



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## CORRELATION STUDY OF IDEAL L2 SELF AND MOTIVATIONAL BEHAVIOR OF NON-ENGLISH MAJORS IN CHINA

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## ARTICLE DETAILS

## Article History:

Received 19 June 2022

Accepted 23 July 2022

Available online 27 July 2022

## ABSTRACT

In the field of Second Language Acquisition, most research has combined L2MSS with L2 motivational behavior currently. Based on the data got from questionnaire in which 104 non-English majors from China participated and SPSS data analysis, this paper aims to explore the current situation of ideal L2 self and motivational behavior of non-English majors, gender differences of both and the correlation between ideal L2 self and motivational behavior for non-English majors. The results indicated that both ideal L2 self and motivational behavior of non-English majors were at a higher level. There existed a significant gender distinction in the ideal L2 self of non-English majors, but there was no significant gender distinction in their motivational behavior. Moreover, the ideal L2 self of non-English majors was positively correlated with their motivational behavior, especially for girls.

## KEYWORDS

Ideal L2 self, Motivational behavior, Gender difference, Correlation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is generally acknowledged that Dörnyei put forward the motivational theory of L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), which has been widely concerned since it was proposed. In the decade from 2005 to 2015, one third of motivation studies in the area of language learning and language teaching were based on this theory. A large quantity of research have proved the significance of the three aspects of L2MSS in second language learning and in recent years, more and more researchers attach importance to the correlation between L2MSS and motivational behavior.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Definitions of Relate Key Terms

## 2.1.1 Motivation

Motivation is the reason why people “decide what to do” and “how long they can persist in it” and “how many efforts they have to make” in the process of doing something (Dörnyei, 2001). It determines the “direction” and “strength” of human activities. Higgins further pointed out that men are motivated to approach happiness and avoid pain (Higgins, 2000). The diversity and variety of motivation definition can be attributed to various reasons behind human behavior, ranging from internal motivation to external environment.

## 2.1.2 L2 Motivational Self System

L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) was put forward by Dörnyei as early as 2005. Drawing on the concepts of “Possible Self” and “Self-Discrepancy Theory” in the field of psychology, Dörnyei studied the Motivation Self System in the context of globalization. In theory, such research is the development and extension of theoretical motivation framework proposed by Gardner and other scholars, which is a more suitable theoretical framework for the study of students’ motivation in the new era. The theory of L2MSS is composed of three components: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience.

As Dörnyei argued, ideal L2 self refers to the ideal self-image which is related to second language the learner wants to achieve (Dörnyei, 2005). If the ideal self of the learner is a person who can master a certain second language, in order to fill the gap between the ideal self and the real self, he will study hard. Both traditionally integrative and internalized instrumental motivation belong to this dimension. The ought-to L2 self refers to the duties and responsibilities related to L2 that one should have in order to meet the expectations of others or avoid negative results. L2 learning experience represents situational motivation associated with specific learning environments and previous learning experience. It includes learning contents, successful learning experience and other factors. Under certain conditions, the three elements will transform each other. At the same time, these three elements play different roles in L2MSS for different learners.

## 2.1.3 Motivational Behavior

Motivated behavior can be defined as “exertions spent on an objective, appetite for language study, and importance attached to the task of learning the language” (Csizér and Kormos, 2009). However, Al-Shehri argues that motivated behavior only represents perseverance of learning L2, excluding efforts (Al-Shehri, 2009). On the basis of this notion, Kim and Kim paraphrases it, which goes like learning behavior is concerned with the degree of inclination towards L2 learning (Kim and Kim, 2014). As a consequence, it is safe to conclude that L2 motivated behavior embodies exertions and perseverance L2 learners keep under the wish to communicate with L2 community or to acquire L2.

## 2.2 Previous Research on Ideal L2 Self

## 2.2.1 Foreign Research on Ideal L2 Self

Dörnyei and his team conducted a large-scale questionnaire study on the motivations of Hungarian adolescent language learners. The results show that the ideal self can better explain the motivational behaviors than the integrative type. Although integrative motivation has been the dominant motivation for ages, in Hungary, where English is a foreign language, it has

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DOI:  
10.26480/ess.02.2022.81.85

not had a critical impact. In fact, English learners cannot find an English-speaking community to join. In 2005, he formed a L2 Motivation Self System based on the original motivation theory. With the theory put forward, researchers from other countries attempted to test the reliability of the results through conducting research in other countries.

In Hungary, Csizér and Kormos found that motivational behavior is connected with foreign language learning experience and ideal self (Csizér and Kormos, 2009). However, the correlation between ought-to L2 self and motivational behavior is relatively weak. Adapting Dörnyei's questionnaire, Ryan conducted a large number of empirical studies across Japan, showing that ideal L2 self can illustrate motivational behavior more effectively than the intensiveness, which further verified Dörnyei's theory of L2MSS (Ryan, 2009). The results of Taguchi, Magid & Papi also showed that the motivational self-system has good reliability in the other three Asian countries, which also proved the validity of the theory of L2MSS.

After the validity of L2MSS theory has been fully verified, foreign scholars embarked on the relation of L2MSS to other variables of language learning. Papi showed that ideal L2 self and English learning experience lead to a significant reduction of L2 anxiety; however, ought-to L2 self will increase more L2 learning anxiety (Papi, 2010). Moreover, Ghanizadeh and Rostami pointed out that task-based and communicative teaching methods enhance the level of L2 motivation self, so the motivation level of students is higher, because of the students' enthusiasm and initiative to participate in the classroom (Ghanizadeh and Rostami, 2015).

### 2.2.2 Domestic Research on Ideal L2 Self

Domestic research on L2MSS firstly introduces or comments on this new theory and continuously verifies whether the theory is suitable for the foreign language learning environment in China. Based on the literature review and empirical research, Xu and Fu brought forward that the new L2 Motivational Self System theory perfects Gardner's motivation model and other theoretical motivation framework, which has stronger explanatory ability in the motivation of second language learners (Xu, 2009; Fu, 2012). Utilizing structural equation model, Xu and Sun concluded that each variable in the model has a significant impact on learning behavior and verify the relationship between the internal components of L2MSS (Xu and Sun, 2012). In the empirical aspect, it is worth mentioning the findings of Liu's research, which indicate that the theoretical models of motivational self-system are effective in both primary, secondary school groups and university groups, and thus L2MSS is suitable for Chinese learners (Liu's, 2010). Moreover, ideal self can motivate students more effectively and in the long run. In addition, for low-level learners, second language learning experience is the best driving force, while for high-level learners, ideal self is the best driving force. Thus, the proportion of L2MSS elements in different stages of learners is different.

Furthermore, some scholars combine L2MSS with other language learning variables to figure out the correlation between motivation and L2 learning related elements. Combining the theories of psychology and social culture to study the relationship between the three dimensions of L2MSS, international attitude and English learning effort by establishing a model, Peng found that L2 motivation, in most cases, will change dynamically through the lengthening of learners' learning time (Peng, 2015). Wang, guided by the L2MSS, investigated 198 English majors in a regular university in Fujian Province, which found that foreign language anxiety and ideal L2 self of English majors had a certain predictive effect on their English performance (Wang, 2018). Shi confirmed that visual and auditory learning styles serve as an important position in the process of constructing ideal L2 self and enhancing motivational behavior (Shi, 2019). Based on the previous research results of English autonomous learning and L2MSS, He illustrated that L2MSS can explain the appearance of autonomous learning behavior (He, 2019). In L2MSS, ideal L2 self and the learning experience of L2 strongly influence one's autonomous learning behavior.

#### 4.1.1 Situation of Ideal L2 Self

Dimension	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ideal L2 Self	94	3.85	5.63	9	3.77	1.42
				11	3.93	1.58
				13	3.90	.78
				15	3.77	1.23
				17	3.95	.60
				18	3.78	1.75

According to the value range of Likert-5 Scale, 1-2.5 points represent ideal L2 self is at a lower level; 2.5-3.5 points represent ideal L2 self is at a middle level; 3.5-5 points represent ideal L2 self is at a higher level.

### 2.3 Past Research Gaps and Present Research Questions

To sum up, despite excellent achievements having been made in the research area of L2MSS, there are some shortcomings. Compared with the foreign research, domestic studies on L2MSS started relatively late, which mainly concentrate on the theoretical verification and explanation. And the empirical study of the correlation between the specific elements of L2MSS and other L2 learners' individual difference is still at an exploring stage. With the purpose of enriching the findings in this field, this research aims to figure out the correlation between ideal L2 self and motivational behavior of non-English majors by quantitative research method. The specific research questions are as below:

- (1) What is the current situation of the non-English majors' ideal L2 self and motivational behavior?
- (2) Are there any gender distinctions between these two factors for non-English majors?
- (3) Is there any significant correlation between these two factors for non-English majors?

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This section will elaborate the methods applied to this study. After introduction to subjects comes instruments used in this study are described. Last but not least, research procedures, data collection and data analysis will be illustrated specifically.

### 3.1 Subjects

In this study, 104 non-English majors were selected from senior college students by cluster random sampling. Among them, there are 25 boys and 79 girls.

### 3.2 Instrument

The research tool employed is questionnaire, which is composed of two components: personal profile and Chinese version of the English Learning Situation scale. The English Learning Situation scale was compiled by which consists of 18 questions and falls into two dimensions: ideal L2 self and motivational behavior (Zhang Qinmei, 2015). The scale is scored on 5-point Likert scoring form, the options of which are from "completely agree" to "completely disagree". The total score ranges from 18 to 90, aiming to measure the level of ideal L2 self and motivational behavior of non-English majors. The higher the score of the scale is, the stronger the ideal L2 self and motivational behavior will be.

### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was conducted through Internet in the first week of March 2022. And the recovery rate of the questionnaire is 100%. After the elimination of invalid questionnaires, 94 valid questionnaires were obtained, including 19 for boys and 75 for girls. Then all the data were input into the computer. Next, they were processed and analyzed through SPSS.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through the analysis of the questionnaire data, this section puts forward results and discussion of research questions.

### 4.1 General Situations of Non-English Majors' Ideal L2 Self and Motivational Behavior

In order to find out the current situation of ideal L2 self and motivational behavior in the process of English learning for non-English majors, descriptive analysis was performed in this section.

As is shown in Table 1, it can be concluded that non-English majors' ideal L2 self is at the higher level ( $M=3.85$ ). That is to say, for most of non-English majors, they have comparatively high aspirations and goals in order to become a potent L2 user. In other words, in the process of L2 learning, most of the English majors have clear ideal L2 self the learner wants to achieve and in order to fill the disparity between selves of ideality and reality, they will study hard. Besides, the standard deviation of 5.63 indicates that there exists great individual difference in ideal L2 self among the non-English majors.

#### 4.1.2 Situation of Motivational Behavior

Table 2: Descriptive Data of Motivational Behavior						
Dimension	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
Motivational Behavior	94	3.73	9.63	1	3.82	1.78
				2	3.57	1.36
				3	3.65	.89
				4	4.24	1.56
				5	3.23	.94
				6	3.43	1.54
				7	3.53	.74
				8	3.86	.34
				10	4.11	1.23
				12	3.90	1.64
				14	3.38	1.84
				16	3.98	.88

According to the value range of Likert-5 Scale, 1-2.5 points represent motivational behavior is at a lower level; 2.5-3.5 points represent motivational behavior is at a middle level; 3.5-5 points represent motivational behavior is at a higher level.

Based on the findings in Table 2, it is safe to conclude that non-English majors have comparatively strong motivational behavior. In other words, in daily college life, most of the non-English majors spend efforts and pay careful and extra attention to English learning. What's more, the standard deviation of 9.63 indicates that there exists great individual difference in non-English majors' motivational behavior. With regards to the composing items (Item 1-18, plus Item 10, 12, 14, 16) of motivational behavior dimension, the mean score of Item 4 (I will mark important knowledge points,  $Mean=4.24$ ) won the maximum, which manifests that non-English majors, in the course of their English study, are more inclined to take notes to make sure their learning achievements. Furthermore, the mean score of Item 10 (Learning English is of great significance to me,  $Mean=4.11$ ) indicates that the bulk of non-English majors have been aware of the significance of English learning, and henceforth they are more inclined to pay careful and extra attention to language learning.

#### 4.2.1 Gender Difference in Non-English Majors' Ideal L2 Self

Table 3: Gender Difference in Non-English Majors' Ideal L2 Self						
Dimension	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	P
Ideal L2 Self	1	19	3.35	3.24	-2.289	.041
	2	75	3.97	9.74		

As is shown in the Table 3, in terms of ideal L2 self, there exists a significant gender distinction between female non-English majors' and male ones' ideal L2 self ( $P=.041<.05$ ), and the mean score of the female non-English majors ( $Mean=3.97$ ) is higher than their counterparts ( $Mean=3.35$ ), which indicates that compared with male non-English majors, female ones bear significantly higher ideal L2 self in learning English than their counterparts.

#### 4.2.2 Gender Difference in Non-English Majors' Motivational Behavior

Table 4: Gender Difference in Non-English Majors' Motivational Behavior						
Dimension	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	P
Motivated Behavior	1	19	3.51	2.56	-693	.432

As is shown in the Table 4, with regards to motivational behavior, there exists no significant gender distinction between male and female non-English majors' motivational behavior ( $P=.432>.05$ ). However, it is not hard to find that the female college students got comparatively higher score ( $Mean=3.78$ ) in motivational behavior than males ( $Mean=3.51$ ), indicating females bear more motivation in their behavior of studying English than males.

#### 4.3 Correlation Between Ideal L2 Self and Motivational Behavior of Non-English Majors

The following part aims at exploring the correlation between non-English

As for the composing items (Item 9-18, except Item 10, 12, 14, 16) of ideal L2 self-dimension, the mean score of Item 17 (I will imagine that I am able to be skilled at using English,  $Mean=3.95$ ) got the maximum, which suggests that despite being non-English majors, they also have great expectations for proficiency in English. Moreover, the mean score of Item 11 (I can imagine myself talking with others in English on the streets of foreign countries,  $Mean=3.93$ ) reveals that college students conceive that they can talk with native speakers.

In addition, the mean score of Item 5 (I am very active in answering questions in English class,  $Mean=3.23$ ) got the minimum, proving that most non-English majors are unwilling and reluctant to engage in class. It should be emphasized that teachers are supposed to pay attention to activating non-English majors' participation in class. Lastly, the mean score of Item 14 (I am assiduous in English learning,  $Mean=3.38$ ) represents that non-English majors haven't been able to make adequate efforts on language learning. Consequently, it is not easy for them to make good academic performances.

#### 4.2 Gender Difference in Ideal L2 Self and Motivational Behavior of Non-English Majors

Individual difference exerts an important impact on the language learning. Then, gender difference in ideal L2 self and motivational behavior are analyzed in this section, in which both descriptive analysis and independent samples T-test were used.

majors' ideal L2 self and motivational behavior, in which Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted.

**Table 5: Correlation Between Ideal L2 Self and Motivated Behavior of Non-English Majors**

		Ideal L2 Self (Male)	Ideal L2 Self (Female)	Ideal L2 Self
Motivated Behavior	Pearson Correlation	.576**	.586**	.580**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	19	75	94

Note:\*\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As is shown in the Table 5, non-English majors' ideal L2 self is positively correlated with motivational behavior ( $r=.580$ ,  $P=.000<0.05$ ). In other words, the stronger the ideal L2 self of non-English majors is, the stronger their motivational behavior will be. In other words, non-English majors' ideal L2 self has a positive impact on their motivational behavior. According to the research on L2MSS, if the ideal self is inconsistent with the real self in L2 learning, negative emotions such as disappointment, frustration and dissatisfaction will occur. If the ideal self-image of learners is a successful English learner, in order to fill the disparity between their selves of ideality and reality, they will work harder to achieve some goals. Accordingly, the teacher is supposed to help learners to establish a positive ideal L2 self, so as to improve their motivation of second language learning and stimulate their actual practice in the daily learning.

In terms of the correlation between ideal L2 self and motivational behavior, females ( $r=.586$ ) seem to do a better job than males ( $r=.576$ ), which suggests that for the female non-English majors, their ideal L2 self is a stronger predictor to their motivational behavior compared with the male ones. To put it in another way, females are more inclined to convert what they hope to be into action and the impact of ideal L2 self on motivational behavior is more evident in females' L2 learning.

#### 4.4 Implications for English Teaching

Some beneficial implications for language teaching can be derived from the results of this paper, which are summed up as follows:

Firstly, it is necessary and advisable for English teachers to help non-English majors to construct, activate and maintain their ideal L2 selves, which can be done by enabling them to admire and appreciate those successful language learners who have acquired such language. For instance, teachers can broadcast English interviews made by Chinese, which will enable them to understand the fluency of Chinese people who use English to communicate. Thereby, they will produce admiration and enhance their ideal L2 selves.

Secondly, it is universally accepted that interest is the best mentor. Thus, teachers are supposed to realize the significance of provoking non-English majors' incentives in language study, which will, to some degree, be beneficial to constructing their positive ideal L2 self. For instance, teachers can introduce lessons through music or short videos, which is beneficial to boosting their interest and enthusiasm. What's more, teachers can also introduce some western culture and customs during the text teaching.

Furthermore, some essential encouragements should be provided and proffered so as to make students become more active and more involved in their class. As we can see, those who made great academic achievements are normally those who are actively engaged in class. Experiencing success in L2 learning is the most proper method to be motivated and encouraged.

Last but not least, considering the subjective initiatives of language learners, teachers should heed their individual differences in the teaching process, teaching them according their aptitudes. On the other hand, the teacher ought to attach great significance to learners' learning process and emotions, so as to enhance their confidence and feeling of accomplishment, which is beneficial to the formation of a more positive learning attitude.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussions of research questions, the principal findings can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, the bulk of the non-English majors bear strong ideal L2 self and motivational behavior during the process of English learning. And there is great individual distinction.

Secondly, there exists a significant gender distinction for non-English majors in ideal L2 self. Meanwhile, girls bear a relatively higher ideal L2 self-intensity than boys. Furthermore, there exists no significant gender distinction in their motivational behavior. However, females bear higher motivational behavior in learning English than their counterparts.

Last but not least, non-English majors' ideal L2 self are positively correlated with and motivational behavior, especially for the female learners.

Despite some beneficial conclusions derived from the research, some disadvantages were left behind. First, merely 94 college students participated in this questionnaire and the bulk of the subjects are females. Consequently, it will impinge upon the reliability and validity in terms of this research. Therefore, a larger number of subjects and male non-English majors are required in the further study. Secondly, questionnaire served as the sole instrument to gather data. According, it lacks diversity and credibility. When completing the questionnaire, students may take it slightly and make some choices without consideration.

In a word, the present study has shed light on ideal L2 self and motivational behavior of non-English majors, from which teachers and students will benefit a lot. Ideal L2 self and motivational behavior are parts that cannot be ignored in the course of non-English majors' language learning. Thus, both cannot be emphasized too much and some drawbacks should be surmounted in the following research.

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