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L2 motivational self system and its relationship with gender, proficiency and year

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Abstract

The present study highlights the central role of motivation in the process of foreign language learning. Drawing on Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system, the study aims to examine the beliefs of pre-service teachers and find out whether there is a meaningful relationship between the system and gender, proficiency and year. To collect data, a motivation questionnaire of 30 items was administered to 160 students. Data were analyzed using SPSS. The results revealed that the majority of students had the motivation required for language learning in terms of the constructs in the questionnaire. Further, significant relationships were noted between the dimension of 'ideal L2 self', and the variables of gender and year. It was shown that motivation had no influence on students' proficiency levels in Turkish context. Along its context-specific results, the study showed several directions for future research by informing the language learning motivation of pre-service teachers in teacher education.

Keywords: Foreign language, motivation, proficiency, gender, year.

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1. Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged that motivation is a fundamental factor in the learning process (Calvo, 2015; Dornyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985). Williams and Burden (1997) describe motivation as the most powerful influences on learning as learning is most likely to occur when we want to learn. Theoretically, motivation is termed as 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, 1985; Oxford, 1996). In the L2 learning process, motivation emerges as the driving force to start learning an L2 and to maintain further interest in studying the L2 involved. As Oxford (1996: 121) mentions, motivation determines “the extent of active, personal involvement in foreign or second language learning”. This makes it clear that the unmotivated students without enough involvement in their study cannot become competent in exploiting L2 skills. Dornyei and Csizer (1998: 203) further emphasize that “Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals”.

This is the case for the state-run educational system of Turkey where one of the challenging problems facing the majority of L2 learners applies to insufficient student motivation. Pre-service EFL teachers in Turkey often attend English classes without the inadequate enthusiasm required to succeed in such a challenging task as mastering a foreign language. Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2011: 572) note that “some teachers may become frustrated by their unmotivated students and their teaching quality may diminish as a consequence”. They might have recognized the lack of motivation as inhibiting students from learning an L2 regardless of students’ abilities, the appropriate curriculum and the quality of teaching. That is why Turkish language teachers are often in search of a systematic solution to insufficient student motivation in order to promote their engagement in classroom activities and consequently help them develop their L2 skills. Accordingly L2 motivation has been the target of a great deal of research in the past decade due to its importance in improving L2 proficiency. Motivation research has sought to explore the defining factors predicting the source of student motivation and how teachers can stimulate motivation in their students and classrooms. Gardner and Lambert’s research (1972) was the pioneering study in the field, which highlighted the idea of ‘integrativeness’, and then it was dominated by the cognitive view, the self-determination and attribution theories in the 1990s. The last motivational theory to date has been the L2 Motivational Self System proposed by Dornyei (2009). With this theory there has been a renewed interest in studying language learning motivation as it presents broad framework and intends to reconceptualize the standard notions on motivation. The present study intends to investigate individual components of pre-service EFL teachers’ language motivation based on Dornyei’s (2005, 2009) recent model of the L2 Motivational Self System. It further seeks to find out the possible relations between the L2 Motivational Self System and the variables of gender, proficiency, and year.

2. Literature Review

The ‘L2 Motivational Self System’ was proposed by Dornyei (2005) as the reconceptualization of past research on L2 learning motivation. In fact the construct grew out of a dissatisfaction with Gardner and Lambert’s (1959) traditional model of L2 motivation, which was based on the concept of ‘integrativeness’. That is why Dornyei’s (2005) model can be seen as a natural progression from Gardner’s theory, addressing many of the concerns about its theoretical basis. One key concern in this respect was that the notion was entirely centered on the contact and identification with a specific L2 group, whereas, as Dornyei (2011) points out, this did not apply to the mainstream motivational process. Instead researchers like Dornyei and Csizer, in particular, set out to extend the theory so that it could be suited to diverse situations and populations. More recently, these efforts have found support from the shift of English to, what is called, World/Global English as an international language. This marked shift in the status of English has stressed the new perspective of the “integrative” term as this “new” language is no longer associated with a specific community or setting (Islam et al., 2013). 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 new stance has prompted the reconceptualization of motivation study which stresses the importance of the theories based on the social context and the learner's identity and view of the self. It has been shown that Dornyei's (2009) theory of the L2 Motivational Self System emerges as one approach to motivation that addresses these aspects through using psychological theories of the self.

In essence the L2 Motivational Self System rooted in several language learning constructs consists of three main components, which are called the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience. Ideal L2 Self is the "L2-specific facet of one's 'ideal self'" (Dornyei, 2009: 29). This means that the learner creates his ideal self-image representative of his wish to master the L2. The Ought-to L2 Self "concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes" (Dornyei, 2009: 29). For instance, if a person intends to please teacher or boss through their language fluency, the Ought-to L2 Self functions as the main motivator for their learning (Calvo, 2015). L2 Learning Experience concerns "situated, executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (Dornyei, 2009: 29). This suggests that the positive learning environment, for example, might possibly lead to a great deal of motivation for some language learners to learn an L2. While Ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self as previously exhibited come to represent the key components in the L2 motivational self system, the system also involves the other three important dimensions called 'attitudes to learning English', 'the criterion measure' and 'integrativeness'. 'Attitudes to learning English' involves "measuring situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (Dornyei, 2009: 75). The criterion measure assesses the learners' intended efforts toward learning English. To illustrate, the sentence reads "I would like to spend lots of time studying English". This construct of motivation is frequently associated with L2 language achievement (Calvo, 2015; Dornyei, 2009), since it depicts students' effort, interest, and readiness to invest time and energy to learn the language. Integrativeness entails "having a positive attitude toward the second language, its culture and the native speakers of that language" (Dornyei, 2009: 75). To exemplify, the sentence reads "I think that learning English is important to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers".

Interestingly the L2 motivational self system as a new theory of motivation has relatively received less attention from researchers in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). At the outset, to validate the new system substantial contributions were made by Dornyei and his colleagues conducting empirical studies in the field. Subsequently, other research has examined the relationship between several dimensions of the L2 motivational self system and language learning across different contexts, in countries as diverse as Japan (Ryan, 2009) and Hungary (Csizer & Kormos, 2009). The actual stimulus for this new model came from the results of a large-scale motivation study carried out by Dornyei et al. (2006) in Hungary that involved over 13,000 students and which focused on attitudes towards five target languages.

A closer look at the Dornyei's 'Motivational Self System' suggests that an in-depth analysis of its components can be helpful to understand what the motivations of the learners are. In addition to capturing students' potential motivations, it can in turn function as a predictor of the other factors such as L2 learning strategies, the interaction with native speakers and L2 proficiency (Oxford, 1996). Among these does second language proficiency stand out as more important factor than any other in motivation research. A large body of research has focused on the relationships between motivation and EFL proficiency (e.g. Gardner, 1985, Crookes & Schmidt, 1991). Existing literature has demonstrated that a high level of motivation is generally linked with high levels of EFL academic achievement (Toni & Rostami, 2012; Csizer and Kormos, 2009; Dornyei, 2009). With this line of research the present study also seeks to find out whether the possible close relation between 'Motivational Self System' and language proficiency verifies the previously conducted research findings. Another variable commonly researched with in the field of L2 motivation concerns gender differences. The bulk of studies on the relationship between gender and L2 motivation suggest that there are differences between males and females in terms of L2 motivation. For example, Williams, Burden, and Lanvers (2002) reported that female British schoolchildren aged seven to nine had a

higher level of L2 motivation than males. Ghazvini and Khajehpour's (2011) study revealed that high school Iranian female learners were more positive toward learning English than male learners. These findings necessarily point to female superiority involving L2 motivation research and it would be worthwhile to explore whether there is a gender difference in L2 motivation toward learning English that is not commonly investigated in the Turkish context. The last factor likely to influence learners' L2 motivation levels relates to the grade that students attend. The studies that are relatively scarce in the field appear to indicate that motivation decline with age or levels of degree. In Williams et al.'s (2002) study, seventh graders scored significantly higher on the need for the language, integrative orientation toward their teachers, and perceived self-ability and success than ninth graders. Sung and Padilla's (1998) study yielded similar results indicating that elementary students were more motivated than secondary students toward learning Korean, Japanese, and Chinese.

3. Aim of the Study

Due to the paucity of empirical research undertaken to generalize the findings from Dornyei's (2009) study on his L2 Motivational Self System in different contexts, the current study attempts to fill this gap. Besides, as implied in the previous studies, there appears to be a limited understanding of what factors might influence students' motivation levels in different learning contexts. The study is unique in that it addresses gender, proficiency and degree differences in L2 motivation in a Turkish context. Resting on Dornyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System as the main theoretical framework, the study attempts to investigate the L2 Motivational Self System beliefs of EFL pre-service teachers in Turkish context. The focus of the study is on the five motivational constructs as identified by Dornyei including "ideal L2 self", "ought-to L2 self", "criterion measures", "attitudes toward learning English" and "integrativeness". To do this, the following research questions were addressed for this study:

1. What are pre-service teachers' perceived L2 Motivational Self System beliefs held in the language learning process?
2. Is there a significant relationship between the subscales of the L2 Motivational Self System and gender, proficiency and year?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

A total of 160 university students (107 females, 53 males) from a state-run Turkish university took part in the study. The participants for this study were all TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) pre-service teachers majoring in English language teaching in Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey. The participating students' age ranged from 18 to 22, with an average of 20. At the time of conducting the study, they were in their second, third and fourth year studying in Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University. Prior to entering university, they had received English education for more than seven years. They were all Turkish students and almost had the same education background.

4.2. Instrument

The L2 Motivational Self System questionnaire as the main instrument was utilized to provide appropriate responses to the research questions. The questionnaire items were adapted from a currently devised questionnaire by Taguchi et al. (2009), with minor wording revisions to fit the language learning context in Turkey. The five main variables of the questionnaire correspond to its dimensions, that is, ideal L2 self (8 items), the Ought-to L2 self (8 items), attitudes to learning English (6 items), integrativeness (3 items), the criterion measure (5 items). For the main study, the quantitative method was employed in order to test these five variables that make up the L2 Motivational Self System. The 30 questionnaire items were measured by five-point Likert scale, from 1 showing "not at all" to 5 showing "very much". Apart from involving five main dimensions, further three independent variables, proficiency, gender and year were included in the study. Among these, students' academic achievement was assessed by means of their latest cumulative average grades

that they reported to formally take before taking part in the study. Practically, students' grades were categorized as being successful or poor over seventy on the basis of their achievement.

4.3. Procedure

The questionnaire was administered in February 2016. At the outset the researcher informed of the purpose of the study so that the students could respond to the survey items accurately. Prior to the implementation stage, the questionnaire was piloted with a small group of samples to identify possible problems in the research instrument. Amendments for some items were made and some statements were reworded. The data elicited from students' responses were computer-coded using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 18.0 Software for Windows. Cronbach alpha index of reliability for the student questionnaire proved to be high and displayed a strong correlation among questionnaire items. In the phase of analyzing data, the mean scores and standard deviations for each item in the L2 Motivational Self System questionnaire were calculated using SPSS. Then, Independent t-test and ANOVA test were run in order to determine significant variation in students' L2 motivations by gender, proficiency and year.

5. Results and Discussion

In order to answer the first research question concerning pre-service teachers' perceived L2 Motivational Self System beliefs held in the language learning process, the means and standard deviations for each of the 30 questionnaire items were statistically analyzed. Ranking these items in accordance with their respective means, it was found that the relevant item included in the dimension of 'integrativeness', which involves pre-service teachers' strong desire "to integrate with more varied people and cultures by studying English" had the highest mean ($M=4.73$, $SD=3.30$). Gardner (2001) frames this notion as the driving force of motivated behavior, that is, "it concerns a central motivational engine that needs to be ignited by some specific learning goal such as an integrative orientation" (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2009: 23). Turning to Turkish context, however, this sense of 'integrativeness' appears to be characterized mostly by financial reasons for learning English. Cetinkaya and Oruc's (2010) survey confirms the vital role of integrative motivation for Turkish learners who reported to value the learning of English, to a large extent, for their future career. Concerning the subsequent important motivational factor ($M=4.62$, $SD=3.32$), the majority of pre-service teachers "found learning English really interesting". This item is included in the dimension of 'attitudes towards English' and provides evidence to suggest that Turkish pre-service teachers' positive attitudes held towards learning English turn out to be a strong motivational factor behind their reasons for learning English. With respect to the other most important factor ($M=4.51$, $SD=0.74$) included in the ideal L2 self subscale, an overwhelming majority of pre-service teachers pointed out that "they imagine themselves using English when planning their future career". In this respect, the ideal L2 self has the function of providing the source of motivation and truly represents students' desire to acquire the L2 as their ideal self-image.

On the other hand, the lowest mean ($M=2.10$, $SD=1.16$) in the questionnaire indicated that one might want to learn English only in order to meet the expectations of close friends. In fact, such a factor is quite far from becoming main motivator for the majority of pre-service teachers in the process of learning English. It may be that they might consider this factor too external to explain the source of learner motivation. Overall, based on the findings from L2 Motivational Self System analysis on items, five subscales were identified. Practically, the descriptive statistics for these five subscales including Ideal L2 self, Ought-to L2 self, Attitudes to learning English, The criterion measure and Integrativeness are demonstrated in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of L2 motivational self system subscales

Subscales	N	Mean	SD
Attitudes to learning English	160	4.76	1.14
Integrativeness	160	4.33	1.27
Ideal L2 self	160	4.13	0.60
The criterion measure	160	3.83	1.15
Ought-to L2 self	160	2.89	0.88
Total	160	3.98	1.00

As clearly depicted in Table 1, the total mean score was found to be 3.98, which is statistically high. This suggests that pre-service teachers viewed their motivation to study English as closely connected with the L2 Motivational Self Model. Statistically, the means and percentages given in table 1 reveal that ‘attitudes to learning English’ have the highest mean (M=4.76, SD=1.14), followed by ‘integrativeness (M=4.33, SD=1.27), ‘ideal L2 self (M=4.13, SD=0.60)’ and ‘the criterion measure (M=3.83, SD=1.15)’ while ‘ought-to L2 self’ is ranked the least mean (M=2.89, SD=0.88). These results of the survey prove to be conducive to enhancing pre-service teachers’ motivation to improve English in the case of possible inadequate enthusiasm required to teach English. In response to the second research question concerning the influence of gender on pre-service teachers’ motivation to actively engage in language studies, the independent *t*-test was run as shown in Table 2. The results of the test appear to back up the view, to some extent, that gender as a factor might have potentially an impact on students’ L2 motivation. Of the five dimension, a meaningful difference was found between Ideal L2 self and gender in that male pre-service teachers (M=4.35) were surprisingly more motivated than female students (4.01) in creating ideal L2 self image. However, a great deal of similar research result indicated the female superiority in L2 motivation (e.g. Mori & Gobel, 2006; Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002). The explanation for this inconsistent result can be that, to the best of the researchers’ knowledge, Turkish male pre-service teachers tend to be driven by the extrinsic motives in actively pursuing language studies offered at university, which would in process lead them to complete the compulsory language courses and graduate as a candidate for English teacher. As such, it should be noted that this kind of motivational orientations, intrinsic or extrinsic, based on gender differences can reasonably be linked to the social and financial conditions specific to a country like Turkey.

Table 2. Independent samples *t*-test comparing male versus female students

L2 dimension	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Ideal L2 self	Male	53	4.35	.879	2.21	.02
	Female	107	4.01			

Along this line of inquiry in the present study the relationship between dimensions of L2 motivational self system and learner achievement in L2 competence is statistically investigated running an Independent samples *t*-test. As displayed in table 3, no meaningful difference was found between more proficient learners and less proficient learners concerning their ideal L2 self, integrativeness and attitudes to L2. Notably, this finding of the survey seems to contradict those common to much of the research, arguing that these L2 motivational factors exert important influence on student achievement (Taguchi et al., (2009); Papi, (2010); and Islam et al., (2013). This finding can rightfully be speculated because it is not compatible with relevant research. However, this is not true of the present survey which proves unique in addressing pre-service EFL teachers at university level. There is also evidence to justify this mismatch indicating that all pre-service students regardless of L2 proficiency levels have been found to have high levels of motivation on the students’ motivational dispositions. This finding also bears out Papi and Abdollahzadeh’s (2012, p. 588) claim regarding ideal L2 self that no matter how well-developed the students’ ideal L2 self is, their actual motivated behavior involving classroom tasks will remain unaffected. In other words, as they (2012) further put,

future selves need to be equipped with appropriate behavioral strategies in order to facilitate goal attainment (Dornyei, 2009; Oyserman, 2008).

Table 3. Independent samples t-test comparing more proficient learners versus less proficient students

L2 dimension	Achievement	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Ideal L2 self	More proficient	53	4.15	.636	.207	.83
	Less proficient	107	4.12	.597		
Integrativeness	More proficient	53	4.55	1.96	1.55	.62
	Less proficient	107	4.23	.701		
Attitudes to L2	More proficient	53	4.82	1.50	.494	.12
	Less proficient	107	4.73	.932		

In the final stage of the data analysis one-way ANOVA test was run in an attempt to find out whether there was a significant relationship among pre-service teachers' year of study at university concerning the L2 motivational self system subscales. The classes under investigation were first year, third year and fourth year, each of which proved representative of both sample and context in line with research purposes. The findings are summed up in table 4 below:

Table 4. Means for differences in L2 motivational self system subscales according to year of study

L2 dimension	1 st year	3 rd year	4 th year
Ideal L2 self	3.24	3.15	3.83
Ought-to L2 self	3.91	4.21	3.45

It seems that the results are indicative of how pre-service teachers develop a sense of L2 motivation within the period of educational process. A meaningful relationship was found between the two dimensions, ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self, with regard to year of study. This was followed by the conducting of Tukey test run to further determine between which classes this relationship was found to be statistically significant. The results of Tukey test make it clear that a significant difference was found in favor of third and final year students, implying that towards the final years of their education pre-service teachers appear to be more motivated compared to those in their first year. This motivated behavior is explicitly manifested in their dispositions to strongly form an imaginative version of English teacher identity. In contrast to this aspect of motivational behavior in the present study, there is a dearth of research on age or class differences, indicating that motivation declines with age (Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002; Sung, 2010). The reason why final year student had a higher L2 motivation level than first year students may be that final year students perceived the competence in English as essential quality required to be a qualified English teacher after graduation in Turkish context. All in all, the reasons in nature appear to be context-specific, which means that research is needed to be able to generalize the research findings on diverse learning populations.

6. Conclusions

The present study has first and foremost confirmed the new motivational factors identified in Dornyei's (2005) L2 motivational self system in Turkish context at university level. Overall, the results have revealed that all of the five dimensions involved in the theory have an effect on pre-service teachers' L2 motivational behaviors, even though their impact was measured to be in varying degrees. Positive attitudes to learning English have been found to be the most contributing factor to pre-service teachers' perceived motivation level, followed by integrativeness and Ideal L2 self. These results are compatible with the current research in the area of SLA. In pedagogical terms these motivational behaviors are ideally acknowledged as defining teaching qualifications required of pre-service EFL teachers in Turkish educational system. With regard to gender and class differences within the framework of L2 motivational self system, male and final year pre-service teachers have been

shown to have a higher motivation than their counterparts, which runs counter to similar research. More surprisingly, unlike most studies, the constructs of L2 motivational self system did not appear to be related to the proficiency level of pre-service teachers. Despite its unexpected results, the current study along its specific learning context may be of help to investigate different learner types in line with Dörnyei's (2005) L2 motivation self model. This resulting knowledge on learner diversity combined with the most influential L2 motivational factors can assist both pre-service L2 teachers and their tutors in emphasizing certain classroom tasks and motivational behaviors associated with the 'ideal' image of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers.

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