Research Article

From Motivation to Mastery: Unveiling the Potential of L2 Motivational Self-system and Attainment Scores among EFL Learners

Soghra Ahangari[1] (iD) and Azizeh Chalak[2,*] (iD)

[1] English Department, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Isfahan, Iran
[2] Associate Professor, English Department, Isfahan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

* **Corresponding author:** Azizeh Chalak, English Department, Isfahan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran. Email: azichalak@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The acquisition of a second language has consistently emerged as a fundamental concern among students globally, paralleled by the enduring significance of motivation for second language learning. The primary objective of this study was to examine the intricate interplay between the motivational dimensions of the L2 self-system, encompassing the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience, and their potential impact on the attainment test scores of Iranian pre-intermediates and intermediate EFL learners. By exploring the correlation between these specific motivational factors and the learners' test performance, the study shed light on the nuanced dynamics and significance of these motivational constructs within Iran's distinct cultural and educational context.

Methodology: A descriptive correlational study was explicitly devised to ascertain the correlation between the L2 motivational self-system and the attainment test scores of Iranian pre-intermediates and intermediate EFL learners. A total of 150 students, encompassing both males and females, aged between 18 and 29 years, representing various academic disciplines, participated in this study. Ryan's (2009) Motivational Factors Questionnaire was administered among the participants. The study involved the analysis of 21 items pertaining to ought-to L2 self, ideal L2 self, and L2 learning experience.

Results: Adopting multiple regression analysis, it was indicated that the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience were noteworthy predictors significantly impacting the attainment test scores. However, ought-to L2 self could not significantly predict the attainment test scores.

Conclusion: By virtue of the valuable implications engendered by the findings of this study, they confer upon L2 pedagogy a distinctive advantage, empowering instructors with the capacity to promote the students' ideal L2 self-concept, thereby optimizing their learning experience.

1. Introduction

Motivation in second language learning and research is highly intricate and nuanced. Due to its complex nature, it has often resulted in clashing findings (Papi, 2010). Motivation plays a crucial role in language learning, as do situations in which learning takes place, the needs of learners, and their wants and desires, which are all interconnected in language learning contexts. Motivation exerts a direct and substantial influence on individuals learning a foreign language. Throughout the past three decades, motivation has emerged as a prominent and central area of investigation, attracting extensive empirical and theoretical attention, particularly within the domain of second language learning as opposed to first language acquisition. Motivation plays a crucial role in second language teaching and learning. Regarding teaching English to non-natives, the primary concern has centered around

comprehending the optimal form of motivation essential for language learners to acquire proficiency in the target language effectively.

In order to delve into this relatively under-researched domain, diligent exploration has been undertaken through the lens of the self-system theory of L2 motivation, as posited by Dörnyei (2003; 2009). This comprehensive conceptual framework represents a significant advancement in the understanding of L2 motivation, building upon and effectively addressing certain limitations inherent in earlier theoretical perspectives. Furthermore, the emergence of L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) theory (Dörnyei, 2006, as cited in Islam, 2013) can be attributed to extensive research efforts (e.g., Dörnyei &Németh, 2006) that compiled and analyzed longitudinal data on L2 motivation from a staggering 13,000 Hungarian schools. Dörnyei's (2003; 2009) theory elucidates the dynamics of motivation through the interplay between two cognitive constructs, namely the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self, alongside the learners' personal experiences with the L2 language. The L2 motivational self-system was a significant renovation of previous motivational thinking as it explicitly used psychological theories of the self (Moskovsky et al., 2016).

The formidable obstacle of insufficient motivation in pursuing language learning poses a significant challenge. The dearth of motivation observed among Iranian L2 learners has precipitated their lack of success in language acquisition endeavors. Consequently, researchers have been compelled to embark upon an investigative journey to examine this theory's impact on EFL learners' attainment scores. It is worth noting that even individuals endowed with remarkable talent can only attain their learning objectives with motivation, regardless of the quality of curricula and instruction provided. Hence, motivation has become pivotal within the realm of theories surrounding second language acquisition.

Given the paramount significance of this matter, the present research endeavors to scrutinize the prediction of three components under the umbrella of the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) framework, namely the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and learners' L2 language experience, in relation to learners' attainment scores within an Iranian context. The salience of this study is underscored by the need for comparable investigations specifically exploring the L2MSS in the context of English language acquisition. While numerous studies have explored this terrain, it is noteworthy that only a handful, if any, studies have been conducted within the Iranian context. Hence, the current study endeavors to fill this void by meticulously investigating the L2MSS and its connection to learners' proficiency within the Iranian context. The ultimate aim is to fortify learners' motivation, with the fervent hope that it will engender a substantial improvement in the efficacy of language learning education in the future.

1.2. Literature review

Motivation has long been fundamental in acquiring a second or foreign language. This notion has garnered significant attention in research due to its crucial role in enhancing the learner's performance throughout the language learning process. Additionally, when instructing non-native speakers in English, a primary concern is identifying the optimal form of motivation language learners require to acquire the target language effectively. As an alternative perspective, the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) has been embraced as a fundamental framework offering a novel approach to conceptualizing motivation in second language acquisition. Within the intricate structure of the L2MSS framework, three principal dimensions emerge: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience.

1.2.1. L2 motivational self-system

Drawing upon the psychological theory of possible selves and extensive research on L2 motivation, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) formulated his theory. His theory was a new formulation of the L2MSS focusing on people's vision of themselves in the future. This theory considers three fundamental aspects of the ideal L2 self, the ought to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. L2MSS theory has received extensive research attention from numerous scholars (e.g., Alanazi, 2020; Al-Hoorie, 2018; Dincer, 2019; Dörnyei, 2019; Moskovsky et al., 2016; Papi, 2010; Rahimi, 2022; Rajab et al., 2012; Sharafati & Ghafournia, 2019).

Moskovsky et al. (2016) conducted a study examining the association between L2MSS and the proficiency levels of Saudi EFL learners. The research involved 360 male and female participants who completed a questionnaire assessing three critical components of L2MSS and the learners' dedication to language acquisition. The participants' L2 ability was evaluated through a writing and reading test. The findings indicated that while the three dimensions of L2MSS significantly influenced learners' efforts, they did not consistently correlate with L2 achievement.

In another descriptive correlational study by Sherafati and Ghafournia (2019), 70 intermediate male and female participants were randomly selected. The study employed a reading comprehension test and an L2MSS questionnaire developed by (Yan et al., 2011). The data analysis revealed a positive relationship between reading comprehension proficiency and L2MSS, as well as a negative relationship between the gender of EFL learners and L2MSS.

1.2.2. Ideal L2 self

At the core of the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) lies the concept of the ideal L2 self, as proposed by Dörnyei (2009). Dörnyei (2003) defined the ideal L2 self as the set of specific attributes that an individual envisions for their ideal self. In essence, the ideal L2 self embodies the characteristics that an individual aspires to possess, representing their hopes, aspirations, desires, and an envisioned image of their future self as proficient L2 users. For instance, an individual who desires to communicate fluently with native speakers may visualize themselves as a

fluent L2 user, and this mental image can serve as a motivational force, driving them to minimize the discrepancy between their current self and their ideal self.

The ideal L2 self has emerged as the most influential factor in predicting learners' motivated behaviors, as evidenced by several studies (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Islam et al., 2013). Consequently, researchers in the fields of psychology, education, and sports have explored various methods and strategies, such as imagery strength and creative or guided imagery, to foster the development of ideal L2 self-images and enhance students' vision (Berkovits, 2005; Fezler, 1989; Gould et al., 2002; Hall et al., 2006; Horowitz, 1983; Leuner et al., 1983; Singer, 2006).

A multitude of studies have been conducted to explore the association between the ideal L2 self and second language learning, as demonstrated by a range of scholarly works (Cho, 2020; Gu & Cheung, 2016; Martinović, 201^; SAK, 202·; Ueki & Takeuchi, 2013). For instance, Martinović (201^) conducted a study examining motivation in English language learning among a diverse group of 543 male and female participants enrolled in various majors at Zadar University in Croatia. The study employed a questionnaire to assess the motivational aspects of the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) and the learners' intended effort in acquiring the new language. Additionally, the researchers investigated the potential impact of students' fields of study, gender, and final grades on motivation levels. The findings revealed positive relationships between higher English grades and the ideal L2 self, intended effort, and instrumentality-promotion. However, a negative relationship was observed between higher English grades and the ought-to L2 self and instrumentality-prevention.

1.2.3. Ought-to L2 self

Dörnyei (2003) proposed the concept of the ought-to L2 self as an additional aspect of the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS). It represents the characteristics individuals believe they should possess, encompassing a sense of duty, obligation, or responsibility. The ought-to L2 self is considered the external component of the L2MSS theory. It emerges when learners are motivated by the fear of failing exams or facing professional setbacks. It can also be influenced by the expectations of family, friends, teachers, and society as a whole (Kim, 2012). The ought-to L2 self can be seen as a less internalized form of instrumental motivation (Kim, 2012).

Several studies, including those conducted by Bagheri Nevisi and Afsooshin (2019), Csizér & Kormos (2009), Papi (2010), Rajab et al. (2012), and Taguchi et al. (2009), have explored the role of the ought-to L2 self as a motivator in English language learning. However, these studies generally indicate that the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience more substantially influence motivation than the ought-to L2 self.

In a study by Taguchi et al. (2009), the effects of family influence and prevention-focused aspects of instrumentality were compared in Japan, China, and Iran,

specifically in relation to preventing exam failure. The variables examined directly influenced the prevention of exam failure. However, their overall impact on learners' motivated performance was less significant than that of the ideal L2 self. Similarly, Csizér and Kormos (2009) found a positive relationship between parental encouragement and the development of the ought-to L2 self.

Papi's (2010) study was pioneering in its examination of the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) proposed by Dörnyei (2003, 2009) across all three concepts. The researcher explored participants' anxiety regarding English and their intended effort to learn the language. A total of 1,011 male and female Iranian high school students studying English as a compulsory subject completed a questionnaire designed according to Dörnyei's (2003) guidelines, specifically tailored for application in Iran. The results indicated significant relationships between all three components of the L2MSS and the participants' intended effort. However, the participants experienced greater anxiety related to their ought-to L2 self while exhibiting less anxiety towards their ideal L2 self and the L2 learning experience.

Furthermore, Jang and Lee (2019) discovered that the ideal L2 self significantly impacted the use of planning strategies and writing outcomes. On the other hand, the ought-to L2 self only influenced the use of revising strategies. In a similar vein, Bagheri Nevisi and Afsooshin (20¹⁹) compared the pragmatic performances of two groups: one with a high ideal L2 self and the other with a high ought-to L2 self. The group with a high ideal L2 self-performed significantly better than the group with a high ought-to L2 self in discourse completion tests. Moreover, the findings highlighted that factors such as an individual's ideal L2 self significantly contribute to the amount of learning that occurs in learners with either a high ideal L2 self or a high ought-to L2 self.

1.2.4. L2 learning experience

Dörnyei (2003) conceptualized the L2 learning experience as encompassing learners' attitudes towards second language acquisition. This experience is influenced by motivation in specific situations where learners encounter and engage with the language for the first time. Attitude refers to the inclination to respond positively or negatively to a situation, idea, object, or person. Gardner (1985; 2006) introduced three types of attitudes in his socio-educational model: attitudes toward learning a second language, attitudes towards the learning context, and attitudes towards the target language community.

Dörnyei (2003; 2009) defined the third component of the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) as motivation associated with the learning environment, including factors such as educators, curriculum, peers, and the sense of achievement and success. This third dimension aligns with the action phase of Dörnyei and Otto's (1998) process-oriented model and is also connected to Noels et al. (2003) and Ushioda's (2009) intrinsic categories (Dörnyei, 2003; 2009). Additionally, it can be influenced by context-specific

motivations, such as teaching materials, curriculum, L2 teachers, and peers.

According to Alanazi (2020), the L2 learning experience holds the second greatest significance within the L2MSS theory, following the Ideal L2 Self. However, Csizér and Kormos (2009) and Taguchi et al. (2009) argued that the L2 learning experience substantially impacts the L2MSS. Dörnyei (2019) acknowledged that the L2 learning experience, as the third primary dimension in theory, has received relatively less theoretical attention than the two future self-guides (ideal and ought-to selves). Some language learners derive their motivation not solely from internal or external self-images but from their actual language learning experiences.

Csizér and Kormos (2009) and Taguchi et al. (2009) demonstrated that the L2 learning experience should not be considered secondary in importance, contrary to previous findings. Studies consistently indicated that language learning attitudes were key predictors of various criteria and motivated behaviors. Papi (2010) also noted a positive correlation between L2 learners' attitudes towards the learning process and their achievement of learning objectives.

In another study, Rajab et al. (2012) identified a significant correlation between language learning attitudes and the criterion measure, emphasizing the high status of the English language and the effort invested in mastering it. Al-Hoorie's (2018) study indicated that language learning attitudes significantly predicted subjective intended effort, although they were weaker predictors of objective achievement measures.

Despite all the studies referred to in the literature, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there are few -if none- studies done regarding the investigation of the L2MSS in the Iranian context. Therefore, this study examined the prediction of the L2MSS on learners' attainment scores. The following questions were addressed to obtain the data:

1. Does students' ideal L2 Self predict their attainment test scores?

2. Does students' ought-to L2 self-predict their attainment test scores?

3. Does students' learning experience predict their attainment test scores?

2. Methodology

In the method section, the initial phase exposes the study's design and contextual framework. Subsequently, attention will be directed towards elucidating the characteristics of the participants involved as well as the instruments employed within the ambit of this investigation. A comprehensive exposition will be presented, encompassing the procedure employed for data collection, alongside an in-depth analysis of the acquired data.

2.1. Design and context of the study

The present study employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the relationship between the learners' L2 motivational self-system, serving as the independent variable, and their attainment test scores, acting as the dependent variable. It was conducted in Iran at IAU University, East Tehran Branch, and data were gathered during April and May 2023.

2.2. Participants

In this study, a sample size of 150 university students hailing from Iran was selected randomly, ensuring representation of both genders. The participants were explicitly recruited from the IAU East Tehran Branch, encompassing various subject fields. Notably, their primary language was Farsi, and their ages ranged from 18 to 29 years. The preliminary English test was administered to assess their proficiency level, resulting in a classification of low-intermediate and intermediate proficiency. The demographic attributes of the participants are illustrated in Table 1.

2.3. Instrumentation

2.3.1. Preliminary English Test

To ensure the participants' homogeneity in this study, the Preliminary English Test (PTE) was administered. The PTE is designed to assess the participants' proficiency in the four language skills. It is widely recognized for its reliability (0.95) and validity. By administering the PTE, the researchers aimed to ensure that the participants had a similar English language proficiency level, creating a more homogeneous sample for the study.

2.3.2. Motivational Factors Questionnaire

For data collection in this study, the researchers employed the complete version of Ryan's (2009) Motivational Factors Questionnaire (MFQ). The questionnaire consisted of items presented in both question-type and statement-type formats. The question-type items were rated on a six-point scale, ranging from "not at all" to "very much." On the other hand, the statement-type items were measured using a six-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The questionnaire focused on three main areas: the ought-to L2 self, the ideal L2 self, and attitudes towards learning English. In total, 21 items from the MFQ were analyzed to gather relevant data for the study.

Moreover, to measure learners' attainment scores, a test of general English was employed at the end of the semester. This researcher-made test also evaluated all four language skills, and the sum of the scores in each section provided the overall score, which was used as the attainment score. The

Table 1.
Demographic Background of the Participants

Number of Participants	150
Age	18-29
Gender	Male and Female
Level of proficiency	Low intermediate to intermediate

reliability of the test was calculated as 0.90. This test was given to two EFL professors at Islamic Azad University to check its content validity, and it was proved to be valid.

2.4. Data collection

An initial step for data collection involved randomly selecting 150 students from the IAU East Tehran Branch who participated in this study. These participants represented diverse subject fields within the institution. Subsequently, a proficiency assessment was conducted using the PET test, classifying participants into two distinct groups: intermediate and low-intermediate proficiency. Once the proficiency levels were determined, the participants were requested to complete Ryan's (2009) Motivational Factors Questionnaire (MFQ) at their own pace—the questionnaire aimed to elicit information regarding motivational factors relevant to the study. The researcher was available throughout the process to address any uncertainties or ambiguities encountered by the participants while responding to the questionnaire. Lastly, a researcher-developed test focusing on General English was administered to all the participants—this comprehensive test assessed proficiency in all four language skills. The aggregate score achieved by each participant across the test sections was considered their attainment score, reflecting their overall language proficiency level.

3.5. Data analysis

The data from Ryan's (2009) questionnaire were collected and transformed into codes. Meanwhile, the sum of each participant's scores from the general English test was calculated to measure the attainment score. The data analysis for this study involved utilizing SPSS version 24 software. Descriptive statistics were utilized to provide an overview of the variables, while multiple regression analyses were performed to examine the relationships and predictive capabilities of the variables within the dataset.

3.6. Ethical considerations

To follow the ethical issues, consent forms were given to

all the participants, the professors, and the head of the university at the beginning of the research, and they were thoroughly informed about the details of data collection, procedure, and the aim of the study. Their names were also kept anonymous so that the confidentiality of the data was proved.

3. Results

Motivation, one of the preliminary factors that directly influence the rate and achievement of second/foreign language learning, has always been under investigation by researchers. The primary objective of this study was to examine the correlation between three components of the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS), precisely the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and students' learning experience, with the attainment scores of EFL learners in Iran.

Multiple linear regression was employed to analyze the data. In this regression model, the students' ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and learning experience were treated as predictors of their language attainment. Descriptive statistics for all the predictors (i.e., the three components of the L2MSS) and the criterion variable (i.e., student's attainment in learning English) in the multiple regression analysis can be found in Table 2.

Before proceeding with the multiple regression analyses, it was crucial to ensure that the statistical assumptions were met and upheld. The assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance of residuals were examined and found to be satisfied without any violations. The Durbin-Watson test of autocorrelation of residuals, presented in Table 3, indicated their independence, with values falling within the range of 1.5 to 2.5. Furthermore, no collinearity issues were observed, as evidenced by condition index values below 15. Similarly, multicollinearity was not detected, as all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) estimates were below the recommended threshold of ten (see Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018 and Table 4).

The skewness and kurtosis values, which ranged between -2 and +2, also indicated a normal data distribution. Detailed information regarding the descriptive statistics of the predictors and the criterion variable and their respective skewness and kurtosis values can be found in Table 2.

Table 2.
The Descriptive Statistics of Predictors and Criterion Variable in Regression Analysis (N = 150)

	Mean	Std. D	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. The error	Statistic	Std. Error
Learning Experience	3.60	0.92	-0.08	0.20	-0.59	0.39
Ought-to L2 Self	3.61	0.80	0.33	0.20	-0.36	0.39
Ideal L2 Self	3.75	0.98	0.15	0.20	-0.81	0.39
Attainment	15.55	6.89	0.42	0.20	-0.50	0.39

Table 3.
Evaluating the Significance of Regression Equation

Model	Sum in Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1826.66	3	608.88	16.96	0.0·
Residual	5240.10	146	35.89		
Total	7066.77	149			

Table 4.

Test of Independence of Residuals of Simple Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. The error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
Estimates	0.50	0.25	0.25	6.00	1.9

Table 5.

Regression Coefficients of Regression Analysis for Attainment Test Scores

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.091	2.446		.446	.656		
Ought-to L2 Self	-.075	.776	-.009	-.097	.923	.623	1.606
Learning experience	2.110	.777	.282	2.717	.007	.471	2.125
Ideal L2 Self	1.902	.783	.271	2.428	.016	.407	2.460

According to the results presented in Table 2 and Table 3, the value of R was significantly different from zero, indicating a meaningful relationship between the predictors and the criterion variable. The F-statistic (F = 16.96, p = .00) further supported the significance of the regression equation. The coefficient of determination, R^2, was 0.25, indicating that 25% of the variance in attainment test scores could be accounted for by the students' ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and learning experience. It is worth noting that this model explains a modest amount of variance, as discussed in Plonsky and Ghanbar (2018). In other words, these three factors collectively contribute to 25% of the variability observed in attainment scores.

As depicted in Table 4, learning experience (B = 2.11, S.E = .77, β = .28, t = 2.71, p =.00) and ideal L2 self (B = 1.90, S.E = .78, β = .27, t = 2.42, p = .00) were observed to be the significant predictors of attainment scores. These two factors caused ٢٤% of the variance in attainment scores. Therefore, it can be concluded that among the three predictors of attainment test scores, learning experience and ideal L2 self could significantly predict the attainment test scores (see Table 4), and the answer to research questions one and three are positive, yet second one is negative.

4. Discussion

The main goal of this study was to investigate the prediction of three key aspects within the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) framework in the context of English language acquisition in Iran. These three aspects include the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and learners' prior experiences with the English language, all concerning their proficiency scores. In the analysis of the multiple linear regression, it was found that both learning experience and ideal L2 self, among the three predictors investigated, exhibit significant predictive power in relation to attainment test scores. However, ought-to self is not a significant predictor of attainment.

These findings are congruent with the findings of Alanazi (2020) that the ideal L2 self held the highest significance within the L2 Motivational Self-System, followed by L2 learning experiences, while the ought-to L2 self ranked as the least influential factor. Additionally, this study supports the findings of Martinović (201^), who revealed positive correlations between superior English grades and the ideal L2 self, learners' intended effort, and instrumentality promotion. Conversely, a negative relationship was observed between higher English grades and the ought-to L2 self and instrumentality-prevention. Furthermore, these findings are consistent with the study conducted by Bagheri Nevisi and Afsooshin (2019), which found that the group with a higher ideal L2 self outperformed the group with a higher ought-to L2 self regarding pragmatic performance on discourse completion tests.

Several studies have shown that the ideal L2 self is the most influential factor in predicting learners' motivated behaviors (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Islam et al., 2013). Moreover, a multitude of studies have found a positive effect of the ideal L2 self on second language learning (Cho, 2020; Gu & Cheung, 2016; Martinović, 2018; SAK, 2020; Ueki & Takeuchi, 2013).

The presence of an ideal L2 self alleviates learners' anxiety when acquiring a second language, whereas the ought-to L2 self tends to induce stress. Rajab et al. (2012) identified a significant correlation between language learning attitudes and the criterion measure, emphasizing the high status of the English language and the effort invested in mastering it. Additionally, positive attitudes exhibited by L2 learners towards the learning process significantly contribute to achieving learning objectives, as discussed by Papi (2010).

The lower performance of the ought-to L2 self-group compared to the ideal L2 self-group may be attributed to the likelihood that they were burdened with obligations, necessities, and requirements to learn the second language. This could have had a detrimental effect on their functional use of the L2. In such situations, the learners' ought-to L2 selves might function as a deterrent, leading to demotivation (as suggested by Dörnyei, 2009). Another possible explanation for the less successful functional performance of the ought-to L2 self group could be their negative attitudes and views toward the L2 teacher, their peers, the process of learning L2 functions, and the learning environment. The findings of this study are contrary to what Moskovsky et al. (2016) found. In their investigation of the relationship between the L2MSS and learners' proficiency level, they concluded that the dimensions of the L2MSS were good predictors of the intended learning efforts. However, these dimensions did not correlate with L2 achievement in the population under their investigation.

The significance of this study is underscored by the scarcity of comparable research that delves explicitly into L2MSS framework within the Iranian context. While many

studies have explored this area, it is worth noting that very few, if any, have been conducted in Iran; therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by conducting a thorough investigation into the L2MSS and its correlation with learners' language proficiency in the Iranian context. By focusing specifically on Iranian foreign language learners and their experiences with English language acquisition, this study provides a unique contribution to the field. The findings of this study shed light on the specific dynamics and factors influencing language motivation and proficiency in the Iranian context, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers working in this context. Moreover, this study adds to the broader literature on the L2MSS by expanding its applicability and generalizability to a new cultural and linguistic setting, thereby enriching our understanding of motivational processes' universality and cultural specificity in second language acquisition. Overall, the novelty of this study lies in its exploration of the L2MSS framework in the Iranian context and its potential to advance the field's theoretical and practical implications.

5. Conclusion

The obtained results of the study indicated that test scores, learning experience, and the ideal L2 self emerged as primary predictors of attainment, while the ought-to L2 self did not exhibit significant predictive power. Learners with a stronger ideal L2 self and more extensive learning experiences achieved higher attainment test scores. However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study. Future research should explore the L2MSS within the context of Iran and investigate its applicability in other contexts. Additionally, studies with larger participant pools and different proficiency levels are needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the correlation between the L2MSS components and attainment scores. Other confounding variables, such as age of L2 acquisition, topic familiarity, difficulty level, and test wiseness, should also be considered in future studies. The findings of this study have implications for L2 pedagogy, highlighting the importance of integrating the ideal L2 self and learning experience into instructional practices. Educators can design effective strategies to promote successful language acquisition by understanding learners' motivational factors. These findings contribute to the field of educational psychology by providing reliable measurement schemes and valuable insights for future research.

Declarations

Competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Funding

There has been no financial support for this novel work that could have influenced its outcome.

Authors' contribution

The authors made noteworthy contributions to this research paper. The first author, Soghra Ahangari, handled data acquisition, did the write-up, and provided administrative, technical, and material support. The first author and the corresponding author, Dr. Azizeh Chalak, were involved in data analysis and interpretation. The manuscript drafting was collaborative, with both authors contributing their expertise. Each author was crucial in reviewing and revising the manuscript for scholarly integrity.

Availability of data and materials

The data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues (including plagiarism, consent to publish, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancy) have been checked and compiled by the authors.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to those who provided insight and expertise during this investigation. The feedback during this process made them a better thinker and strengthened this work. The authors want to show my appreciation to all the scholars, instructors, educational officials, and participants whose contributions were instrumental in completing this study.

References

Alanazi, H. D. (2020). *Investigating L2 motivation self-system theory for learning English as a foreign language among Saudi cadets*. Thesis. The University of Limerick, Ireland. http://hdl.handle.net/10344/9243

Al-Hoorie, A. H. (2018). The L2 motivational self-system: A meta-analysis. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 8*(4), 721-754. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2018.8.4.2

Bagheri Nevisi, R., & Afsooshin, M. (2019). Ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and EFL learners' L2 functional use. *Language Horizon*, *3*(2), 147-164. https://doi.org/10.22051/lghor.2020.28265.1188

Berkovits, S. A. (2005). Gambling on Las Vegas: bringing professional sports to Sin City. *Gaming Law Review*, *9*(3), 220-231. https://doi.org/10.1089/glr.2005.9.220

Cho, M. (2020). An investigation into learners' ideal L2 self and its motivational capacity. *Reading and writing, 33*, 2029–2048. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-020-10031-7

Csizér, K., & Kormos, J. (2009). Learning experiences, selves, and motivated learning behaviour: A comparative analysis of structural models for hungarian secondary and university learners of English. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self* (pp. 98-119). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293-006

Dincer, A., Yesilyurt, S., Noels, K. A., & Vargas Lascano, D. I. (2019). Self-determination and classroom engagement of EFL learners: A mixed-methods study of the self-system model of motivational development. *Sage Open, 9*(2), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019853913

Dörney, Z. (2003). *Questionnaires in second language research*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410606525

Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 motivational self-system. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self* (pp. 9-42). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293-003

Dörnyei, Z. (2019). Towards a better understanding of the L2 learning experience, the cinderella of the L2 motivational self-system. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 9(1), 19-30. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2019.9.1.2

Dörnyei, Z., & Csizér, K., & Németh, N. (2006). *Motivation, language attitudes and globalisation: A hungarian perspective*. Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853598876

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2009). *Motivation, language identity, and the L2 self.* Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293

Dörnyei, Z., & Ottoʹ, I. (1998). Motivation in action: A process model of L2 motivation. Working Papers in Applied Linguistics. Thames Valley University, London. https://nottingham-repository.worktribe.com/output/1024190/motivation-in-action-a-process-model-of-l2-motivation

Kim, T. Y. (2012). The L2 motivational self-system of Korean EFL students: Cross-grade survey analysis. *English Teaching*, 67(1), 29-56.

Csizér, K., & Dörnyei, Z. (2005). The internal structure of language learning motivation and its relationship with language choice and learning effort. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89(1), 19-36. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0026-7902.2005.00263.x

Fezler, W. (1989). *Creative imagery*. Simon and Schuster.

Gardner, M. P. (1985). Mood states and consumer behavior: A critical review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12(3), 281-300. https://doi.org/10.1086/208516

Gardner, R. C. (2006). The socio-educational model of second language acquisition: A research paradigm. *Eurosla yearbook*, 6(1), 237-260. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1075/eurosla.6.14gar

Gould, D., Dieffenbach, K., & Moffett, A. (2002). Psychological characteristics and their development in Olympic champions. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 14(3), 172-204. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200290103482

Gu, M. M., & Cheung, D. S. P. (2016). Ideal L2 self, acculturation, and Chinese language learning among South Asian students in Hong Kong: A structural equation modeling analysis. *System, 57*, 14-24. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.01.001

Hall, E., Hall, C., Stradling, P., & Young, D. (2006). *Guided imagery: Creative interventions in counseling & psychotherapy*. Sage.

Horowitz, M.J. (1983) *Image formation and psychotherapy.* Northvale, NJ. Jason.

Islam, M., Lamb, M., & Chambers, G. (2013). The L2 motivational self-system and national interest: A Pakistani perspective. *System*, 41(2), 231-244. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.01.025

Jang, Y., & Lee, J. (2019). The effects of ideal and ought-to L2 selves on Korean EFL learners' writing strategy use and writing quality. *Reading and Writing, 32*(5), 1129–1148. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-018-9903-0

Leuner, H., Horn, G., Klessmann, E., & Klemperer, I., Lachman, E.,

Singer, J. L. (1983). Guided affective imagery with children and adolescents. Plenum Press. https://lib.ugent.be/en/catalog/rug01:000275039#reference-details

Martinović, A. (2018). The L2 motivational self-system: Differences among learners. *Jezikoslovlj*e, *19*(1), 133-157. https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/298472%23:~:text=Ought-to%20L2%20self%20is,extrinsic%20types%20of%20instrumental%20motives.

Moskovsky, C., Racheva, S., Assulaimani, T., & Harkins, J. (2016). The L2 motivational self-system and L2 achievement: A study of Saudi EFL learners. *Modern Language Journal*, *100*(3), 67-78. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12340

Noels, K. A., Pelletier, L. G., Clément, R., & Vallerand, R. J. (2003). Why are you learning a second language? Motivational orientations and self-determination theory. *Language Learning*, *53*(S1), 33-64. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9922.53223

Papi, M. (2010). The L2 motivational self-system, L2 anxiety, and motivated behavior: A structural equation modeling approach. *System*, *38*(3), 467-479. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2010.06.011

Plonsky, L., & Ghanbar, H. (2018). Multiple regression in L2 research: A methodological synthesis and guide to interpreting R2 values. *The Modern Language Journal, 102*(4), 713-731. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12509

Rahimi, S., Tajaddini, M., & Fatehi Rad, N. (2022). Dörnyei's motivational self-system theory and EFL learners' L2 selves. *Journal of Language and Translation*, *12*(2), 99-114. DOI: 10.30495/TTLT.2022.690712

Rajab, A., Roohbakhsh Far. H., & Etemadzadeh, A. (2012). The relationship between L2 motivational self-system and L2 learning among TESL students in Iran. *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *66*, 419-424. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.11.285

Ryan, S. (2009). Self and identity in L2 motivation in Japan: The ideal L2 self and Japanese learners of English. In Z. Dornyei, & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 120-143). Multi-lingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293-007

Sak, M. (2020). The role of ideal L2 self in predicting L2 willingness to communicate inside and outside the classroom. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *6*(2), 189-203. https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.775798

Sherafati, S., & Ghafournia N. (2019). The relationship among L2 motivational self-system, reading comprehension ability, and gender: A study of EFL learners in Iran*. Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advances*, *7*(2), 29-45. https://doi.org/10.22049/jalda.2019.26602.1134

Singer, J. L. (2006). Expanding Imagery in Patient and Therapist. In J. L. Singer, *Imagery in psychotherapy* (pp.161–186). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/11366-010

Taguchi, T., Magid, M., & Papi, M. (2009). The L2 motivational self-system amongst Chinese, Japanese, and Iranian learners of English: A comparative study. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp.66-97). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293-005

Ueki, M., & Takeuchi, O. (2013). Forming a clearer image of the ideal L2 self: The L2 Motivational Self System and learner autonomy in a Japanese EFL context. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching. 7*(3), 238-252. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2013.836205

Ushioda, E. (2009). A person-in-context relational view of emergent motivation, self, and identity. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self. Second language acquisition* (pp. 215-228). Multilingual Matters. http://webcat.warwick.ac.uk/record=b2252937~S1

Yan, T., Conrad, F. G., Tourangeau, R., & Couper, M. P. (2011). Should I stay or go: The effects of progress feedback, promised task duration, and questionnaire length on completing web surveys. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *23*(2), 131-147. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edq046