influence emerges or recedes. Three sets of findings emerged from the analysis of focus group discussions and weekly learning journals collected from 25 French-major students across six dormitories and three year levels (Y1–Y3) at a Chinese university.

First, five boundary conditions—temporal conditions, spatial co-presence in study settings, digital connectivity, perceived autonomy over study decisions, and alignment of task or study mode—were recurrently associated with variations in the participants’ engagement. Second, the predominant mechanism through which these conditions were narrated to operate was peer modeling conditioned by collective norms: The participants did not simply imitate their roommates’ behavior but responded to it through a normative frame that shaped whether and how engagement changed. These changes overwhelmingly concerned the behavioral dimension of engagement rather than motivational orientation. A preliminary pattern of positive asymmetry also emerged: Peer influence was described as capable of increasing engagement but not of reducing it below individual baselines. Third, cross-case comparisons suggested that this mechanism emerged more readily when four contextual conditions were jointly present, and that it weakened as the shared academic structure diminished. Figure 1 presents a tentative heuristic model of the proposed BC–mechanism–engagement pattern. The model represents the main analytical chain—from boundary conditions through normatively conditioned peer modeling to variations in engagement. It also incorporates the contextual configuration that modulates whether the mechanism operates.

Figure 1

Boundary Conditions, Mechanism, and Variations in Engagement as Reconstructed From Participants' Accounts



Note. Solid boxes represent the main analytical chain. The dashed box represents how conditions combine to shape whether the mechanism operates. The model depicts a process-level pattern rather than proposing a causal model; contextual configuration is shown as modulating the mechanism, although direct contextual influence on engagement is not excluded. The model is offered as a tentative heuristic summary of the observed patterns and as a source of working propositions for subsequent investigation. Details of emergence and receding conditions are elaborated in the text.

Normatively Conditioned Peer Modeling as a Process Linking Boundary Conditions to Engagement

The predominant mechanism identified in this study—peer modeling conditioned by collective norms—extends existing accounts of peer influence in important ways. While social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) provides the theoretical basis for observational learning, the present findings suggest that modeling alone is insufficient to explain the patterns observed. The same behavioral signal—seeing a roommate engaged in French-

related activity—was described as producing qualitatively different responses depending on the normative context of the dormitory. Where French learning was collectively practiced and normatively supported, observing a roommate studying was associated with increased engagement; where dormitory norms did not support engagement, the same behavioral cue was not reported to prompt any change.

This normative conditioning is consistent with Volet's (2001) cognitive-situative perspective, in which the affordances of the learning context shape whether and how learners engage. More specifically, it aligns with context-sensitivity accounts in which environmental cues activate motivational appraisals, shaping what learners take from the same situation (Boekaerts, 2001). It further extends accounts that position peers as constitutive of the motivational system (Vauras et al., 2009), and supports the view that context shapes engagement rather than functioning merely as a background variable (Hickey & McCaslin, 2001). The present findings open the black box of peer influence on academic outcomes (Cao et al., 2024; Ha, 2016; Sacerdote, 2001) by suggesting that such influence on engagement is not a generic spillover but a normatively conditioned process whose operation appears to depend on the social configuration of the living environment. Which specific normative features—shared task demands, collective routines, or relational quality sufficient for mutual observation—contribute most to this conditioning remains a question for subsequent research.

A second finding concerns the aspect of engagement on which peer influence appeared to operate. The participants' accounts overwhelmingly described variations in engagement rather than changes in their motivational orientations. The single case in which a shift in motivational orientation was described involved experience accumulated over multiple semesters rather than a proximal peer trigger. These observations suggest that the peer influence documented here operated primarily on the behavioral dimension of

engagement (cf. Fredricks et al., 2004) rather than on the motivational orientations typically examined in L2 motivation research (Dörnyei, 2005).

This observation has implications for how the present findings relate to the motivation regulation literature. Wolters (2003) and Schwinger et al. (2009) conceptualized motivation regulation as strategies aimed at sustaining or increasing effort in the face of motivational challenges. The peer influence described by the participants served a functionally similar role—amplifying engagement—but was triggered by the social environment rather than by deliberate self-regulatory action. Whether such social triggering constitutes a distinct regulatory process or a socially situated source of a similar outcome cannot be resolved definitively with the present qualitative data. This question is therefore treated as a theoretical implication rather than a taxonomic claim. Instruments that separately capture engagement and motivational orientation could help clarify this distinction in future research.

A third, more tentative pattern concerns the valence of peer influence. Across dormitories where peer modeling was reported, the participants described it as capable of increasing their engagement but not of reducing it below their individual baselines. This positive asymmetry is noteworthy because peer influence on academic outcomes is not necessarily unidirectional. If confirmed by subsequent research, this pattern would suggest that socially triggered motivation regulation is asymmetrically distributed—more effective at amplifying engagement than at diminishing it. This would have implications for how peer influence is modeled in future quantitative research. The discrepancy between the asymmetry observed here and the more variable effects reported in quantitative peer effects research may reflect a genuine difference between self-reported engagement and academic performance measures. Engagement may be more strongly constrained by individual dispositions than performance is. Equally, the discrepancy may reflect self-presentation dynamics in focus group settings, where the participants discussed peer influence in the presence of the

roommates being discussed, potentially suppressing reports of negative effects. Given the qualitative design and reliance on self-reported accounts, a systematic investigation of this asymmetry, using instruments that capture both positive and negative dimensions of peer influence, is needed before any stronger conclusion can be drawn.

Contextual Conditions for the Emergence and Weakening of Peer Influence

The cross-case comparisons conducted under RQ3 suggest that peer influence on engagement was not a mechanical consequence of sharing a dormitory. Rather, its emergence appeared to depend on four jointly present conditions: physical co-presence in study-relevant settings, relational quality sufficient for mutual observation, at least one collectively enacted academic task, and a shared academic structure providing common curricular demands. When one first-year dormitory exhibited all four conditions, the participants described rich patterns of peer modeling; when another with comparable structural features—same courses, same instructors, same semester—lacked relational quality and collective academic activity, such patterns were less salient in participants' accounts. The implication is that proximity creates an enabling but insufficient condition; what appeared to matter was whether the dormitory functioned as a shared learning ecology rather than merely a shared living space.

These four conditions are best understood not as separable predictors to be ranked by individual weight but as a configuration of mutually reinforcing affordances. Within Volet's (2001) framework, affordances are not properties of physical settings but emerge from the interaction between contextual features and the social practices enacted within them. This perspective supports treating the four conditions as jointly constituting the ecology within which peer modeling became operative, rather than as independent variables each capable of sufficing alone. Boekaerts's (2001) account of context sensitivity offers a complementary lens: The same structural arrangement activated different motivational appraisals depending on whether the relational and normative context supported engagement as a shared practice.

Whether these conditions operate in a strictly conjunctive manner or whether some carry greater weight cannot be determined from the present data and remains a question for research involving larger and more diverse dormitory samples.

A complementary dynamic emerged in comparisons involving later-year dormitory contexts. The D5–D6 contrast appeared to be associated with the weakening of shared academic structure rather than year level. When the shared academic structure underpinning collective alignment was reduced or no longer present, the dormitory was generally no longer described as a site of motivational influence. Instead, peer interaction shifted toward informational exchange (e.g., sharing resources and practical advice) without the engagement-amplifying quality observed in earlier stages. This pattern suggests that dormitory-based peer influence on engagement may be structurally contingent: It depends not only on the interpersonal configuration within the room but also on the institutional arrangements that create occasions for shared academic experience. As these institutional arrangements recede, the normative frame that conditioned peer modeling appears to dissolve with them. Whether this weakening involves threshold effects and whether alternative shared structures could sustain the mechanism are questions that require longitudinal designs tracking configurations over time. Whether the contextual configuration also exerts a direct influence on engagement, bypassing the mechanism entirely, remains an open question that the present design cannot resolve. These patterns of emergence and weakening raise a broader theoretical question: How does dormitory-based peer influence relate to existing accounts of motivation regulation?

Theoretical Implications

Existing motivation regulation frameworks remain centered on individual strategy use (Schwinger et al., 2009; Wolters, 2003). Even recent extensions incorporating social support as a strategic dimension (Berger & Cosnefroy, 2026) do not theorize the social environment

itself as a source of regulation. The present findings point to a complementary dynamic that existing frameworks have not yet theorized: How engagement is amplified not through deliberate self-regulation but through exposure to peers whose behavior, within a normatively supportive context, appears to prompt motivation regulation in the absence of deliberate self-initiation. The social sources of self-regulation identified by Zimmerman (2000)—modeling and social feedback—provide a theoretical precedent for locating the sources of regulation beyond the individual. What the present study adds is an empirically grounded account of the configurations under which such social triggering operates in a naturalistic residential setting.

At the same time, the scope of this contribution must be specified. The data show that boundary conditions in the dormitory were associated with changes in individual engagement. The regulation itself, as described by participants, remained an individual response to a social cue rather than a reciprocal regulatory process between peers. The process identified—social cue prompting engagement change—is functionally similar to motivation regulation as defined by Schwinger et al. (2009) and Wolters (2003), in that it serves to sustain or amplify engagement. The distinguishing feature is that this outcome was triggered by the social environment rather than by individual choice. We use the term “socially triggered motivation regulation” as a working designation for this pattern. It refers to a family of processes in which contextual configurations prompt motivation regulation without deliberate self-initiation. Whether this family of processes belongs within existing motivation regulation frameworks or constitutes a distinct process remains a question for subsequent investigation.

As reported under RQ2, several participants demonstrated the capacity to distinguish between stable components of motivational orientation and situationally fluctuating engagement. This capacity is consistent with metamotivational monitoring, defined by Miele and Scholer (2018) as the ability to reflect on one’s own motivational states and discriminate between dispositional and situationally responsive components. Within the broader MASRL

framework (Efklides & Schwartz, 2024), such monitoring represents a metacognitive-affective process that enables learners to calibrate their motivation regulation by distinguishing between motivational states of different origins. P2's awareness that his perceived self-discipline was socially conditioned is particularly consistent with this framework: It illustrates how metamotivational monitoring can reveal the social basis of what learners had attributed to individual regulation. A systematic examination of metamotivational processes was beyond the scope of the present study, which was designed to capture boundary conditions and mechanisms at the social-contextual level. However, the weekly learning journals, which contain richer self-reflective material than the focus group discussions, offer a basis for investigating how metamotivational awareness interacts with socially triggered motivation regulation in a companion analysis (Efklides et al., 2026).

Limitations

The study drew on a predominantly male sample of six dormitories, including only one at the third-year level, at a single Chinese university. It also relied on self-reported accounts rather than direct observation. The patterns identified therefore reflect the participants' retrospective narratives about peer influence rather than independently verified behavioral processes. This reliance on self-report warrants caution in transferring the findings to settings where peer influence may operate below the level of conscious awareness. Social desirability dynamics and the sequential instrument administration (focus groups preceding journals) may have further shaped what the participants reported. In particular, the focus group format, in which roommates discussed peer influence in one another's presence, may have discouraged reports of negative peer effects and contributed to the positive asymmetry observed in the data. Additionally, the journal data were collected during a five-week period spanning exam preparation and the examination itself (December–January). This high-stakes phase may have intensified certain peer dynamics (e.g., collective revision) while suppressing

others (e.g., individual study in libraries rather than dormitories). The boundary conditions identified may therefore partly reflect this specific temporal context rather than peer influence dynamics across the full academic year.

The analytical design captured only one direction of influence—from peer behavior to individual engagement—without examining reciprocal dynamics. It also examined only one outcome domain (engagement), limiting the study's ability to systematically distinguish among possible dimensions of engagement. The theoretical frameworks employed originate primarily in North American and Western European contexts. Therefore, whether findings linked to institutionally assigned co-residence and shared academic structure transfer to settings with different residential arrangements remains an open question. This comparison is nevertheless theoretically informative precisely because the Chinese residential university system provides a naturally occurring ecology of sustained peer proximity rarely available where students self-select into housing.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Shanghai Jiao Tong University for facilitating access to the dormitory sites and supporting the data collection process. They are also deeply thankful to the 25 participants who generously shared their experiences across the five-week data collection period. The authors also wish to thank Sara Da Silva and Rajabu Abdalah Shafii for their careful reading of the manuscript.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Yichen Wang: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Project administration. Jean-Louis Berger: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

Ethics Statement

No formal ethics committee approval was obtained for this study, as the research was conducted prior to the implementation of institutional ethics review requirements at the host university. The study was conducted in compliance with the Personal Information Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (PIPL, 2021). All 25 participants were legal adults (aged 18 or older) who provided informed consent, obtained both orally and in writing, prior to data collection, including consent to audio recording. Participation was voluntary and conducted at both the dormitory and individual levels; participants could decline or withdraw at any time without penalty. All data were pseudonymized during transcription, analysis, and reporting. No personally identifiable information is disclosed in the manuscript.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the manuscript preparation process

During the preparation of this work the authors used DeepL Write in order to improve language and readability. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

References

- Al-Hoorie, A. H., & MacIntyre, P. D. (Eds.). (2020). *Contemporary language motivation theory: 60 years since Gardner and Lambert (1959)*. Multilingual Matters.
<https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788925211>
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Berger, J.-L., & Cosnefroy, L. (2026). Development and validity evidence of the Motivational Regulation Strategies Inventory (MRSI). *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829261447334>
- Boekaerts, M. (2001). Context sensitivity: Activated motivational beliefs, current concerns and emotional arousal. In S. Volet & S. Järvelä (Eds.), *Motivation in learning contexts: Theoretical advances and methodological implications* (pp. 17–32). Pergamon.
- Boekaerts, M., & Corno, L. (2005). Self-regulation in the classroom: A perspective on assessment and intervention. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 54(2), 199–231. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2005.00205.x>
- Boo, Z., Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). L2 motivation research 2005–2014: Understanding a publication surge and a changing landscape. *System*, 55, 145–157.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2015.10.006>
- Cao, Y., Zhou, T., & Gao, J. (2024). Heterogeneous peer effects of college roommates on academic performance. *Nature Communications*, 15, Article 4785.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-49228-7>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

- Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002). Motivational beliefs, values, and goals. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 109–132.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135153>
- Efklides, A., Gonida, E. N., & Kikas, E. (2026). Metamotivational processes in self-regulated learning: Exploring the implications for research, theory, and educational practice. *Educational Psychology Review*, 38(1), Article 53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-026-10154-3>
- Efklides, A., & Schwartz, B. L. (2024). Revisiting the Metacognitive and Affective Model of Self-Regulated Learning: Origins, development, and future directions. *Educational Psychology Review*, 36, Article 61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-024-09896-9>
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59–109.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059>
- Ha, W. (2016). Quasi-experimental evidence of academic peer effects at an Elite University in People's Republic of China. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 17(4), 703–718.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-016-9461-6>
- Hadwin, A. F., Järvelä, S., & Miller, M. (2018). Self-regulation, co-regulation, and shared regulation in collaborative learning environments. In D. H. Schunk & J. A. Greene (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation of learning and performance* (2nd ed., pp. 83–99). Routledge.
- Hickey, D. T., & McCaslin, M. (2001). A comparative, sociocultural analysis of context and motivation. In S. Volet & S. Järvelä (Eds.), *Motivation in learning contexts: Theoretical advances and methodological implications* (pp. 33–55). Pergamon.
- Hiver, P., Al-Hoorie, A. H., & Mercer, S. (Eds.). (2021). *Student engagement in the language classroom*. Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788923613>

- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Huang, Z., Hu, X., Yu, X., & Deng, J. (2024). Profiles of EFL learners' motivational regulation strategies and their nonlinear relationship to English writing performance in mainland China. *Metacognition and Learning*, 19, 721–742.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11409-024-09386-x>
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). SAGE.
- Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics*, 33(1), 159–174. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2529310>
- Li, C. (2023). Exploring L2 motivational dynamics among Chinese EAP learners in an EMI context from a socio-cultural perspective. *SAGE Open*, 13(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231172704>
- Luo, S., & Gan, Z. (2026). Use of motivational regulation strategies and its relations to motivational beliefs in a college English course context. *Language Teaching Research*, 30(6), 3206–3232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688231217095>
- Luo, S., Gan, Z., & An, Z. (2026). Validating a measure of motivational regulation strategies and examining their relationship to English proficiency. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 16(1), 77–104. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.38771>
- Miele, D. B., & Scholer, A. A. (2018). The role of metamotivational monitoring in motivation regulation. *Educational Psychologist*, 53(1), 1–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2017.1371601>
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2017). *Regulations on the management of students in regular higher education institutions* [普通高等学校学生

管理规定] (Order No. 41).

https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2017/content_5220900.htm

Morgan, D. L. (2019). *Basic and advanced focus groups*. SAGE.

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071814307>

National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Natural Resources, Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, People's Bank of China, & National Financial Regulatory Administration. (2024). *Guidance on strengthening the construction of university student dormitories* [关于加强高校学生宿舍建设的指导意见] (Document No. Fagai Shehui [2024] 25).

https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xxgk/zcfb/tz/202401/t20240118_1363446.html

Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (1997). *Realistic evaluation*. SAGE.

Pu, S., Yan, Y., & Zhang, L. (2020). Peers, study effort, and academic performance in college education: Evidence from randomly assigned roommates in a flipped classroom.

Research in Higher Education, 61(2), 248–269. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-019-09571-x>

Reeve, J. (2012). A self-determination theory perspective on student engagement. In S. L.

Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 149–172). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-2018-7_7

Sacerdote, B. (2001). Peer effects with random assignment: Results for Dartmouth roommates. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 116(2), 681–704.

<https://doi.org/10.1162/00335530151144131>

Sacerdote, B. (2011). Peer effects in education: How might they work, how big are they and how much do we know thus far? In E. A. Hanushek, S. Machin, & L. Woessmann (Eds.), *Handbook of the economics of education* (Vol. 3, pp. 249–277). Elsevier.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-53429-3.00004-1>

- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Sato, M., & Ballinger, S. (Eds.). (2016). *Peer interaction and second language learning: Pedagogical potential and research agenda*. John Benjamins.
<https://doi.org/10.1075/llt.45>
- Schmitz, B., & Wiese, B. S. (2006). New perspectives for the evaluation of training sessions in self-regulated learning: Time-series analyses of diary data. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 31(1), 64–96.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2005.02.002>
- Schwinger, M., Steinmayr, R., & Spinath, B. (2009). How do motivational regulation strategies affect achievement: Mediated by effort management and moderated by intelligence. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 19(4), 621–627.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2009.08.006>
- Stinebrickner, R., & Stinebrickner, T. R. (2006). What can be learned about peer effects using college roommates? Evidence from new survey data and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. *Journal of Public Economics*, 90(8–9), 1435–1454.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2006.03.002>
- Ushioda, E. (2009). A person-in-context relational view of emergent motivation, self and identity. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 215–228). Multilingual Matters.
- Vauras, M., Salonen, P., Lehtinen, E., & Kinnunen, R. (2009). Motivation in school from contextual and longitudinal perspectives. In M. Wosnitza, S. A. Karabenick, A. Efklides, & P. Nenniger (Eds.), *Contemporary motivation research: From global to local perspectives* (pp. 1–23). Hogrefe.
- Vereshchahina, T., Cosnefroy, L., & Berger, J.-L. (2026). *Motivational regulation strategies in EFL: Insights from a scoping review*. SSRN. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=6175839>

- Volet, S. (2001). Understanding learning and motivation in context: A multi-dimensional and multi-level cognitive-situative perspective. In S. Volet & S. Järvelä (Eds.), *Motivation in learning contexts: Theoretical advances and methodological implications* (pp. 57–82). Pergamon.
- Volet, S., & Järvelä, S. (Eds.). (2001). *Motivation in learning contexts: Theoretical advances and methodological implications*. Pergamon.
- Wolters, C. A. (2003). Regulation of motivation: Evaluating an underemphasized aspect of self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 38(4), 189–205.
https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326985EP3804_1
- Xu, G. (2023). *Roommate relationships in Chinese university dormitories: Students' life experience and perception* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield]. White Rose eTheses Online. <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/34689/>
- Zhang, Y., & Dong, L. (2022). A study of the impacts of motivational regulation and self-regulated second-language writing strategies on college students' proximal and distal writing enjoyment and anxiety. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 938346.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.938346>
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: A social cognitive perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 13–39). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012109890-2/50031-7>