

Analyzing the Relationship between L2 Motivational Selves and L2 Achievement: A Saudi Perspective

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Abstract

The present study aims at exploring the relationship between L2 motivational selves and L2 achievement in Saudi EFL context. The participants of the study are Saudi Foundation Year female students (aged 18-20) studying at English Language Institute of King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah. To serve this purpose, Dornyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System is utilized as a theoretical framework to find out the relationship between *L2 selves (Ideal and ought to)*, *students' intended efforts to learn English*, and *their achievement (marks obtained in formal exams)*. This is carried out through the survey in the form of structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Moreover, the marks sheet of English language test of the participants is also obtained for this purpose. The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data reveals that L2 Ideal self highly affects both the motivational level to learn English language and their formal L2 achievement as compared to ought to L2 self which has significant influence only on participants' motivational level i.e. their efforts to learn English (criterion measure). The results of the study are significant enough to generalize, thus, it offers a graphical representation of the relationship between all the variables under discussion. In the end, pedagogical recommendations have been made in order to develop and strengthen L2 ideal selves of the EFL learners.

Keywords: EFL, ESL, L2 Motivational Selves, L2 Achievement

1. Introduction

English Language learning, whether learnt as a foreign or second language, is a complex phenomenon which involves the interplay of many factors. Motivation to learn the language, however, remains central to its learning process. It is observed that despite of the efforts made by the EFL teachers, many students fail to acquire the required level of English language proficiency. In EFL contexts, situation gets more complex as "there is neither enough English input outside the classroom nor opportunities for interaction with native speakers. Most of the circumstances to successful English language acquisition are lacking (Alshlowiy, 2014). Such is the case with Saudi students who achieve a little in terms of language proficiency even after learning English for many years (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013).

Pertaining to the value of English as a global language, it has become an integral part of Saudi educational system. The Foundation or preparatory year study program has been introduced at colleges and universities where students study English as a compulsory subject. The basic aim of program is to prepare the students to acquire the required level of linguistic proficiency before they get admission in different Graduate programs at the university. The students take a placement test and on the basis of their scores, they are enrolled in different levels, beginner to intermediate, at ELI (English Language Institute). Each level consists of 6-7 weeks of intensive English language teaching which includes formal assessment of English language proficiency acquired throughout the module. Upon the successful accomplishment of all four levels, students get admission in Graduate programs of their choice.

As mentioned, despite of teachers' efforts, the majority of students are found to be less motivated and low at achievement. Therefore, there is a dire need to know the motivational pattern of English Language learning among the Saudi EFL learners who, apparently, seem to lack internal drive which guide and motivate individuals to acquire linguistic competence.

Hence, the present study, examines the dynamic and complex nature of motivation to learn English language of the Foundation Year students (aged 18-20) studying at English Language Institute, King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia. To conduct the study, Dornyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System is utilized as a theoretical framework. The significance of the study lies in its probe into the L2 motivational selves, L2 Ideal and ought to self, thereby revealing the context-specific factors affecting the conceptualization of future selves. Moreover, the study supplements the work done by Al-Sheri (2009) and Eusafzai (2013) by adopting the mixed method research design and examining the effects of L2 motivational selves on L2 achievement. Mixed method approach is comprised of both quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect and analyse data in detail.

2. Literature Review

Last few decades have witnessed a bulk of research studies in the field of L2 motivation where the efforts have been made by the linguists and psychologists to understand and decode the complex phenomenon of L2 learning. Thus, motivation is found to be one of the crucial factors involved in L2 learning. L2 motivation can be defined as, "the extent to which an individual strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in the activity" (Gardner, 1985, p10.). Therefore, learner's efforts to learn a second or a foreign language are directly influenced

Research studies have proved that motivation is the major factor in second language learning because it "determines human behaviour by energizing it and giving it direction" (Dornyei, 1998). The pursuit to understand its complex nature and the role it plays in second language learning has gone through a major change in recent years. The re-conceptualization of L2 motivation stems from dissatisfaction with socio-educational model and, particularly, its major component i.e. "integrative orientation" which is defined by Gardner as 'the class of reasons to learn second language to either interact with or become closer to the second language community (Gardner 1985: p. 54). The notion of integrative motivation has been debated over with regard to the fact that English has acquired the status of Global Language and its "ownership does not necessarily rest with a specific community of speakers, whether native speakers of British or American English varieties or speakers of World English Varieties (Dornyei, 2009).

The continual efforts in the field of L2 motivation has resulted into a recent development; re-theorization of the components of motivation which is *L2 Motivational Self System* developed by Dornyei (2005). The framework proposed by Dornyei (2005) is based on the concepts of "Possible Selves" by Markus and Nurius, (1986) and the "Self-discrepancy theory" by Higgins (1987, 1998). This model is comprised of three components;

The Ideal self: is the central component and deals with "L2- specific facet of one's ideal self. In other words this framework is the manifestation of one's goals and aspirations" (Dornyei, 2010) and is intrinsic in nature.

Ought to L2 Self: concerns the "attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes" which is further divided into two sub-components: *promotion focus* and *prevention focus* (Dornyei, 2010). It is, therefore, extrinsic kind as it deals with the desires and expectations of parents and teachers, to name few.

L2 Learning Experience which deals with the "immediate learning environment and experience" (Dornyei, 2010). This encompasses teacher's role, the curriculum, the peer group and the experience of success.

Since the emergence of the L2 motivational paradigm, many research studies have been conducted to validate its relevance in different EFL contexts of the world. For example, Taguchi, Magid and Papi (2009) validated L2 motivational system in Asian contexts; Japan, China and Iran. Similarly, the research study by Shabaz (2012) suggests that the development of future images can work well in order to motivate Pakistani students to learn English language. Some other studies confirming the relevance of L2 Motivational self system are conducted in Hungary (Csizer and Kormos, 2009), Chile (Kormos, 2011) and Indonesia (Lamb 2012). Another important research endeavor by Islam (2013) conducted in Pakistani context is one of the series that confirms the effectiveness of L2 motivational system and its underlying tenet with their "explanatory power" (Taghuchi, Magid, Papi, 2009) in different foreign language contexts. The theory has also been validated in Saudi Arabian context by Eusafzai (2013) where the strongest predictors of motivation are attitude towards learning English and instrumentality-promotion. However, the study is quantitative and room is left for the deeper understanding of L2 motivational selves and relative factors.

Nevertheless, L2 motivational self system alone should not be taken as working mechanism behind second language learning. There are many other factors that affect L2 motivation like social milieu, socio-economic status, learning experience and cultural contexts. The status of English language as a foreign or second language in a country may also affect its people's motivation to learn English language. In other words "people's attitude towards their own

country and fellow citizens may also be a significant component of their motivation to learn English” (Islam, 2013). One such factor is “International Posture” (2000, 2002) which is used by Yashima for the tendency among the Japanese learners to relate to the international community in general rather than any specific English-speaking community.

The current research study can be seen as a continuation of the researches which have been conducted to validate L2 motivation self system in different EFL contexts. However, its main aim is to know that

1. Which self, ought to or Ideal L2 Self, does prove to be the strongest predictor of motivated learning behavior of Foundation Year Saudi students?
2. Does the well developed L2 self of Foundation year Saudi students, is significantly related to the achievement of English language proficiency?
3. What other motivational pattern does this study yield?

3. The Study

Mixed method approach is found to be the appropriate research method to examine the relationship between L2 selves and L2 achievement and other relational factors which appeared during the course of study. As it is suggested by Dörnyei (2007), a mixed method research design may help researchers to overcome the weaknesses in qualitative and quantitative paradigm, and, therefore, can strengthen the impact of their research outcomes.

The data is collected from English Language Institute at one of the Women Colleges of King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah. The participants of the study are 100 Foundation Year female students (aged 18-20) studying in level 103 (Pre-Intermediate) of English language course. It is important to mention that the students are enrolled in one of the four levels based on the scores they obtain in a placement test. The levels are carefully designed to match the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference). The students can be exempted from English language course if they score required marks in IELTS or TOEFL. The reasons behind the selection of this target population are, firstly, the age of the participants and secondly, the availability of it as the sample. As suggested by Dörnyei (2009) “the self approach may not be appropriate for pre-secondary students”.

Pertaining to the research objectives and design, the present study has used a structured questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview to collect data. Motivational factors questionnaire (MFQ) is developed which includes the constructs used in the research studies by Dörnyei (2006), Ryan (2009), Yashima (2009) and Islam (2013). The questionnaire includes 35 items addressing attitude towards learning English, criterion measure (students intended efforts), ideal self and ought to self. Necessary changes are made to suit the purpose of the study and the proficiency level of the participants. The questionnaires are administered in the regular English language classes in the presence of class teachers. Semi-structured interview is conducted and recorded in order to get in-depth data. The interviewees are 10 randomly selected participants of the study who are assured of confidentiality of their responses.

The main aim of the study is to determine the impact of motivational selves on students’ achievement in the form of grades they obtain in formal English language exam. Therefore, the marks scored by the participants in the end of the module are obtained after the formal permission of the concerned authorities. The marks are based on the students’ performance in formal exams which include the assessment of four English language skills acquired during the course of a module i.e. six to seven intensive instructional weeks.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Data

The data collected through the questionnaire is analysed statistically using SPSS analysis version 15.0. Considering the main purpose of the study, a Coefficient correlation is determined between the:

- L2 selves (Ideal and ought to) and students’ intended efforts to learn English
- L2 selves (Ideal and ought to) and Students’ achievement (Marks obtained in Formal exams)

Table 1. Correlation Coefficients between attitude towards learning English, L2 selves (Ideal and ought to) and students' intended efforts to learn English

Model		Coefficients		T	Sig.	
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	3.297	2.929	1.126	.264	
	Attitude towards Learning English	.873	.106	8.260	.000	Highly Sig. at 1% LOS
	Ought to Self	.148	.058	2.542	.013	Significant at 5% LOS
	Ideal Self	.161	.055	2.916	.005	Highly Sig. at 1% LOS

Dependent variable: Criterion Measure

The statistical analysis shown in table 1 reveals that both Ideal L2 Self and Attitude towards learning English have highly significant impact on Criterion Measure; while Ought to Self has affected the participants significantly.

Table 2. Correlation Coefficients between attitude towards learning English, L2 selves (Ideal and ought to) and Students' achievement (Marks obtained in Formal exams)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		T	Sig.	
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	78.823	3.826	20.602	.000	
	Attitude towards Learning English	.291	.140	2.080	.041	Significant at 5% LOS
	Ought to Self	-.107	.085	-1.259	.212	Insignificant at 5% LOS
	Ideal Self	.180	.078	2.315	.023	Significant at 5% LOS

Dependent Variable: Marks Achieved out of 100

Thus, statistical analysis of data clearly establishes the strong relationship between the Ideal L2 selves of the students and their achievement in the formal exams. In other words, students who had well developed L2 Ideal self outperformed their course fellows by scoring excellent grades. L2 Ought to self, on the other hand, has an influence on the intended efforts of the students whereas it is proved to have an insignificant impact on the marks obtained by the participants at the end of the module.

4.2. Qualitative Data

The responses recorded through structured interviews were coded according to the themes addressing the key questions under study.

Table 3. Tabular presentation of Qualitative Data

Theme	Positive%	Negative%
Attitude towards learning English	100%	00%
Importance of English	100%	00%
Intended efforts to learn English	90%	10%
Vision of future self	90%	10%
Role of English in future career	100%	00%
Utilitarian value of English	100%	00%
Pressure of people (Family and friends) to learn English	00%	100%

The qualitative data has brought forth the context-specific factors affecting L2 motivational selves of the Saudi learners. The responses recorded during the course of interview has provided participants' conceptualization of future selves which supplements the empirical findings of the present study.

All 10 interviewees are aware of the role of English language in today's modern world and have expressed positive attitude towards its learning. They have also acknowledged the indispensability of English language for their future career. However, 1 out of 10 interviewees does not have clear idea of her ideal future self as she has expressed that she is learning English because she likes it.

The most important and strongest factor working behind the participants' motivational selves is found to be parents' encouragement. While sharing their experience of learning English, 9 out of 10 the interviewees have mentioned that their parents encourage and appreciate them for learning the language and performing well in English language exams. It is important to mention that the participant, with no clear idea about her ideal future self, have not mentioned her parents' role in her learning of the language. Thus, parents' encouragement play vital role in the development of learner's concept of future self which results in the motivated behaviour to learn a language. It is worth mentioning, that while sharing her ideas about ideal future self, one of the participants has expressed her wish to work in petroleum Industry as Saudi Arabia is quite famous for it. It points to the pleasant fact that Saudi female students are well aware of the expanding world of professional opportunities.

Another factor affecting the development of L2 ideal self is the social setting. The participants with clear and specific vision of ideal selves have shared that they have travelled to English speaking countries which has enabled them to practice English language. In other words, the environment in those countries has been conducive for them to interact with English speaking people and feel themselves as one among them. Such opportunities are quite rare in Saudi Arabia as English is not commonly used in both, speech and writing and is only learned and practiced in a formal context: a classroom.

Considering the aims of the study, participants are asked to share their efforts to learn English language. Once again, the interviewees with clear perception about their ideal future selves are found to exert efforts towards gaining English language proficiency even outside the classroom. They have also reported that they learn English language by watching movies with English subtitles and listening to English songs. In other words, they are found involved in self-initiated learning activities.

5. Discussion

According to the analysis, Ideal Self has highly significant whereas an attitude towards learning English has significant impact on the marks achieved by the participants. On the other hand, ought to self is proved to have an insignificant effect on the students' achievement in formal exams. The analysis shows:

- The change in attitudes towards learning English may change both marks achieved by the participants and the criterion measure. Thus attitudes play vital role in enabling the participants to achieve proficiency in English Language.

- Another factor which is very important in motivating participants to achieve English language proficiency and get good grades too is Ideal L2 self. The clear cut Ideal L2 self perception enables the second language learners to achieve maximum proficiency in the target language.
- Comparatively, Ought to self has no significant impact on the formal achievement in the L2 learning process but have some influence in developing criterion measure. Thus ought to self partially influences the target language learning process.

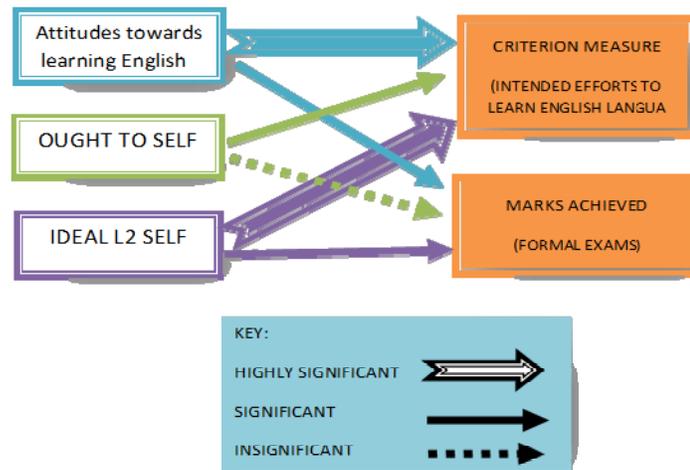


Figure 1. A graphical representation of the relationship between the L2 Motivational selves and L2 Achievement

On the basis of the results yielded by the study, L2 self has been proved to be the strongest predictor of the motivated behavior of the participants. The clear vision of future self results into the positive attitude towards learning English which eventually motivates the students to devise the ways to learn English language. The results obtained from the current research are in line with the studies conducted by Rajab et al, (2012) Outhaichute & Raksasataya (2013) where L2 ideal self was found to rank higher than other components of the L2 motivational self system.

6. Recommendations

Based on the results, it can safely be stated that the positive attitude and vivid idea of future self lead the learners to exert their efforts towards the achievement of language goals. Therefore, EFL teachers can use motivational strategies to strengthen the learners' vision of L2 selves. The clear and specific description of Language learning goals results into an increase in learners' linguistic self-confidence (Magid & Chan, 2012). The clear idea of desired future self achieved through imagery is found to enhance learners' L2 motivation (Magid & Chan, 2012).

Thus, there is a dire need to use above mentioned strategies in the context where English is taught as a foreign language, like in Saudi Arabia, and classroom is possibly the only place to learn and practice English language. The tasks, in which students can visualize themselves as successful English language speakers, activate students' imagery. Such tasks can be incorporated into the regular English language courses or books by the material developers. Teachers may use guided or scripted imagery and act as a counselor to help students who have problems in imagining their desired future selves. The students may be encouraged to write their own scripted imagery situations as they can identify with them more closely. In addition, if corrected by teachers, this can also be an effective way for the learners to improve their writing (Magid, 2013).

7. Conclusion

The present study is an in-depth analysis of L2 selves in Dornye's L2 motivational System (2009). Firstly, it shows that learners' positive attitude towards learning English and clear image of L2 ideal self enable them to direct their learning outside the classroom. Secondly, the study yields highly significant relationship between the ideal L2 selves

of the learners and their achievement in the formal English language exam. In other words, the learners who can foresee themselves as the proficient users of English language direct their learning and acquire linguistic competence. Besides, qualitative data lays bare the factors like parental encouragement and social context that positively affect development and strengthening of learners' future selves and therefore, motivate them to learn English language.

Thus, EFL teachers can use motivational techniques to foster L2 Ideal self of their students and boost their linguistic confidence. Further research is recommended to find out the efficacy of motivational techniques employed by EFL teachers in Saudi context which can enhance students' conceptualization of L2-related future selves. Moreover, there is also room for longitudinal studies to measure the development of students' motivational selves in the beginning and the end of an English language course.

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