L2 MOTIVATIONAL SELF-SYSTEM THEORY:

L2 MOTIVATIONAL LEVELS IN THE SRI LANKAN LEARNING CONTEXT

Dilmini Direckze[1] and Madawi Sumanasinghe[2]*

[1,2]*Department of PGIE, The Open University of Sri Lanka*

INTRODUCTION

Research on motivation to learn a second language or a foreign language has been in focus in the field of education for many years. As per Dornyei and Chan (2013), some important milestones of language motivation research includes Gardener and Lambert's (1959, 1972) pioneering research that introduced the concepts of integrative and instrumental orientation, Clement's (1980) addition of self-confidence to the motivational research paradigm, Gardener's (1985) and Gardener and Maclntyre's (1992, 1993) detailed discussion of the socio-educational model in second language acquisition (SLA), the educational shift in motivation research in the 1990s (eg. Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei, 1994) and the L2 Motivational Self system proposed by Dornyei (2005, 2009).

Dörnyei has reconceptualized L2 motivation as part of the learner's self system outlining the effect of two significant theoretical developments: L2 field and conventional psychology. Dörnyei (as cited in Far, Rajab, & Etemadzadeh, 2012) states that the L2 motivational self system considers the idea of "possible selves" that "give form, meaning, structure, and direction to one's hopes and threats, thereby inciting and directing possible behavior". The concept of possible selves is captured from Higgin's self-discrepancy theory (as cited in Far, Rajab, & Etemadzadeh, 2012). Carver et al. (as cited in Dörnyei, 2009) emphasise that possible selves - representing the individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming denote a unique self-dimension in that they refer to future rather than current self-states. Markus and Nurius (as cited in Dörnyei, 2009) points out three main types of possible selves: ideal selves that we would very much like to become, selves that we could become and selves we are afraid of becoming. Many researchers have conducted a great deal of research to discover the relatioonship between ideal selves and academic self guides.

Through his research, Dörnyei (2009) identifies that L2 motivational self system is made up of three components: Ideal L2 self, Ought-to-L2 self and L2 Learning experience. Data of his Hungarian research and new theoretical approaches determines that future self guides i.e. ideal and ought to selves are central components of L2 motivational self system. Ideal L2 self is derived from the inner desire to learn the language by the learner. Dörnyei (2009) points out that "if the person we would like to become speaks a L2, the 'ideal L2 self' is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves". Ought to L2 Self which is the other main component of L2 motivational self system, is originated from the influence of the society where the learner belongs to. Dörnyei (2009) defines ought to L2 self as "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess such as duties, responsibilities, obligations etc. to meet expectations and to avoid possible negtive outcomes". L2 learning experience is coined from the authentic participation of the learner in the learning process. According to Dörnyei (2009), "L2 learning experience, which concerns situated, 'executive' motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience such as the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success etc."

Dörnyei (2009) emphasizes that Gardner's socio-educational model as well as influential conceptualisations suggested by Noels and Ushioda "appear to converge in a common tripartite construct, which is fully compatible with the L2 Motivational Self System."

---

[*] *Corresponding author: E mail -* **dilmini.direckze@gmail.com**

This study is based on Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self-System and analyses a language learner's L2 motivational levels in terms of their ideal L2 selves, ought to L2 selves and L2 learning experience demonstrating the relationship of various factors and their influence on each other and the L2 motivational system as a whole. Thus the objective of the study is to identify the main component of L2 motivational self system that affect the Sri Lankan learners. Language teachers, specifically second language teachers often have the challenge of motivating L2 learners to get the maximum benefit when learning L2. This study focuses on Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self-System theory in Sri Lankan or South Asian learning context. Sri Lanka is a multilingual, multi cultural country comprises of approximately 20 million population. Learning a second language is quite common in the country while learning a third language gives an additional benefit in many instances.

METHODOLOGY

Profile of the target group

A quesitonnaire based on Ideal L2 self, ought to L2 selves and L2 learning experience was given to a group of 26 students in two advanced level classes i.e. 17-18 years old students in a semi-urban government mixed school in Central Province in Sri Lanka. Students come from lower middle class and lower class families which lack formal education and language education.
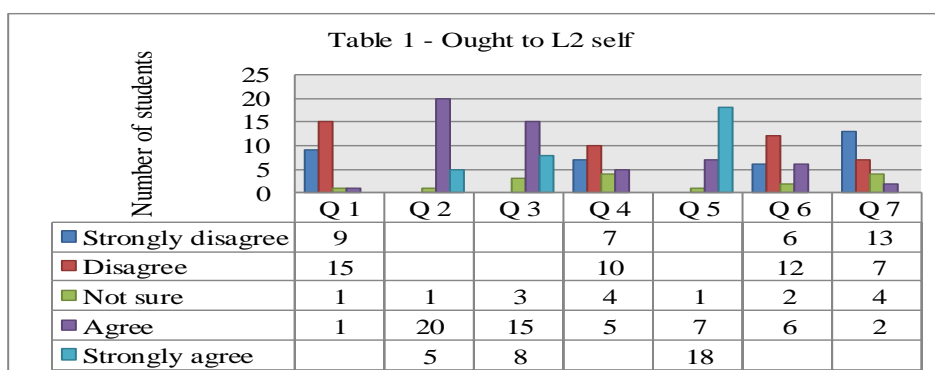
Gender equality can be observed in classes thus in the research: out of 26 students, 12 are girls and 14 are boys. All the students speak Sinhala as the mother tongue and learn English as the second language. Although the students have been learning English since grade 3, they are not confident enough to speak in English as their proficiency level is limited. They do not get any influence from their families to speak in English thus they feel shy talking in English even with their peers during group work though they want to learn to speak. Even at school, they hear speaking in English only from their English teacher which happens during the English period.According to their English teacher, they show a lot of interest in learning the language during English period.

Method

This study was done with only quantitative data which was collected from the questionnaire using Likert scale format. Questionnaire was translated and given to students in their mother tongue, Sinhala. First part of the questionnaire was designed to obtain the biological details of the learner together with information about the learning context. Second part of the questionnaire which was divided in to three categories according to the three components of L2 Motivational Self-system, contained seven questions for ought to L2 self, nine questions for ideal L2 self and eight questions for L2 learning experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The rating results according to the answers of students for questions 1 to 7 related to ought to L2 self-component are given in Table 1.

Number of students	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7
Strongly disagree	9			7		6	13
Disagree	15			10		12	7
Not sure	1	1	3	4	1	2	4
Agree	1	20	15	5	7	6	2
Strongly agree		5	8		18		

Table 1 - Ought to L2 self

In the table 1, the answers depict that certain societal factors help students to motivate to learn L2. According to the results in the question 2 *(My parents believe that I must study English to be an educated person)* parents of the target group as well as students themselves believe that they should learn English to be educated people, to obtain a good reputation and respect from peers, family, and teachers and also to get a good job. Most of the students have a strong belief that they should learn English to get social recognition.

However, it is visible that close friends of the target group or the people surrounding them do not motivate or influence them to learn L2. Answers to the question number 4 *(I have to study English to please my parents)* reveal that the target group believes that their parents want them to learn English not merely for the happiness of parents but for the benefit of their children. To summarize the results of ought to L2 self, it is revealed as this target group is motivated by certain societal factors. Parents, society, and their beliefs related to social recognition and a better job motivate the students to learn L2. Yet, the influence of their close friends who are in the same caliber regarding the language proficiency and formal education setting are not motivating the target group which gives a perception of the attitudinal state of the target group.
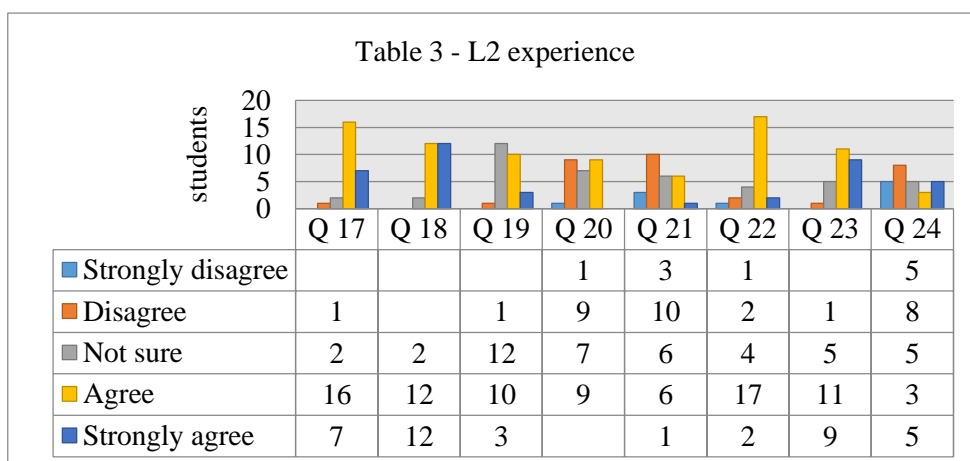
Result of the nine questions designed to find out the motivation of L2 learners in relation to Ideal L2 self are given in Table 2.

Table 2 - Ideal L2 self

	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15	Q 16
Strongly disagree								1	2
Disagree		2		2			1	1	7
Not sure		11	6	1		3	3	5	6
Agree	6	10	13	14	10	14	17	13	10
Strongly agree	20	3	7	9	16	9	5	6	1

According to table 2, majority of students seem to have inner desire to learn L2 implying inner motivation. Although most of the students answered to question 9 stating that they could be happy even if they do not know much English, almost all of them believe that English is a compulsory requirement for their future as per the answers to question 8 *(The things I want to do in the future require me to use English)*. However, several students have a negative comment or attitude on question number 16 *(Studying English is important because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak in English)*. There could be several reasons behind this confidence or attitude. Although they have limited English proficiency, they are recognized as the cleverest students in the whole school which make them feel that their education is not affected by L2. Another reason could be that they are not confident in learning L2 thus making an effort to face the challenge by being educated without allowing L2 learning affect their education as a whole.

It is noticeable that several students mentioned that they are not sure of imagining things. The effect of visualizing is proven strong but without having a proper training, it will only be day dreaming. Showing that they do not know about how to visualize gives the view that they know the difference between day dreaming and visualizing.

Answers of the questions designed to find out the motivation related to L2 learning experience is given in Table 3. Answers depict that students lack L2 learning experience. Majority of students are motivated by their English teacher (question 17*: My English teacher always maintains a supportive and pleasant classroom climate where we are free from embarrassment and ridicule)* as well as the lessons in the text book (question 19). As per question 23, they believe that they can do higher studies in English medium and they can speak in English with their English teacher, family, and friends. Yet, depicted by question 22, they state that they get nervous when talking to a fluent speaker of English. Even though they genuinely want to learn English, most of the students do not read English newspapers or books. Students are not quite comfortable with using English with peers in the classroom. They have mixed feelings when they think about themselves as people who do not know English.

Table 3 - L2 experience

	Q 17	Q 18	Q 19	Q 20	Q 21	Q 22	Q 23	Q 24
Strongly disagree				1	3	1		5
Disagree	1		1	9	10	2	1	8
Not sure	2	2	12	7	6	4	5	5
Agree	16	12	10	9	6	17	11	3
Strongly agree	7	12	3		1	2	9	5

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Validity of the L2 Motivational Self System has been demonstrated through numerous studies and research done not only in Europe but also in Asia where different languages are in use. This study which is done using only one government school in Central Province provides considerable facts about L2 learning and L2 motivational self system. Out of ideal L2 self, ought to L2 self and L2 learning experience, students are motivated mostly by ideal L2 self. Capacity of motivating through ideal L2 self can be enhanced by teaching how to visualize and imagine the desires of students related to L2 learning.

Another observation which could be noticed in the school is that neither teachers nor parents are motivated or encouraged to use English in the school premises. As a result, students hear or use English only during their English period, i.e. only for 30 - 40 minutes per day. From the ratings of the questions, it is understood that students don't use or are not motivated to use English at home either. They seldom get the opportunity to watch English films or an English programme in TV as no other person at home understands English. Everybody watches TV at night and they normally seem watching what majority prefer to watch.

Students are not motivated much with ought to L2 self and L2 learning experience mainly due to the fact that both ought to L2 self and L2 learning experience interrelate with the environment and society and people surrounding them. It seems that students have the inner desire to learn L2 but they do not know how to motivate themselves through close friends and learning contexts.

 Although teachers cannot change the society in a large scale and the people surrounding students, it will be effective if the school enviornment and people commuicate with students in school premises motivate them in L2 learning. Providing a friendly enviornment and pleasant L2 learning experience by providing the opportunity to use new technology in L2 learning could be quite effective as they stay more than 6 hours in the school premises

everyday. More than the responsibility of the teacher, we perosnally believe that it is the responsibility of the principal and the management of the school to encourge teachers and students to do their part.This way, language teachers will get numerous opportunities to increase student motivation in L2 learning. As Dörnyei (as cited in Dörnyei & Skehan 2003) clearly states, wide range of academic and social motives are needed in order to have a sophisticated motivational life of classrooms.

REFERENCES

Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and Motivating in the foreign Language Classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 273 - 284.

Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 Motivational Self System. In Z. Dörnyei, & E. Ushioda, *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 self* (pp. 9 - 42). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Dörnyei, Z., & Skehan, P. (2003). Individual Differences in Second Language Learning. In C. J. D., & M. H. L., *Tha Hanbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 589 - 527). Oxford: Blackwell Pubishing.

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2011). *Teaching and Researching Motivation.* Pearson Education Limited.

Dornyei, Z., Henry, A., & Muir, C. (2016). *Motivational Currents in Language Learning: Frameworks for Focused Interventions.* New York: Routledge.

Far, H., Rajab, A., & Etemadzadeh, A. (2012). Examining the Relationship between L2 Motivational Self System and L2-Learning Among TESL Students. *US-China Foreign Language*, 1266 - 1270.

Gunawardena, S. (2012). *Motivational factors influencing learners following voluntary and mandatory English language programmes at Sri Lankan universities: A comparative study using the L2 Motivational self system Perspectice.* Colombo: Open University of Sri Lanka.

Harrison, J. (2008 -2009). Research Project. *INNERVATE - Leading Undergraduate Work in English Studies*, 109 - 126.

Magid, M. (2014). An Application of the L2 Motivtional Self System to Motivate Elementary School English Learners in Singapore. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 228 - 237.

Rajab, A., Far, H., & Etemadzadeh, A. (2012). The Relationship between L2 Motivational Self-System and L2 Learning among TESL Students in Iran. *ELSEVIER*, 419 – 424.

Skinner, E. (2015). Engagement and disaffection as central to processes of motivational resilience and development .