

# Asian Students' Social Goals in English Learning Motivation

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**Abstract** This paper presents a study of Asian university students' motivation with reference to the Malay university students by utilizing Dornyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System. The purpose of this work was to test the robustness of self-concept in L2 Motivational Self System and examine the consequence of the learner social goals into their self and motivation in Malaysian context. A questionnaire survey was designed and administered among 29 Malay undergraduates in Malaysia. The results of this investigation confirmed the strongest correlation between ideal L2 self and motivated learning. And a strong correlation was found between the learner self and social goals and learner social goals and motivated learning. It is pretty surprising that ought to L2 self and motivated learning has a significant correlation. The significant correlation of social goals and selves and motivated learning suggests the inevitable social attachment of the Asian learners. Asian learners as interdependent members of the society always focus their goals to meet the needs of the co-participants.

**Keywords** Social goals, Selves, Motivation

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## 1. Introduction

Spread of globalization changed the image of the English language in the world. Specially in the Asian countries English appears as a key language, because English became the language of the globalized world. In fact English learning motivation appears very high among the learners. English plays a dominant role in local or national educational policy, curriculum provisions, high stakes in gate keeping exams, the professional job market and society at large. This local and global pressure has an inescapable impact on the motivation of students and teachers (Ushioda, 2013). Because of that learners in Foreign Language (FL) and Second Language (SL) contexts have their own social reasons behind their English learning motivation. This paper investigates the social factors (social goals) behind the Asian learners specially Malay learners English learning motivation by utilizing the Dornyei (2009) L2 Motivational

Self System (LMSS).

## 2. Motivation

Language learning motivation was investigated by the researchers in the world wide. Gardner (1985) appears as the remarkable point in the motivation research field. His concept of 'integrativeness' or desire to be a part of the target language community was questioned later by the motivation researchers by considering the multilingual contexts in the world. Moreover spread of English via multilingual contexts like Asian countries, causes to emerge new varieties of English (Brutt-Griffler, 2002). Thus second language learners (L2) expect to reach the fluency of local English speakers rather than the native speakers of English or westerners, because their role models are urban middle class English speaking locals. Moreover English became the international communication code and lost its cultural and geographical boundaries (Lamb, 2004).

The traditional concept of integrativeness was challenged by the 'Chinese Imperative' where traditional motivators were failed to explain the required motivation of Chinese English language learners (Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005). The study is important in motivation studies, because it emphasized Chinese FL learners of English may be driven more by instrumental factors rather than integrativeness. Globalization had made it possible for Chinese learners to access and share information via their first language (L1) or mother tongue (MT).

In recent years motivation theory has heightened the need for investigating the self-concept. To date, there has been little agreement on the principles of integrativeness of Gardner (Dornyei & Csizer, 2005); (Dornyei, 2009). Presently, the integrativeness principle continues to be challenged as English language races to become the preferred mode of communication of the international community, internet world and 'world Englishes' (Lamb, 2004; Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2006). Within this, Dornyei's (2005) conceptual model for learner contributed to identify the learner motivation with reference to their self concept. There are three major concepts for describing the LMSS. The

first component being the Ideal L2 Self, which is the L2-specific facet of one's 'ideal self. If the person would like to speak the L2, the 'ideal L2 self is seen as a powerful motivator to learn the L2. The second being the Ought-to L2 Self, which is concerned with the attributes that the self needs to possess in order to avoid possible negative outcomes, and therefore may bear little resemblance to the person's own desires or wishes. (e.g. Obligations, duties). The third being the L2 Learning Experience, which is concerned with situated motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. The impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success) (Dornyei, 2010). LMSS was conceptualized with reference to the Hungarian FL learners, although later researchers in all over the world started to examine the validity of LMSS in their language learning contexts to identify the learner motivation. This has helped confirm the validity of the tripartite model (Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009); (Csizer & Kormos, 2009); (Papi, 2010); (Kormos, Kiddle, & Csizér, 2011); (Lamb, 2012); (Islam, Lamb, & Chambers, 2013). Also, international posture has also proven to be a significant causative factor of the Ideal L2 self (Csizer & Kormos, 2009); (Kormos et al., 2011). Presently, A higher rating in the Ideal L2 self and L2 learning experiences were found to decrease L2 learning anxiety while a higher rating on the ought to L2 self was found to make students more anxious by adding English anxiety into the L2 Motivational Self System (Papi, 2010). Added to this is parental encouragement, which has been found to be an increasingly important component in LMSS and this has had a significant relationship on the ought to L2 self (Csizer & Kormos, 2009); (Kormos, Kiddle, & Csizér, 2011). Taking all these factors into consideration, Kormos and et al (2011) went on to implement a new Interactive Model to investigate learner motivation by utilizing goals, attitudes and selves. The implementation of goal orientation in LMSS is, therefore considered significant because they may be viewed as the energy for motivated behavior. They can be the source of sustained effort and achievement as well (Mercer, Ryan, & Williams, 2012). Meanwhile, Kormos et al (2011) found International posture (desire to use English to connect with the international community) as a goal in Chilean context to contain a significant relationship to the ideal L2 self.

Previous studies (e.g. Kormos et al, 2011) does not take account the broader perspective of learner goals like socially oriented goals and academically oriented goals which play major roles in the L2 learning context which incidentally may be a bigger factor for many Asian L2 and FL settings. Recently urban and rural learners' self- concept was investigated among Indonesian junior high school students and the findings revealed the ideal L2 self to be only significant among the metropolitan group. In Lamb (2012), the ideal L2 self was found to demonstrate a less prominent role due to the relatively young age of the respondents. More recently, national interest has also been found to be a significant factor for improving the ideal L2 self and this has highlighted the need to understand the connection of English

with the national identities (Islam et al., 2013). This can be useful to identify the Asian students, because English as the key language of the international community has its power to represent the national identities to the world.

Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest on social influence on learners' self and language learning motivation. Milieu was found to be have a significant relationship to the instrumentality and instrumentality was found to be an socially promoted motivation (Dornyei & Csizer, 2005). One of the most significant current discussions in social influence is parental influence (Csizer & Kormos, 2009); (Kormos et al., 2011). Csizer et al (2009) found a significant relationship of parental encouragement and international posture. Kormos et al (2011) found a significant relationship of ought to L2 self and parental encouragement. So far, however there is a little discussion about ideal L2 self and social goals of the learners.

Asian learners as interdependent parts of the larger society sensitive towards others, the co- participants in various relationships; mother, father, sibling, friend, co-worker and etc. (Markus et al., 1991). Thus, their self may have a significant relationship with the society. On the other hand, they have a desire to achieve socially valued outcomes in their classroom, including academic success (Wentzel, 2000). In this line it can be hypothesized that, social goals remain important factors for determining students' motivational quality in education (King & Watkins, 2011) in many parts of Asia. Taken in this context, motivation to learn English for many Asian learners may be derived from the society due to the learners' bond with the society and need to be seen as a part of their L1 society.

The current study aims to find the validity of ideal L2 self and ought to L2 self of LMSS for East Asian learners. It is assumed that the findings will help policy makers, language planners and instructors to help learners to achieve their goals. Following research questions were formed to examine the validity of LMSS and relationship of social goals.

1. What is the nature of the relationship between the ideal L2 self and social goals?
2. What is the nature of the relationship between ought to self and social goals?
3. How self and social goals contribute to the motivated learning?
  - a. What is the nature of the relationship between motivated learning and ideal L2 self?
  - b. What is the nature of the relationship between motivated learning and ought to L2 self?
  - c. What is the nature of the relationship between the motivated learning and social goals?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants

This study involved twenty nine Malaysian Malay undergraduates between ages 22 to 25. The participants were

randomly selected from various faculties and various regions of Malaysia. None of the participants were English major, but they were studying compulsory English Language courses at the target university.

### 3.2. Instrument

A questionnaire based on items adapted from motivation questionnaires of Taguchi and et al (2009), Islam et al., (2013), Dowson & McInerney, (2004); Dornyei and et al (1994); Lamb (2012) was used to gather the views of learners. The final revised version of questionnaire consisted of 30 five point Likert scale items and took 10 minutes to complete. Following are the scales:

- Motivated Learning: This scale measures the extent of motivated learning of learners
- Ideal L2 self: The items in this scale aim to measure the imagined personality of learners, they wish to achieve through learning English
- Ought to L2 self: The obligations and responsibilities of learners, they have to accomplish by learning

English included in this scale

- Social goals: Socially constructed aspirations of learners, they wish to achieve by learning English included in this scale.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using SPSS 21.0. A reliability analysis was run to ensure the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients of the items. The basic statistical procedure used to analyze the data was Pearson Correlation Analysis.

## 4. Results and Discussions

The results of the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients are depicted in the Table 1. All the values are above 0.6 and consistent with accepted standard of social sciences (Pallant, 2007).

**Table 1.** Test for reliability

Variables	Item no.	A
<b>Motivated Learning Behavior</b>	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	.92
<b>Ideal L2 self</b>	11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18	.95
<b>Ought to L2 self</b>	19,10,21,22	.90
<b>Social Goals</b>	23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30	.92

In accordance with the table 1 Cronbach's Alpha is higher than 0.6. This makes the test reliable.

### RQ.1 Relationship between the ideal L2 self and social goals

The mean value for the ideal L2 self and social goals was 32.2069 (SD =5.9) and 33.0345 (SD=5.84614) respectively. Table 2 indicates a significant relationship between the social goals and the ideal L2 self.

**Table 2.** Correlation between Ideal L2 self and social goals

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	P- Correlation	Sig. (2 -tailed)
<b>Social Goals</b>	Ideal L2 self	.768**	.000

(N= 29 )\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The findings prove that English language learning for this context is highly affected by the socially constructed goals, because there is a big demand of English proficiency in academic and professional field in Malaysia. Moreover Malay learners found the disadvantage of learning in their L1 or Malay. In Malaysia the private university students who have the proficiency of English receive the priority in multinational companies and government university students with less English proficiency has the risk of being unemployed and low paid (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014); (Ha, Phan, Kho, & Chng, 2013). Thus their ideal self highly focused on to the social goals of gaining social respect, earning money, been successful in the profession, represent the country and gain the benefits of scientific development. This cultural evidence proves that Asian learners cannot be exempted from their society (King & Watkins, 2011).

### RQ.2 Relationship between ought to L2 self and motivated learning

The mean and Standard deviation for social goals and ought to L2 self was established to be at  $\chi=33.0345$  (SD=5.84614) and  $\chi=15.3103$  (SD=3.94700). The correlation effect was significant as indicated in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Correlation between social goals and ought to L2 self

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2 –tailed)
Social Goals	Ought to L2 self	.605**	.001

(N=29) \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In accordance with the Table 3 social goals and ought to L2 self has a significant correlation. This is an additional evidence to support the claim that there is a close connection between the learners' socially oriented goals, obligations and responsibilities and these factors need to consider negotiating or overcoming diminishing effects in future. The evidence further validates the pragmatic concerns of Malay learners. The finding is consistent with Dornyei (2005) views which indicate a strong relationship between instrumentality and milieu. This finding further supports the idea of significant relationship of parental encouragement and ought to L2 self which remains a primary motivating factor in Asian child parent relationship, because Asian parents continue to represent an essential part of the social perspective of English learning in the L2 context (Kormos et al., 2011).

### RQ.3 How self and social goals contribute to the motivated learning

The correlations of different variables with the motivated learning are shown in the table 4. Taken in context the findings indicate the ideal L2self to have the highest significant correlation to the motivated learning.

**Table 4.** Correlations of independent variables to the motivated learning behavior

Ind. Variable	P-Correlation	Sig. (2 –tailed)
Ideal L2 self	.780**	.000
Ought to L2 self	.390*	.037
Social Goals	.686**	.000

(N=29) \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It seems possible that this result is due to the high future aspirations of the undergraduates. These students may have had positive experience of using English and may want to further improve themselves, because English is regarded as the language of commerce and higher education in the private sector and also the language of desirable wealth in both nationally and internationally (Ha, Phan et al., 2013). As same these students may realize that, though they can communicate locally in their MT they cannot survive in the globalized world and fast moving development process of the country without the fluency of English.

This finding confirms earlier findings of motivation researchers involving including Islamic subjects (Islam et al., 2013); (Kormos et al., 2011); (Csizer & Kormos, 2009). However, the results differ from Taguchi et al (2009) and Papi (2010). Taguchi and et al (2009) found a highly significant relationship with attitudes and the criterion measure in Japan and Iran. Similarly, Papi (2010) found a high significant correlation with learning experiences and criterion measure. This result therefore needs to be interpreted with caution and needs further investigation with a larger sample size in order to determine whether this finding can be applied to FL and SL courses in the region.

The most interesting finding in this study was that social goals are seen to have a strong correlation to the motivated learning behavior and could serve as the driving force for learner success in the language. As mentioned in the literature review, goals are important factors of learner

motivation (King & Watkins, 2011). However, this result has not previously been described in the motivation studies. Further research should be done to investigate the strength of the social goals for a wider population.

In contrast to earlier findings, this study found a significant correlation between ought to L2 self and motivated learning. Previous motivation studies found a weak or no significant correlation of ought to L2 to the criterion measure (Kormos et al., 2011); (Papi, 2010); (Taguchi et al., 2009); (Csizer & Kormos, 2009). This rather contradictory result may be due to unavoidable obligations of the learners. Future work is required to establish this.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper has given an account of factors motivating Malay undergraduates to learn and perform in English. The purpose of the current work was to identify the nature of relationships between social goals, Ideal L2 self, ought to L2 self and motivated learning behavior. One of the most significant findings to emerge from this study is that social goals have a positive strong correlation to the learners' Ideal L2 self. Further significant correlation of ought to L2 self and motivated learning has also been emphasized. It also confirmed the significant correlation of Ideal L2 self to the motivated learning behavior. Generally, this study confirmed the validity of LMSS among Malay students as Asian

counterparts and signified the emerging social need of learning English for the well being of self and the society. This research will serve as a base for future studies and will commence investigating the social factors behind English learning motivation with respect to the context of the country. Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the findings suggest a need of a new direction in motivation studies in the region in line with the increasing challenges of globalization and technology.

## 6. Further Work

This research has brought up a number of questions that demand further investigation. Presently, more work needs to be done to establish social goals in LMSS of Malaysian learners in line with other Asian learners. It is recommended that further research be undertaken in social goals and learner self from regional nations to obtain a clearer construct for what motivates some learners to do well compared to others. The findings can also have positive outcomes in terms of teaching, learning and planning of the English Language curriculum at higher learning institutions.

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