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Corresponding email address: lawrie.moore@gmail.com

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Exploring the Potential of *Study With Me* as an English-Language Learning Tool: A Multiple-Case Study of Secondary School Pupils in Austria

Lawrie Moore, Vienna, Austria

Abstract

This article investigates the use of in-real-time *Study with Me* streaming sessions as an out-of-class tool for English-language learning among Austrian secondary school students. Taking the form of a multiple-case study, this paper examines how three students utilize *Study with Me* to support their English-language development. Through semi-structured interviews and member checking, the study explores participants' motivations, interaction patterns, and learning strategies during *Study with Me* sessions. Findings reveal a nuanced approach to *Study with Me* use, emphasizing its role in minimizing distractions, fostering a sense of community, and enhancing self-regulation skills. While participants perceive *Study with Me* as beneficial primarily for subjects requiring process internalization, they acknowledge only limited utility for English-language learning. The study underscores the need for further research on the efficacy of *Study with Me* in non-language learning contexts and highlights students' adaptive learning strategies within an exams-oriented education system.

Keywords: *Study with Me*, self-regulation, learning strategy, secondary school, Austria

In many European countries, the final years of secondary school necessitate rigorous study and significant time spent learning for exams. This is no different in Austria, where it is estimated that pupils spend an average of 124 minutes/day studying (Tatzberger & Skala, 2022) and that parents spend €720/year on out-of-school tutoring (Arbeiterkammer, 2023). This has intensified in recent decades due in part to an Austrian school reform triggered by low rankings on OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in the early 2000s (Wiesner & Heißenberger, 2019). Negative media attention about inequality and accountability drove the country's politicians at the time to pass a school reform strengthening centralization of the school system. In an attempt to increase both the quality and equality of education in the country, an output-oriented and standards-based education system was implemented (Graß, 2017); the types and frequency of exams are mandated by federal law and the Austrian school-leaving exam (*Matura*) is centralized. What resulted from the reform is a culture of intense academic learning, competitive test performance, and emphasis on high marks (Altrichter et al., 2014).

It is within this context that many pupils in Austria find themselves studying long hours in order to pass their exams. At the same time, they, like many secondary schoolers

around the world, spend a significant amount of time on social media: 161 minutes/day for Austrian youth (DerStandard, 2022). It is perhaps unsurprising that these learners have developed strategies to couple their need to study with their free-time use of social media; the intersection of these two activities is the focus of this paper, the use of *Study with Me* as a learning tool.

Originally from South Korea, *Study with Me* is in-real-life streaming content wherein content creators, mostly on YouTube or TikTok, livestream themselves silently studying. Viewers study along with the content creator, often taking regular, scheduled breaks simultaneously. *Study with Me* is beginning to be a subject of research, with findings pointing towards an increase in productivity of users (Jhuang et al., 2022) and higher motivation and engagement (Kim & Ryoo, 2023). This paper adds to the growing conversation about *Study with Me* and seeks to draw attention to its potential as a learning-support tool. At the time of writing, there is very little research on the use of *Study with Me* as a learning tool of secondary school pupils, especially in English-language learning.

The research in this paper takes the form of a multiple-case study to explore how and why three Austrian secondary school pupils use *Study with Me* outside the classroom and how this tool supports their English-language development. Using data from semi-structured interviews and results from member checking, i.e., having the research participants review and revise the findings of the data analysis (Gall et al., 2011), this paper seeks to highlight ways that *Study with Me* can enhance the English-language learning process for pupils in this age group.

Literature Review

***Study With Me* as a Learning Community**

Being part of a learning community can benefit the learner by improving academic performance, increasing academic satisfaction, strengthening communication skills, and enhancing awareness of the learner's self and others in the community (Lenning & Ebberts, 1999). According to West and Williams (2017), a learning community has four defining characteristics: access, relationships, vision, and function. Using this framework to define *Study with Me* as a learning community, access represents a common meeting place, e.g., a YouTube channel created by a streamer who livestreams or records *Study with Me* sessions; relationship refers to a sense of belonging to the *Study with Me* community of learners; vision concerns having the shared goal of using *Study with Me* to concentrate while studying; and

function involves what the users do while using *Study with Me*, e.g., quietly study for 50 minutes followed by a 10-minute break.

The learning community on *Study with Me* can be seen as having two levels of interaction: parasocial and peer-to-peer. The parasocial relationship represents the connection users feel towards the *Study with Me* creator; this is often a one-sided relationship in which the user looks up to or even idolizes the YouTuber, feeling a sense of intimacy with that individual (Kurtin et al., 2018). A study by Jhuang et al. (2022) showed that the parasocial relationship with *Study with Me* content creators led to increased learning productivity because users felt encouraged by the creator, developed a sense of guilt when not joining a session, and enjoyed the ritual of being a part of *Study with Me*.

With both parasocial and peer-to-peer relationships on *Study with Me*, there is an element of vicarious learning in that users observe and imitate other members of the learning community (Jia et al., 2024). While users do not explicitly learn with each other, they learn in the social presence of others, which leads to increased motivation to study (Lee et al., 2021). Vicarious and social learning both suggest elements of interaction. Because the purpose of *Study with Me* is to provide a quiet learning environment, the interactions are generally during breaks or in chats and serve a community-building purpose (Ibtasar et al., 2022).

English-Language Learning on Social Media

Social media environments provide English language learners various opportunities to view, learn, and practice the language (Lee, 2023). Applying the Council of Europe's (n.d.) definitions of formal, informal, and non-formal learning, *Study with Me* affords learning opportunities that blur the boundaries between all three. Users stream *Study with Me* with the conscious goal of using the channel as a learning space, i.e., it serves as a non-formal organisational framework (Council of Europe, n.d.). At the same time, *Study with Me* presents incidental learning opportunities, i.e., interaction with the English language when posting, reading, or chatting. (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Although there has been discussion in the literature on what exactly constitutes formal learning and if it can be delineated, a general agreement is that formal learning is intentional, has some kind of facilitator, and is commonly part of a course of some sort (Colley et al., 2003). With the parasocial relationship between the streamer and user partially driving learning productivity on *Study with Me* (Jhuang et al., 2022), this can perhaps be seen as a quality of formal learning in that there is a facilitator who helps guide the learning process.

Learning Strategies Supported by *Study With Me*

Self-regulation is the cyclical process by which learners plan and manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in order to reach personal goals (Zimmerman, 2000). While self-regulation is a broader process of planning and managing goal attainment, learning strategies are the specific techniques and approaches implemented to achieve those goals (Williams et al., 2015). Strategies can include time management, finding ways to minimize distractions, setting goals, self-assessing, using resources, or asking for help (Oxford, 2021). Wang and Zhang (2021), when investigating *Study with Me* streams on Bilibili, the Chinese video-sharing platform, found that the streamers' strict schedules with regular breaks support learners in planning and reflecting on their learning. The breaks serve as a type of collaborative progress report wherein users chat and exchange learning achievements (Wang & Zhang, 2021). Similar results were reported by Kim and Ryoo (2023), who found that many learners use *Study with Me* to help them set and achieve goals. A further learning strategy seen in *Study with Me* is the organization of learning resources. The parasocial relationship prevalent in some *Study with Me* interactions can encourage users to create a supportive learning environment in that users sometimes emulate the streamer's use of notetaking, highlighting, or organizing materials (Lee et al., 2021).

Research Questions

To add to the growing body of research on *Study with Me* and address the lack of research on *Study with Me* in English-language learning, the following research questions have been identified:

RQ1: How do upper-secondary students leverage *Study with Me* during real-time streaming study sessions to enhance their English-language learning experience?

RQ2: What role do *Study with Me* sessions play in motivating students when studying English?

Method

Context and Participants

The three participants, here referred to as Lena, Julia, and Stephanie, were acquired through volunteer sampling. Recruitment invitations were sent by word-of-mouth to approximately 200 pupils; five responded with interest in participating in the research. One of these respondents was excluded from the research because her use of *Study with Me* was

purely in German and a second was excluded because she had only tried out *Study with Me* in response to receiving an invitation to participate in this study.

The selection criteria for participation in the study were threefold: 1) the pupils need to attend an Austrian secondary school, 2) they need to be 18 years or older to avoid requiring parental consent, and 3) they need to regularly use *Study with Me*. No specific schools were approached and no demographic variation was actively sought. Although there was no specific gender targeted, only girls responded. All three girls speak German as a home language and attend different German-language upper secondary schools in Vienna. Lena is in her final year while Julia and Stephanie are in their third year out of five.

Data Collection

A multiple-case study approach was chosen because it was the most direct way to explore the process of what is a relatively new and unique way of learning (Halkias et al., 2022). In order to better replicate the data and provide more robust results, the goal was to find between three and five cases to analyze. As only three volunteers qualified for the inclusion criteria, this number of participants was used.

The main data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interviews were conducted in English. The participants were asked to describe how *Study with Me* works; what unfolded was a narrative describing when, how, and why they use *Study with Me*. Because all three girls mentioned at the beginning of their interview that they were nervous, they were allowed to talk freely with only gentle probes for more detail when necessary. All three needed more direct questions to help them discuss their use of *Study with Me* when learning languages. The interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai and then checked against the original recording.

After the findings for each individual case study were analyzed but before the cross-case synthesis, member checking was implemented to get an emic interpretation of the results. The participants were given their findings and asked if they agreed with the results or had further comments. All three did have points to add; these are integrated in the findings section below. This was an important part of data collection because, possibly due to the participants' nervousness and use of a non-dominant language, they were not always able to fully explain themselves during the interview.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for thematic analysis were used as the basis of this paper's data analysis. The transcripts and member-checking comments were read several times and organized into initial codes. The codes were then categorized into three themes: reasons for use, communication during sessions, and evidence of self-regulation, which were reviewed and refined to ensure the themes accurately represent the data. Because use of *Study with Me* is so new, the primary approach was inductive in order to allow unexpected or unresearched themes to emerge.

Findings

In this section, the within-case analysis from each participant is explored in turn, presenting 1) the participant's approach to using *Study with Me*, 2) the interaction that takes place during *Study with Me*, and 3) learning strategies employed during *Study with Me* sessions.

Lena

Approach to Using Study With Me

Lena reported using *Study with Me* on a regular basis, sometimes for several hours in a row. Her preferred way of participating in a session is to have her schoolwork open on her laptop and a *Study with Me* session streaming on her tablet. Her phone, mentioned by Lena as a frequent distraction, is set aside. Lena mostly streams *Study with Me* sessions on YouTube and has several streamers she follows. She generally chooses which one to watch based on who is streaming when she needs to study, but sometimes she joins spontaneously if she receives a notification from a YouTube channel that she subscribes to that a *Study with Me* is starting.

The primary reason Lena uses *Study with Me* is to reduce distractions and increase her ability to focus on studying:

Since I often find myself really distracted if I work alone and in my room with my phone to distract me. But if I use *Study with Me*, it feels like somebody else is there studying with you. So you kind of have this pressure of you have to study.

Lena further explained that she sometimes feels like someone is watching her, and that she will be seen as “slacking off” if she is on her phone instead of studying during a *Study with Me* session. She reported that she sometimes goes to a library to study near other

learners and that this also makes her feel a sense of responsibility to continue studying. If she does not have time or does not want to go to a library, she uses *Study with Me* to replicate the pressure she feels when sitting next to someone physically. She also mentioned that it is simply more fun to study when “you have somebody there instead of just studying alone”.

Interaction During Study With Me Sessions

In most of the *Study with Me* sessions Lena attends, English is the Lingua Franca and users are from many parts of the world. The YouTuber talks to the users in English at the start of a session and during the breaks. This is normally small talk and questions about where the users are from and what subjects they are studying at the moment. At other times during the *Study with Me* session, there is generally no communication from the YouTuber in the channels Lena participates in. While some *Study with Me* streamers whisper to users during the sessions, Lena either avoids these sessions or turns the volume off. She described this as a benefit to *Study with Me* in comparison to working in a library, where it is not possible to tune out ambient sounds.

The chat function is frequently used in sessions Lena participates in. She said that it always contains positive words of encouragement. The English used is informal and communication is on a superficial level. When asked what she can learn from the English used in *Study with Me* chats, Lena explained that the language used during *Study with Me* resembles “real life” because

actually using your English because for example, in class, you only learn like the specific things. Um, but you never really have it like, outside of school. I guess that's what I mean, in real life, that's pretty much actually using it and having to really adapt your answers and stuff like that.

Learning Strategies Employed During Study With Me Sessions

One of the most prominent learning strategies Lena uses during *Study with Me* is planning her learning. She is disciplined about starting her sessions punctually and not stopping before they are over. She synchronizes her breaks with the YouTuber, who generally uses a Pomodoro technique of working for 45-50 minutes and taking a break for 10-15 minutes. Lena mentioned that she appreciates this strict studying schedule and that it helps her remain focused and avoid distractions.

Another learning strategy Lena mentioned is organization of learning materials. The YouTubers she views all have meticulous notetaking skills, utilizing colors, bullet points, and

sticky notes to organize their learning. Lena tries to emulate this strategy because it gives her a

feeling of organization that is kind of like, Oh, they're being so organized. And I can also be organized and sometimes you then also pull different colors, and you're just like, okay, maybe I can use this technique too. So, really, what they're doing on the livestream also kind of influences your studying.

Several times during the interview, Lena mentioned that *Study with Me* helps her get “in the flow”. Because she feels that someone is studying with her, she can stay in the flow more easily and remain focused. She reported that while her grades may not have changed significantly due to use of *Study with Me*, she sees an improvement in the effectiveness of her learning.

Lena primarily uses *Study for Me* for subjects that require concentration and calculations, such as bookkeeping and math. She uses *Study with Me* every time she is preparing for a test and said she can better focus and enter a learning flow when she has something happening in the background. She does not use *Study with Me* to study for English exams because, “English in my school is so easy.” She added that she can best prepare for English tests by writing texts, which she does not need to concentrate as much for.

Julia

Approach to Using Study With Me

Julia uses *Study with Me* for up to three hours per day, mostly when she gets home from school. When using it, she has a session open on her laptop and uses her tablet for doing schoolwork. Her phone is a constant distractor, so she normally gives it to her mother to hold on to. She follows two main *Study with Me* channels on YouTube, one featuring pre-recorded videos that are released at a certain time and another with livestreams.

The key reason Julia uses *Study with Me* is to be a part of a learning community. She mentioned strongly disliking studying; knowing that *Study with Me* is an environment with other learners in the same situation is a comfort to her. She is quite communicative and likes talking with people who are near her, but during a *Study with Me* session, she knows that she cannot interrupt the other users because she would disturb their learning progress, “I know okay, while there are people also studying, I need to continue studying.” She appreciates the sense of companionship she receives from a *Study with Me* session and looks forward to

using it because, “it makes my learning experience more really, really much more enjoyable than when I’m studying alone.”

Interaction During Study With Me Sessions

The *Study with Me* sessions Julia attends are in English and use the Pomodoro technique with 50 minutes studying and a 10-minute break. With the pre-recorded sessions, the content creator releases the video on a schedule but is not present live. There is a recorded message at the beginning of the video and announcements when it is break time. During the breaks, the viewers chat with each other, generally writing well-meaning messages of encouragement and small talk about what they are studying. Julia enjoys reading and participating in the chats and finds the 10 minutes a welcome respite and finds it easy to use informal English during this time.

The livestreamed *Study with Me* Julia often joins is even more participative. The YouTuber actively chats with his viewers during the breaks and Julia regularly interacts with him. His attention to his audience is one of the reasons that she returns to his channel: “I had several conversations with him about the studies he does. And I do. And I don’t know, he just seems really interested in what I do or what the what the chat does.” She chats with him solely in English and has no difficulty doing so.

Through this livestreamed *Study with Me*, Julia was able to start a small study circle with other users. The YouTuber has a Discord channel set up where users can find a study buddy. She found two other Austrian girls in school and met with them regularly until they finished their schooling. Their study sessions were similar to the mass-streamed *Study with Me* in that there were 50 minutes of silent studying, then 10 minutes comparing what they had learned in those 50 minutes.

Learning Strategies Employed During Study With Me Sessions

Planning and sticking to a strict schedule are useful learning strategies for Julia. She starts her *Study with Me* sessions by writing a to-do list for the day and remains on the *Study with Me* until she has completed the tasks on her to-do list. She often emulates the organization and colors the content creators use and has started underlining and highlighting her notes using markers and sticky notes she saw the content creators using. She especially appreciates the uncluttered approach shown in the videos, stating, “the things I write in my book, and in my textbooks and on my iPad, those look very clean and very aesthetic. And I think that also encourages me to study.”

Julia also benefits from the structure and rules established during *Study with Me*. Even when studying with the study buddies she met on Discord, there is a clear etiquette about not interrupting the other person for 50 minutes:

I feel bad when I when I distract the individual person. Because I keep them from studying. And they want to finish something. But I don't let them because I think oh, I talked to, I want to talk to them.

Julia uses *Study with Me* solely when studying for tests. Knowing that a break is coming motivates her to continue studying for the full 50 minutes. She does not study languages (German or English) on *Study with Me* because they involve more creative writing, and the breaks would interrupt her focus. She also prefers to study languages with friends or family because communication is more sanctioned when studying for such subjects. She finds *Study with Me* most useful for subjects where she needs to memorize formulas, such as math or physics. She noticed an improvement in her grades when she first started using *Study with Me* because she finds it easier to motivate herself to start studying.

Stephanie

Approach to Using Study With Me

Stephanie primarily uses pre-recorded *Study with Me* sessions. She searches YouTube for “*Study with Me* no music”, then skips to the middle of the recording to see if she likes the ambience of the *Study with Me*. If she does, she starts the video from the beginning. She does not like livestreams because she gets distracted if the YouTuber talks or messages pop up. Stephanie also mentioned that she prefers the sound quality of edited and pre-recorded videos. She does not have a favorite *Study with Me* content creator, but she enjoys ones with a first-person view where the creator’s camera position is from that person’s head: “I also like it when it's like from you as if like from the person who's writing. Like, they're kind of you. I don't see the face but their hands.”

One key reason Stephanie uses *Study with Me* is to give her phone a different purpose than social media or communicating with friends. While using *Study with Me*, Stephanie turns off her notifications and fully focuses on her studying. Another main factor for using *Study with Me* is to provide her with company. She used to share a bedroom with her sister, who would study next to her. Since her sister moved out, she has felt alone in the room and sees *Study with Me* as a way to have someone near her: “I think it's a person thing, like I like people around me.”

Stephanie will sometimes go to a café to study, where she enjoys having people around her but no one in particular to talk to or who would distract her. However, she prefers studying from home because it is more comfortable and relaxing for her. She enjoys being in her own environment.

Interaction During Study With Me Sessions

The *Study with Me* videos Stephanie watches are almost all in English, but she prefers as little interaction as possible. She looks for videos with very little talking, and if the YouTuber talks, Stephanie skips that part of the video. She does not feel any interest in socializing through *Study with Me*; if she does want to interact during a break, she switches to social media and communicates with her friends. She does not read any of the chats because they interrupt her concentration.

Stephanie explained that she used to set up learning circles on WhatsApp or in person, but would often be distracted by the people in her group because it was too easy to start talking. With *Study with Me*, she can be strict with herself about communicating with friends only during her breaks. Her exception for this is when she needs a peer to explain something to her or vice versa.

Learning Strategies Employed During Study With Me Sessions

A prominent learning strategy noticeable in Stephanie's description of *Study with Me* is her use of reflection skills. She is aware of her learning process and that she needs a type of companion when studying, but that this should not be a live person who can distract her. She knows when she is finished studying and leaves the *Study with Me* when she is done, not when the session is done.

Although Stephanie does not like ambient noise, music, or talking by the YouTuber, she mentioned several times that she likes the sound of writing and seeing the pages of the YouTuber's books or notes moving.

I really liked the pencils and like, again, the aesthetics, like if they use markers and make it really cute or something. And that also inspires me. I just am not that good with writing it. But it also inspires me a bit.

Stephanie uses *Study with Me* every time she has a test in a subject that requires recall of a process, e.g., chemistry, where she needs to remember the sequence of laboratory tasks. She switched from a general middle school to a vocational secondary school with a focus on

chemistry and found the transition demanding. Using *Study with Me* has helped her manage the significant demands of her new school. She does not use *Study with Me* while studying English because she can “just wing it somehow.” With English tests, she said she does not “really have to go that deep. So I just use *Study with Me* when I have to go like deep into something.”

Discussion

In this section, a cross-case analysis of the three participants is presented. Findings related to the primary motivators of *Study with Me* use, self-regulation enhancement through *Study with Me*, and subjects most suited to *Study with Me* are discussed.

Primary Motivators of *Study With Me* Use

All three participants use *Study with Me* to minimize distractions when they are studying. The primary distractor for all three is their phones and the urge to look at social media or get in contact with their friends. They mentioned *Study with Me* helping them concentrate, focus on their tasks, and get in the flow of learning. They have a clear goal for using *Study with Me*: to pass their exams. This is in line with Kim and Ryoo (2023), who found in research on *Study with Me* in Korea that the majority of users of the tool used it in order to achieve a specific goal.

Another common motivator is being part of a community of learners. The participants all find it easier and more enjoyable to study when they are in the company of other people in the same situation. Of note is that it did not matter to them if the session was livestreamed or pre-recorded; regardless, they had the feeling of being near someone. Because teenagers have an innate need to belong (Reich et al., 2014), an online community such as *Study with Me* could give them a sense of being part of an in-group that seeks to achieve the same purpose.

Self-Regulation Enhancement Through *Study With Me*

This study shows that secondary school pupils can be acutely attuned to how they best learn and what strategies they can implement in order to hone their learning skills. All three girls demonstrate adeptness in self-regulating to set goals for their *Study with Me* sessions, plan their learning through scheduling, organize what they need to learn, and know what it is that they need to learn. They are cognizant of how *Study with Me* can help them in different subjects and how they can best utilize the tool to achieve their learning objectives. They display keen reflection skills and a willingness to adapt their approach to studying when

necessary. Furthermore, not only are they using these self-regulation skills, they are aware that they are using them, making them deliberate and conscious metacognitive choices (Williams et al., 2015).

Subjects Most Suited to *Study With Me*

The three participants were in agreement that *Study with Me* is most supportive in subjects that require internalization of a process or formula, such as math- and science-related classes. These are subjects that are tested in Austria mostly by output-based exams where learners are required to replicate steps used during such a process rather than understanding that process itself. *Study with Me* provides the participants with a learning environment that can foster the concentration and focus needed to acquire enough knowledge to pass the exams.

Equally unanimous were the participants' opinions that *Study with Me* is not a supportive tool for studying for English exams or doing English homework. They find English in Austria relatively easy to pass and do not spend a lot of time studying it. These findings could be skewed in that all three girls were B1+ speakers of English; a study of lower-level English language learners' use of *Study with Me* could illuminate whether it is a suitable tool for a lower level.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

This paper set out to probe the extent to which *Study with Me* can enhance learners' English language skills. While the participants in this research project rejected the idea of *Study with Me* as a tool for English language learning, they accepted that use of the chat function could improve their English skills, especially regarding informal and authentic use of English. However, use of social media chat in English language learning has been investigated extensively, and is thus not a significant result of this research.

What is, perhaps, of added value to the English-teaching community and teachers in general in Austria is that pupils are able and willing to select, adapt, and refine their learning strategies. In an exams-oriented education system, learners can naturally self-regulate and identify their optimal way of learning. They can capitalize on technology and utilize tools like *Study with Me* to minimize distraction, establish accountability, and be part of a learning community.

Until now, there has been very little research into the use of in-real-life streaming tools like *Study with Me*. Although the results of this paper did not turn out as expected,

several ideas for further research arose during the case study. The concept of self-regulation and independent discovery of learning approaches in an exams-oriented context might be of particular interest to readers. Parasocial relationships and modelling of influencers' study habits are also potential areas of exploration. The use of *Study with Me* for non-language learning contexts could be relevant, as could the use of the tool with lower-level language learners. Finally, the comments by the participants that they feel like a member of a learning community equally if the *Study with Me* is live or is prerecorded suggests a comparative study.

Notes on the Contributor

Lawrie Moore is a lecturer and teacher trainer who has been living in Austria since 1997. Originally from a business background, Lawrie transitioned to teaching in 2008. She teaches mainly ESP and EAP at the tertiary level and is especially interested in encouraging students to collaborate and take responsibility for their learning. She holds a Cambridge CELTA and DELTA and is a CELTA tutor in Vienna, where she enjoys supporting new EFL teachers in creating learner-centered classes. Lawrie is Joint Coordinator of IATEFL's Learner Autonomy Special Interest Group. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of St. Andrews.

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