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**Language Learning Motivation: The L2 Motivational
Self System and its Relationship with Learning
Achievement**

TFG Estudis d'Anglès i Espanyol

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Abstract

Recent motivational theories on L2 learning emphasized the importance of the ‘selves’ in motivating students. Consequently, the present study reports the influence of motivation in Spanish students’ achievement using Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System as the main theoretical framework. The purpose of the paper was to find the relationship between the dimensions of the L2 Motivational Self System and language achievement, as well as to provide motivational learner types according to the theory. A questionnaire of 24 items was administered to 29 Spanish high school students. The results of the correlations revealed a strong relationship between the Ideal L2 self and achievement scores. The L2 Learning experience correlated with Ideal L2 self and it also had an impact on achievement scores, while the Ought-to L2 self was found to be insignificant. The findings suggest the importance of students’ capacity to visualize themselves as L2 speakers in language learning. Teachers can benefit from the implications of these findings, given that they can help students improve their Ideal L2 self in different teaching environments.

Keywords: Motivation, The L2 Motivational Self System; Ideal L2 self; Ought-to L2 self; English learning experience

1. Introduction

Motivation is a fundamental factor in the learning process. It is a complex and multifaceted construct, but it has been considered one of the factors that most influence the success of second language (L2) learning by teachers and researchers (Gardner, 1972; Oxford, 1996). Motivation provides the force to start learning an L2 and to sustain the later learning process (Dörnyei, 2001a). It also determines “the extent of active, personal involvement in foreign or second language learning” (Oxford, 1996: 121). For that reason, those unmotivated students who do not have enough involvement in their study, cannot develop L2 skills. As Rajab et al. (2012: 419) mentions, without motivation, “even gifted individuals cannot accomplish long-term goals; whatever the curricula and whoever the teachers are”.

Motivation has become a central area of research and theoretical work in language learning due to its importance. In the last 50 years, the study of motivation has tried to find out the determining factors that motivate students to learn an L2 and how teachers can heighten motivation in their students and classrooms. Motivation study started with Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) research, which emphasized the idea of integrativeness, and then in the 1990s it moved on to the cognitive view, the self-determination and attribution theories. The last motivational theory has been the L2 Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2009), which is made up of three constituents: the Ideal L2 self, the Ought-to L2 self and the L2 Learning experience. Its broad framework and its intention to reconceptualize some previous notions on motivation make it an appropriate theory to study language learning motivation.

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between the L2 Motivational Self System and language learning achievement. It examines how the three dimensions

of the theory relate to achievement, and how it can provide motivational learner types, which can be useful in terms of teaching strategies.

In order to understand how the Motivational Self System was proposed and created, this dissertation first reviews the literature related to motivation study, which started with the concept of integrativeness. It briefly presents other motivational theories and how the position of English as an international language has influenced the change of paradigm and the design of the L2 Motivational Self System. It then focuses on the L2 Motivational Self System and previous studies that have proven its validity. It also stresses the importance of studying motivation and its teaching implications. After having set the motivational study background and its importance, the research questions and expectations are introduced. The methodology of the study is presented in the following section, where the participants, instrument and data analysis are detailed. After the methodology, the results are shown in terms of correlations. The discussion aims to interpret the correlational results regarding the L2 Motivational Self System and achievement. This study finally tries to reveal how the findings can be useful for language teachers.

2. Literature review

Motivation study aims to investigate the factors that contribute to L2 learners' performance. However, the complexity of L2 learning motivation has resulted in conflicting findings and conceptualizations over recent years. Research on language learning motivation started with Gardner and Lambert's (1972) theories, which stressed the importance of culture and attitude towards language learning. They introduced the concept of integrativeness, which corresponds to the wish to integrate and learn more about another cultural community; and instrumentality, a concept which considers the utilitarian value of language learning (i.e. academic and job purposes). Gardner's

motivation theory and his social approach were so influential than most studies before the 1990s adopted this paradigm (Dörnyei, 2001b).

Later, it was considered that Gardner's theory could not capture the new conceptualizations of social identity, so new motivational studies emerged. Cognitive constructs proved to be significant in pedagogical contexts, so researchers applied them in L2 learning and teaching. This is how the cognitive view, the self-determination and attribution theories appeared. These theories emphasized the concept of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Ghapanchi et al., 2011). Intrinsic motivation refers to the satisfaction of learning for personal pleasure and fulfillment, while extrinsic motivation is related to external regulations such as rewards, imposed rules or choiceful behavior (Dörnyei, 2001b). Now, the current period considers both the learner's social context and the learner's identity and view of the self as factors connected to second language motivation.

The reconceptualization of the L2 motivation theories occurred due to a dissatisfaction with the traditional model of L2 motivation, which was centered on the concept of integrativeness. Researchers wanted to extend the theory so it could apply to different situations, especially the ones where integration was not possible or the identification with the L2 community was not expected (Dörnyei et al., 2006). In recent years, English has become a different language, mostly called World or Global English. This "new" language is no longer associated with a specific community or setting, and this ambiguity has stressed the new perspective of the "integrative" term (Dörnyei, 2009; Islam et al., 2013). One of the differences in motivation now is that learners want to communicate not only with native speakers but also to a bigger community outside the English speaking countries. As Dailey (2009:7) points out, "due to the change in

global languages, there is no model community to identify with, consequently leading to a broader classification of integrative motivation”.

This reconceptualization of the motivation study has underlined the significance of the theories based on the social context and the learner’s identity and view of the self. One approach on motivation that focuses on these aspects is the one that comes from Dörnyei’s (2009) theory of the L2 Motivational Self System, which intends to extend previous conceptualizations of L2 motivation using psychological theories of the self.

The psychological concepts which influenced Dörnyei’s theory were presented by Markus and Nurius (1986) in their theory of the *possible selves* and by Higgins’ (1987) theory of the *ought selves*. On the one hand, the “possible selves” concept included three main types of self: the idea of what we would like to become, what we could become and what we are afraid of becoming. By the conceptualization of possible selves, the analysis of the thoughts and feelings that individuals experience while they have a motivated behavior became easier. On the other hand, Higgins’ (1987) motivational theory distinguished the *ideal self* and the *ought self*. While the *ideal self* refers to the attributes one would like to possess, the *ought self* refers to the attributes one believes ought to possess according to a general sense of obligations and responsibilities, which can be different from one’s desires and aspirations (Dörnyei, 2009).

The L2 Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2009) is made up of three dimensions, which are named the *Ideal L2 self*, the *Ought-to self*, and *L2 Learning experience*:

The **Ideal L2 self** is the “L2-specific facet of one’s ‘ideal self’” (Dörnyei, 2009: 29). It represents the ideal image a learner would like to have in the future. For example, if

one wants to become a fluent L2 speaker who interacts with international friends, the image that this person would create of oneself as a fluent speaker might act as a powerful motivator, since it would reduce the discrepancy between the actual and the ideal self (Papi, 2010). This dimension is correlated with traditional integrative and instrumental motives, since the immediate antecedent of the Ideal L2 Self is the attitude towards the L2 speakers and community. The Ideal L2 self is a “vivid and real image: one can see, hear and feel one’s ideal self” (Dörnyei et. al., 2006: 92). This means that the ultimate ideal self is the native speaker of the L2, so if there is a positive attitude toward these speakers, the idealization of the L2 self is broader. Conversely, those learners who despise the L2 community will be unlikely to develop a strong L2 self.

The **Ought-to L2 self** “concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes” (Dörnyei, 2009: 29). Obligations, responsibilities and perceived duties are the attributes which control this dimension. For instance, if a person wants to please their family, teacher or boss with their language fluency, the Ought-to L2 self is the main motivator for their learning. This dimension can be linked to extrinsic motivational factors, since the wish to be rewarded or praised by others is what prevails to accomplish good language knowledge.

The **L2 Learning experience** concerns “situated, executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience” (Dörnyei, 2009: 29). Situation-specific motives such as the curriculum, the L2 teacher, the peer group and the teaching materials can have a strong influence on motivated behavior (Papi, 2010). This dimension is not related to self-image but with the situation in the learning process. For some language learners, the motivation to learn an L2 is not from self-images but from the enjoyment of the learning environment. This last dimension is related to intrinsic

motivation, since the adequate environment or situation might make learner's attitude or study improve.

The combination of these three dimensions, which could be summarized as the learners' vision of themselves as L2 speakers, the social pressures from the outside and a positive environment, are supposed to motivate to learn an L2.

The Motivational Self System also provides a broader view on motivation. The Ideal L2 self previously introduced can be used to explain "the motivational set-up in diverse learning contexts even if they offer little or no contact with the L2 speakers" (Dörnyei, 2006: 94). The reconceptualization of motivation theories occurred due to the growing significance of World English, and this language globalization has produced changes in the relationship between the Ideal L2 self and the L2 native speakers. The Ideal L2 self that some learners construct now is not based on the native speakers of the L2 but on other non-native speakers who use English as an international language. The fact that the Ideal L2 self can be based on different models is of significance to understand the whole system.

In recent years, many researchers have examined L2 learning motivation from the perspective of the L2 Motivational Self System in different contexts. Their studies have also supported the validity and applicability of the theory. Most of the studies have focused on examining the relationship between the dimensions of the system and other criterion measures such as learner's motivated behavior, L2 achievement or language choice (Papi & Teimouri, 2014).

In the case of the Ideal L2 self, it has been found to be an important component of the L2 Motivational Self System. In Kim & Kim's (2014) research, the Ideal L2 self revealed a positive impact in the Korean context, and it pointed out that the more clear

the Ideal L2 self, the higher level of English proficiency. Taguchi et al. (2009) showed that the Ideal L2 self was positively correlated with integrativeness, and proved the validity of the Motivational Self System by demonstrating that the Ideal L2 self “achieved a better explanatory power toward learners’ intended efforts than integrativeness did” (ibid. p 78). The Ideal L2 self type of motivation has also been considered as the most important factor in Ghapanchi et al. (2011), Islam et al. (2013) and Rajab et al. (2012) studies. Ghapanchi et al. (2011) and Rajab et al. (2012) found that it was the most significant predictor of the L2 language acquisition, while Islam et al. (2013) discovered a significant correlation between the Ideal L2 self and attitudes to learning English and instrumentality (promotion). The Ideal L2 self is the dimension that has been found to be the most important of the criterion measures, which means that it could be considered the primary constituent of L2 motivation (Dörnyei et al., 2006)

Concerning the L2 Learning experience, in some researches it has been determined that it is a strong motivating component. In Islam et al. (2013), attitudes towards learning English and the Ideal L2 self are the strongest predictors of intended effort. Taguchi’s et al. (2009) study also shows that English learning experience has the highest impact on intended effort, becoming the first predictor of it.

Lastly, the Ought-to L2 self has been found to be the least contributing factor. Islam’s et al. (2013) and Papi’s (2010) research confirm that this dimension is the one which has the least effect on intended effort in relation to the other two components of the Motivational Self System. According to Islam et al. (ibid), the Ought-to L2 self also contributes less to motivated learning behavior, even though we can find some variability in other cultures. For instance, in Asian contexts it has found to be more significant (Taguchi et al. 2009), due to family and school pressure.

Overall, these researchers prove that all the constituents of the L2 Motivational Self System motivate language learners, despite having distinct levels of influence. The L2 Motivational Self System can also define diverse motivational learner types, and its definitions may contribute to L2 motivation research. Dörnyei's (2009) theory can function as a predictor of second language proficiency as well: students with different aims to learn English will have different language proficiency, as the three dimensions have proved in previous research.

Motivation is significant for language learners and their success, and its study can be helpful to understand what the motivations of the learners are (Oxford, 1996). The more we understand the factors that create motivation, the more teachers will be able to help motivate language learners in class. Motivation is also important because it influences other factors such as L2 learning strategies, the interaction with native speakers, their proficiency or their perseverance and maintenance of L2 skills after their language study finishes (Oxford, 1996).

The Motivational Self System can provide some clues for teaching strategies, along with some information regarding language learner motivational types. It is possible to promote the Ideal L2 self through motivational techniques in class. If learners are presented different possible selves and powerful role models, and they consider one of these selves realistic and possible, they will be likely to increase positive motivation (Dörnyei, 2009). The L2 Motivational Self System becomes an effective motivator if the dimensions of the system are accomplished. For instance, if a learner has a desired and clear future self-image which agrees with the learner's family's expectations, and enjoys the teaching materials in their language environment, they will probably be remarkably motivated.

Teachers have an important influence on the improvement of motivation in language learners. They are the leaders in the classroom and they serve as a model or reference (Dörnyei, 2001b). Teachers can identify integrative and instrumental reasons as motivators in their students. They can help heighten motivation by demonstrating the challenge, the importance of L2 learning and some strategies, and they can also create a positive classroom environment, which is significant for the Learning experience dimension in the Motivational Self System. The interest of the lessons and materials for students are contributing aspects which teachers can work on as well.

Parents, peers and friends can also be a major factor for motivation, which is related to the Ought-to self dimension. Parents can show a solid self-image and transmit a positive attitude towards the L2 community, and this can influence their children's motivation as well.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate motivation, but since it is a very complex construct, it only focuses on some specific terms. Measures to observe and analyze motivation vary and are not simple, so the variables only represent a segment of what L2 motivation is, instead of giving a general idea of the term. It is also important to note that motivation is inconstant and unstable, which means that the results that are shown in this research might vary in the future, even if the participants of the study were the same.

This study addresses the question of the L2 Motivational Self System and its relationship with L2 Learning achievement, considering that motivation is related to achievement, and that the L2 Motivational Self System is currently one of the most reliable motivational theories. This paper focuses specifically on the relationship between the three main components of the L2 Motivational Self System (Ideal L2 self,

Ought-to self, L2 Learning experience) and language achievement. This study also aims to find out what language learner motivational types can emerge from the L2 Motivational Self System and which one is the most proficient in English. Therefore, the variables of the study are the Ideal L2 self, the Ought-to self and L2 Learning experience, while the criterion measure is students' achievement scores.

Some researchers have argued that achievement scores are an indirect measure of motivation, since they are influenced by other factors such as the learner's ability or learning opportunities (Dörnyei, 2001b). It is true that other factors influence them, but the same happens with other criterion measures. In consequence, we have decided that achievement scores are a suitable criterion measure, because learners have control over their actions and it is mostly reflected in their achievement scores, and because it can be more objective than measuring it by their language choice, behavior or attitude.

Having considered the purpose of the study and its different variables, the research questions of this study are the following:

- 1) Is L2 learning achievement related to the L2 Motivational Self System, and if so, what is the variable from the L2 Motivational Self System that most influences English achievement?
- 2) What is the language learner type which is most proficient in English according to the L2 Motivational Self System?

The hypothesis of the paper is that when motivation is measured in terms of the L2 Motivational Self System, there is a correlation between motivation and achievement scores.

This study expects to find a relationship between the L2 Motivational Self System and English achievement. Given that the research was conducted in a state school

context, the L2 Learning experience component might have different results than in other contexts such as in private or language schools. The fact that the study of English is compulsory in Spanish schools until upper high school is a factor that might affect the results of that component, given that the obligatory nature of the study makes it less appealing to its learners. Considering the results of other research, the Ideal L2 self is expected to be the component which most influences English achievement, while Ought-to self is predicted to be the less contributing factor of the L2 Motivational Self System. The language learner type who is likely to be more proficient in English is the one who has the biggest rate in all three motivational components, but especially in the Ideal L2 self section. Therefore, the learner who has an ability to develop a vision of the self as a competent L2 speaker will tend to have the highest achievement scores.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The total number of participants in this study was 29 Catalan high school students between 17 and 18 years old. Among all of the participants, 11 were female and 18 were male. For all of the students, Catalan or Spanish was their first language. All students were in their last year of *Batxillerat* in a state school located in a small town near Barcelona, Spain. They were all studying English as a compulsory subject, having three English classes a week with a total of 3 hours per week. State school students have a similar learning environment in the entire province in terms of curriculum, materials and assessment methods: they are required to follow a syllabus assigned by the Ministry of Education, and so their exposure to English is similar in other learning contexts. Pre-university students were chosen for the study as they have a more mature perspective of themselves and their ideal-self representation is more accurate.

3.2. Instrument

Students were asked to answer a questionnaire (see Appendix). The three main variables of the questionnaire were the three dimensions from the L2 Motivational Self, that is, the Ideal L2 self (8 items), the Ought-to L2 self (8 items) and the L2 Learning experience (8 items). The items of the questionnaire were developed and adapted from Taguchi's et al. (2010), Papi's (2010) and Islam's et al. (2013) studies and some were newly designed. The items were measured by five-point Likert scales, from 1 showing 'not at all' to 5 showing 'very much'. The criterion measure was taken from the students' English achievement scores. The questionnaire was translated by the researcher into Catalan in order to avoid misinterpretations. Students took approximately 25 minutes to complete it. The variables in this study were analyzed in the following way:

- The Ideal L2 self was measured by the extent of how students perceive themselves as English speakers in their future.
- The Ought-to L2 self was measured by the sense of obligations and duties learners have in order to avoid negative consequences.
- The L2 Learning experience was measured considering the context, environment, material and teachers of English.
- Their English achievement was measured by means of their latest English scores. The teacher reported the students' English grade from the previous term, which corresponds to the first trimester. The scores are taken from tests based on the common syllabus for state schools. The number was out of 10.

Before administering the questionnaire to the students in this particular school, it was piloted in two classes in one private language school in order to learn if there were any

difficulties in the understanding of the questions. No comprehension problems were found.

3.3. Data analysis

3.3.1. Procedure

The questionnaire was administered in March 2015. The researcher contacted her former school and requested help and cooperation from the English teacher. The teacher and the school were informed of the nature of and purposes of the study. Then, the researcher visited the school to conduct the survey during the class time. Before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher told the purpose and directions of the questionnaire so that the students could complete the survey more accurately. They were assured that their answers would be used only for research purposes.

3.3.2. Analysis

The collected data was analyzed and computer-coded using Excel. Pearson correlations were calculated to identify the possible relations between the different variables and the criterion measure. P value from Pearson was calculated to determine the significance of “r” at 0.05 level and to examine the reliability of the data.

4. Results

Given that the main purpose of this study was to find the relationship between the L2 Motivational Self System and students’ learning achievement, the main part of the analysis was correlational in nature. The analysis provided a deeper look at the internal structure of the L2 Motivational Self System and the motivational characteristics of English students. To analyze the data, values ranged from 5 for ‘very much’ to 1 for ‘not at all’. The total number for each section could be 40 maximum and 8 minimum.

This study used the Pearson correlation coefficient to understand and analyze the data. The correlation coefficient is summarized in the table below.

Table 1 Correlation Coefficients

| | Ideal L2 self | Ought-to self | Learning experience | Grades |
|---------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|--------|
| Ideal L2 self | - | | | |
| Ought-to self | .047 | - | | |
| Learning experience | .570* | .153 | - | |
| Grades | .737* | -.129 | .401* | - |

*Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$

The graphs below visually illustrate the correlations between the different dimensions of the L2 Motivational Self System and achievement scores.

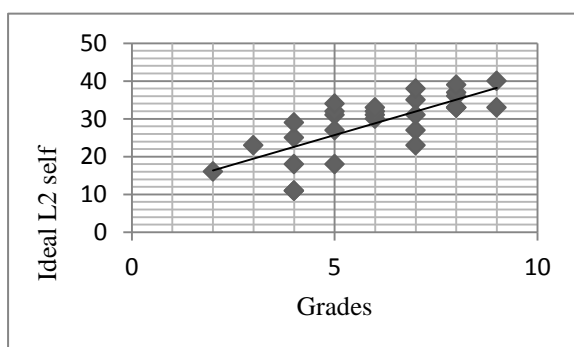


Figure 1: Scatterplot of the Ideal L2 self and grades

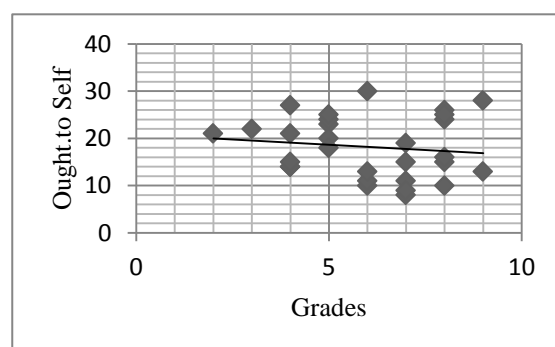


Figure 2: Scatterplot of the Ought-to self and grades

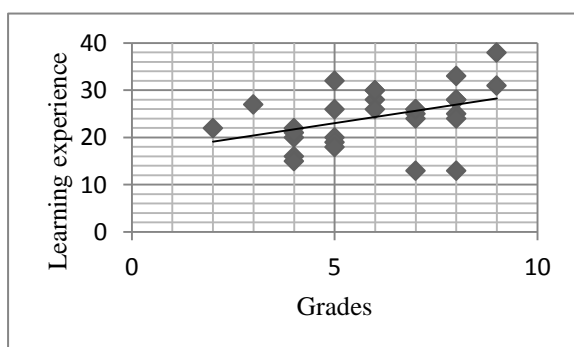


Figure 3: Scatterplot of the L2 Learning experience and grades

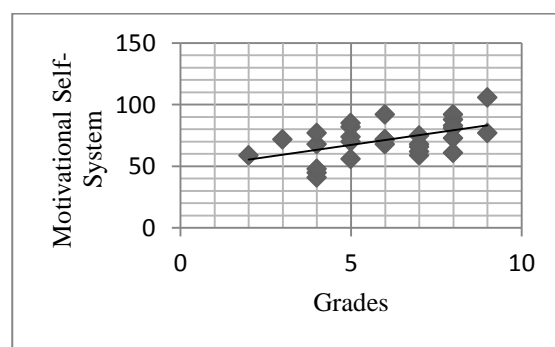


Figure 4: Scatterplot of the Motivational Self System and grades

As the above results show, the Ideal L2 self and the L2 Learning experience correlated with the criterion measure, which was achievement scores. The Ideal L2 self

presented an important effect on students' proficiency, since the coefficient between the dimension and grades appears to be strongly linked (.737). The correlation between the L2 Learning experience (.401) and achievement scores was not so strong, but it was still evident at the 0.05 level. The correlation between the Ought-to L2 self and the criterion measure was insignificant. Figure 4 reveals the correlation between the whole dimensions of the Motivational Self-system and grades, which is also clearly relevant (0.511).

Correlation analysis also shows the relationship between some of the components of the L2 Motivational Self System, especially between the Ideal L2 self and the L2 Learning experience. Its correlation is the strongest of all of them (.570) as can be observed in the figure below.

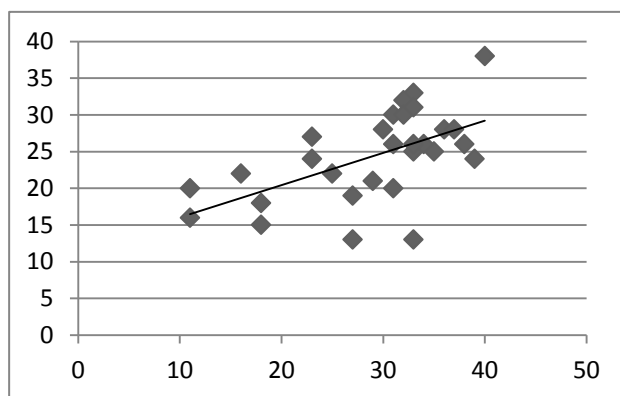


Figure 5: Scatterplot of the Ideal L2 self and L2 Learning experience

On the other hand, as can be observed in Table 1, the Ought-to self dimension not only has the least relation to achievement scores, but also on the Ideal L2 self and L2 Learning experience.

The analysis of the data following the L2 Motivational Self System can also provide some clues on different learner types:

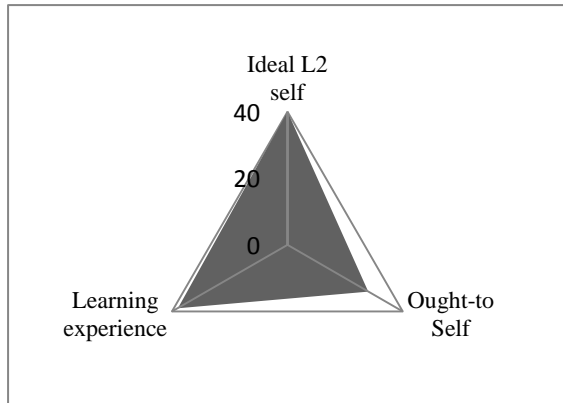


Figure 6: Motivational Pattern of a High Scoring Learner

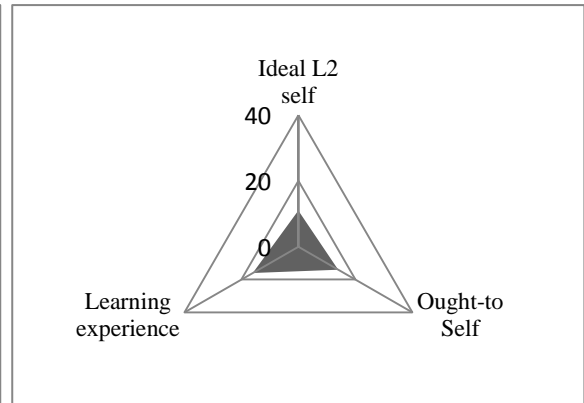


Figure 7: Motivational Pattern of a Low Scoring Learner

The figures above correspond to the profile of a motivated and unmotivated student. Figure 6 shows the profile of a student who has a very strong motivation level, especially in the Ideal L2 self and Learning experience dimensions, whereas figure 7 presents a learner who has a low level of motivation in the three components of the L2 Motivational Self System, particularly in the Ideal L2 self. The learner presented in figure 6 has also the best achievement scores in their class while Figure 7 corresponds to a low scoring learner.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to find out how the L2 Motivational Self System is related to achievement scores. The results and correlations showed above suggest that there is a relationship between the L2 Motivational Self System and achievement scores. The variable that seems to be the most closely linked to English achievement appears to be the Ideal L2 self, followed by the L2 Learning experience.

The Ideal L2 self had the biggest impact on English achievement, and this parallels other studies in other contexts, such as Taguchi et al.'s (2009), Papi's (2010), Rajab's et al. (2012), and Islam's et al. (2013). It could be argued that the fact that the Ideal L2 self was the most important factor means that the desired future self that students have, if

perceived as 'available', results in motivation, and that, if students have intrinsic motives to study a language, they will be more motivated to improve their skills (Papi, 2010). It seems that learners who have the capacity to visualize themselves as future English speakers tend to have better achievement scores in order to achieve the Ideal L2 selves they aspire to be (Kim & Kim, 2014). However, correlations cannot show a cause-effect relationship between the Ideal L2 self and achievement. Both of these factors might be affected by a more general Expectation factor. Expectations could influence learners' vision and achievement: Expectancy-value theory explains how expectancies of success or failure can impact students' motivation to learn a language (Oxford, 1996). According to Dörnyei (2001a: 12), "people will only be motivated to do something if they expect success", and the way in which people interpret past successes and failures could also determine their future behaviour. Therefore, expectations and past experiences possibly affect students' future vision of themselves, which is a key factor for their achievement.

The L2 Learning experience also correlated with achievement scores, even though its correlation was weaker compared to the Ideal L2 self. Both Islam's et al. (2013) and Taguchi's et al. (2009) studies showed that this dimension predicted intended effort, which could be related to achievement scores in this study. This correlation suggests that students who enjoy their English classes, because of their teacher, group or curriculum, tend to have better achievement scores than students who find classes unenjoyable. As the Ideal L2 self could be related to the expectancy-value theory, the same happens with this dimension. According to this theory, learners "engage in activities that are relevant to their goals and at which they expect to succeed" (Schmidt et al., 1996: 54). This means that if learners expect to succeed in their language learning, they will be more likely to enjoy their experience, which can contribute to their

achievement. Moreover, as other studies have suggested (Young,1991; Papi, 2010), learning experience can be related to L2 anxiety. Thus, a negative language experience can increase L2 anxiety, whereas positive experiences are related with lower anxiety levels. Students' personality can also be associated with their learning experience, since Ghapanchi et al. (2011) showed that extroverted students, in general, scored higher on the L2 Learning experience. For that reason, it could be argued that learners enjoy their English classes not only because of their teacher or class material, but also because they have certain expectations about their future, and because they have had a positive learning experience in the past. These factors can influence their general L2 learning experience, and this might be reflected in their correlation with achievement scores as well.

The Ought-to L2 self dimension did not correlate with the criterion measure and it did not appear in any way linked with the other dimensions either. This result is in line with Islam's et al. (2013), Papi's (2010) and Rajab's et al. (2012) research, since they confirmed that this dimension had the least effect on intended effort. It appears that obligations and responsibilities do not play a significant role either in students' motivation or in their achievement scores. Students seem to be aware of the importance of learning English, but this external pressure does not motivate them to achieve better grades. As we have seen with the L2 Learning experience, some studies have also found a relationship between anxiety and the Ought-to L2 self (Papi, 2010; Ghapanchi et al., 2011; Papi & Teimouri, 2014). Papi (2010) states that the Ought-to L2 self raises anxiety, suggesting that if students are motivated through their Ought-to L2 self, they will be likely to feel anxious about their language learning. Those students who are concerned about what others think of them are afraid of disappointing others and this emphasizes their anxiety, which is a negative factor for their motivated behaviour and

consequent language achievement. This possible anxiety associated with the Ought-to L2 self also influences their learning experience, since students can be less motivated to participate in class due to their anxiety. The fact that English study is compulsory in schools can make it less motivating to students, because, as Dörnyei (2001a: 12) states when introducing the self-determination theory, “we will be more motivated to do something of our own will than something that we are forced to do”, and that could be the reason why the Ought-to self could correlate neither with the criterion measure nor the other two dimensions. There is also a possibility that the Ought-to L2 self did not have an impact on the criterion measure because students may be unaware of how strongly social pressure influences their decisions and motivated behaviour to learn.

This brings us to the question of our perception of the self. It might be that the distinction between the Ideal L2 self and Ought-to L2 self may not be so clear if we consider how social influences can control learners’ perceptions of themselves, and how this can question their vision. It could be that the desired and possible “ideal” self that a learner believes to be their own is in fact influenced by others (Taguchi et al., 2009). Students’ perceptions are behind their beliefs and expectations, so the Ideal L2 self can also be shaped by aspects which can be more related to the Ought-to L2 self dimension.

The Ideal L2 self correlated with L2 Learning experience too. Papi (2010) found that the Ideal L2 self impacts students’ English learning experience, which affects their motivated behaviour as well. It seems that learners with a positive future image of themselves as L2 speakers enjoy their learning experience more, while learners with a weak Ideal L2 self do not have the same perception of their learning environment because they cannot see the purpose or value of it. This could be due to the fact that students with a strong Ideal L2 self can perceive the relevance of what they do in class, knowing that it will help them achieve their ‘ideal’ and ‘future’ self. However, it might

also be that students with a strong Ideal L2 self engage in class more since they are conscious of their own selves and attitudes. In addition, their past learning experiences can be significant in terms of the impact they have to their own selves, given that positive or successful experiences can lead to motivation and can increase their self-esteem. Nevertheless, as Papi (2012) and Islam et al. (2013) suggest, it is difficult to determine the direction of causality, not knowing if learners' learning experience and positive L2 selves influence their learning achievement or the other way round. It might be that both affect one another.

The second research question of this study focused on the motivational learner types that could emerge using the L2 Motivational Self System. Generally, students who had high levels of motivation, especially on the Ideal L2 self dimension, also had better achievement scores than those learners with low levels of motivation. The motivational pattern of a high scoring learner consists of a strong Ideal L2 self, an enjoyable learning experience and a less meaningful Ought-to self dimension. This means that these learners see themselves as capable speakers, they enjoy their language learning experience and they distance themselves from their obligations or expectations: they have an inner interest in learning and this has a positive influence on their achievement. On the other hand, low scoring learners also have low motivational levels, the Ideal L2 self being the most influential dimension in their lack of motivation. Those students cannot visualize themselves as proficient English speakers. They might also not see the relevance of studying English for their future; it is merely a school subject, and this attitude and lack of motivation is what makes them poor achievers.

The whole Motivational Self System correlated with achievement scores, and this relationship can confirm the general assumption that the more motivated learners are, the higher achievement they obtain. The constructs, even though they measure different

aspects of motivation, showed a relationship or contribution to language learning. They also reflected different reasons for learning English, which can influence students' level of proficiency. Motivation is, hence, important to students' learning experience, to their achievement scores and their future selves. Motivation is a significant factor in the process of language learning, and it can influence L2 proficiency. Yet, as we have seen, it is not easy to identify cause-effect relationships, and in order to obtain a more complete view, factors such as experience, expectations and anxiety would also have to be taken into account.

Despite these uncertainties, these findings on the Motivational Self System could help teachers focus on the aspects that have proved to be more significant for students in their language learning. Given that the Ought-to self proved to be insignificant for students' achievement, this establishes that neither teachers nor parents should coerce learners to study, since it is not effective for them. It is not possible to modify learners' image per se, but teachers can provide the necessary tools to enhance and make their 'ideal' selves look more real. They can show them the actual advantages of speaking English, the kind of world they could live in or what people do internationally, which can arouse their image and motivate their learning. Similarly, they can work on the L2 Learning experience by making classrooms positive places where anxiety is low. They can also teach using materials which are appealing to their students and which promote their ideal selves, since this will contribute to a better achievement for the learners. Given the fundamental role of motivation, it is important that the educational system considers the significance and the ways in which it is possible to motivate L2 learners in order to achieve higher English proficiency.

6. Conclusion

This study has aimed to examine the relationship between Dörnyei's (2009) Motivational Self System and language learning achievement. Overall, the results have shown that the three dimensions of the theory have an impact on language learning, even though their effect appeared to be different. The Ideal L2 self has been found to be the most contributing factor to learners' achievement, followed by the L2 Learning experience. The Ideal L2 self has proved that learners who have the capacity to visualize themselves as future English speakers are generally more proficient in English. The study of the Ought-to L2 self has established the insignificance of what external pressures could produce in promoting students' motivation to become better achievers. The difference between students' motivational factors; i.e. self-internal view of an ideal future self or other's vision of the perfect self, has shown to be determining to their motivation and consequent achievement. The correlation between the Ideal L2 self and the L2 Learning experience has also given some clues on how to focus the teaching of an L2 in order to obtain better results. The L2 Motivational Self System has proved its usefulness to investigate motivation, giving some keys to interpret different motivational learner types. The different learner types and the most influential motivational factors can be of help for teachers to emphasize certain tasks and behaviours related to the 'ideal' image, as well as to improve their general learning experience.

Even though this study has shown some interesting results regarding motivation, the conclusions are limited to a small sample of participants in a state school context, who are only 17-18 years old. It is possible that different age groups in different learning environments would give slightly different results, given the psychological nature of the Ideal L2 self, the different possible learning environments and the influence of others in

distinct societies or more demanding contexts. This study was also limited in terms of the motivational variables, since only three were chosen. Other motives that have not been taken directly into account could influence the results, and this is significant for future research.

It would be interesting to conduct qualitative investigations or case studies to have a closer approach on the Ideal L2 self and students' vision of themselves, as well as to focus on different learners with a variety of levels in order to obtain more convincing results. It could also be of use to measure not only achievement, but also the factors that make it possible, such as ability or past experiences. Finally, it would be worth focusing on personal traits and individual factors, since it is not possible to say in what way the results may have been affected by other factors that have not been measured. If more factors could be applied and investigated in different contexts, the results on motivation could be clearer.

Motivation plays a major role in language learning. By researching it and applying its findings in the learning process, both teachers and learners will be able to benefit from it and enjoy their learning and teaching experience more.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Language Learning Questionnaire

We would like to ask you to help us by answering the following questions regarding foreign language learning. This is not a test so there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. We are interested in your personal opinion. Please answer seriously as only this will reassure the validity of the investigation. Thank you for your help.

We would like you to answer some questions by giving marks from 1 to 5.

5 = very much 4 = quite a lot 3 = so-so 2=not really 1=not at all

For example, if you like ‘apples’ very much, you don’t really like ‘lentils’ and you don’t like ‘spinach’ at all, answer the following:

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Do you like apples? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Do you like lentils? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Do you like spinach? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Please put one number in each box and don’t leave out any of them. Thank you.

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I can imagine myself speaking English as if I were a native speaker of English. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends or colleagues. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. I can imagine myself studying in a university where all my courses are taught in English. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. I can imagine myself writing English e-mails fluently. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. I can imagine myself living abroad and using English effectively for communicating with the locals. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. I imagine myself as someone who is able to speak English | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. If my dreams come true, I will use English effectively in the future. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. I study English because close friends of mine think it is important. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. If I fail to learn English, I will disappoint other people. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. Studying English is important to me in order to gain the approval of my teachers. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. Studying English is important to me in order to gain the approval of my family. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 13. Learning English is necessary because people surrounding me expect me to do so. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 14. Studying English is important to me because other people will respect me more if I have the knowledge of English. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 15. My parents believe that I must study English to be an educated person. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 16. Studying English is important to me because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak English. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 17. Do you like the atmosphere of your English classes? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 18. Do you find learning English really interesting? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 19. Do you think time passes faster while studying English? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 20. Do you find the topics covered in your English course book interesting? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 21. Would you like to have more English lessons at school? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 22. Do you volunteer answers in your English classes? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 23. Do you consider that your teacher motivates you to learn English? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 24. Would you like to have more alternative activities in your English classes? (e.g. group speaking activities, oral presentations, etc) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Adapted from Papi (2010), Taguchi et al. (2009) and Islam et al. (2013)

Appendix B: Qüestionari d'aprenentatge d'idiomes

Et demanem la teva ajuda per respondre a les següents preguntes sobre l'aprenentatge d'idiomes estrangers. Això no és cap examen, així que no hi ha respostes “bones” o “dolentes”. Ens interessa la teva opinió personal. Si us plau, contesta seriosament, ja que és l'única manera de poder assegurar-nos de la validesa de la investigació. Gràcies per la teva ajuda.

Ens agradaria que contestessis a algunes preguntes, puntuant de l'1 al 5.

5 = molt 4 = bastant 3 = més o menys 2 = no gaire 1 = gens

Per exemple, si t'agraden molt les “pomes”, no t'agraden gaire les “llenties” i no t'agraden gens els espinacs, marca el següent:

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| T'agraden les pomes? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| T'agraden les llenties? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| T'agraden els espinacs? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Si us plau, marca un número a cada casella i no te'n deixis cap. Gràcies.

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25. Em puc imaginar parlant anglès com si fos un parlant nadiu. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 26. Em puc imaginar parlant anglès amb amics o col·legues internacionals | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 27. Quan penso en la meva futura trajectòria, m'imagino utilitzant l'anglès | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 28. Em puc imaginar estudiant en una universitat on totes les assignatures s'imparteixin en anglès. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 29. Em puc imaginar escrivint correus en anglès amb fluïdesa | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 30. Em puc imaginar vivint a l'estranger i fent servir l'anglès de manera efectiva per comunicar-me amb els del país | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 31. M'imagino com algú capaç de parlar anglès | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 32. Si els meus somnis es fan realitat, faré servir l'anglès eficaçment en un futur | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 33. Estudio anglès perquè els meus amics propers pensen que és important | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 34. Si fracasso a l'estudiar anglès, decebré a altres persones | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 35. Estudiar anglès és important per mi perquè així puc guanyar-me l'aprovació dels meus professors | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 36. Estudiar anglès és important per mi perquè així puc guanyar-me l'aprovació de la meua família. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 37. Aprendre anglès és necessari perquè la gent del meu voltant espera que ho faci. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 38. Estudiar anglès és important per mi perquè l'altra gent em respectarà més si sé anglès | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 39. Els meus pares pensen que he d'estudiar anglès per ser una persona culta. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 40. Estudiar anglès és important per mi perquè una persona culta se suposa que sap parlar anglès | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 41. T'agrada l'ambient de les teves classes d'anglès? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 42. Trobes que estudiar anglès és realment interessant? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 43. Creus que el temps passa més ràpid quan estudies anglès? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 44. Consideres que els temes del teu llibre d'anglès són interessants? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 45. T'agradaria tenir més classes d'anglès a l'institut? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 46. Contestes a respostes voluntàriament a les classes d'anglès? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 47. Consideres que el/la teu/teva professor/a d'anglès et motiva a aprendre anglès? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 48. T'agradaria fer més activitats alternatives a les classes d'anglès? (per exemple, activitats grupals orals, presentacions orals, etc.) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Adapted from Papi (2010), Taguchi et al. (2009) and Islam et al. (2013)