

## **EFL LEARNING MOTIVATION AMONG STUDENTS OF ISLAMIC STUDIES: THE CASE OF DAR EL HADITH EL HASSANIA INSTITUTION**

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### **Abstract**

The present study was predicated upon two main objectives. The first was to explore the L2 Motivational Self System of Islamic Studies students. This undertaking consisted in measuring the impact of the 'ideal L2 self', the 'ought-to L2 self' and the 'L2 learning experience' variables on their 'intended effort' to learn English. As a second objective, the study purported to elicit the views of these participants on the importance of learning the language, account being taken of their motivational behavior qua Islamic studies students. A thirty-six-item questionnaire was administered to forty-four male and female students at Dar El Hadith El Hassania (DHH) in Rabat, Morocco. This instrument was complemented with an interview with four students in order to infer their perceptions as to their overall English language learning motivation. Results from the regression measure run showed that attitude towards learning — operationalized herein as a key exponent of the L2 learning experience— and the ideal L2 self were predictors of intended effort among these learners. Analysis of the interview responses also corroborated the foregoing statistical finding.

**Key Words:** English in education, Dar El Hadith El Hassania, L2 Motivational Self System, intended effort, attitudes.

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## **1. Introduction**

The centrality of motivation in second language learning has led researchers to explore the concept from different theoretical standpoints. One conceptual model that has been influential in the field was proposed by Dörnyei (2005) and has been known in the literature as the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS, hereafter). This new conceptualization of motivation as being both dynamic and complex (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009) represents a departure from earlier models, namely that of Gardner and Lambert (1972). One of the factors that have increased the popularity of this new model resides in the changes today's world is witnessing, making the 21<sup>st</sup> century EFL learner today necessarily a member a global world, where boundaries are transcended thanks to the lever of information technology now accessible to almost all layers of the modern society. As another important factor, the spread of English around the world, along with the emergence of the so-called "world Englishes", has bereaved the concept of "the native speaker" of his/her long-standing status as an "uncrowned king of linguistics" (Mey, 1981, p.73). Linked to this is the waning of notions like the target English language community insofar as this language is used as a lingua franca for communication at the international level.

With this background as a starting point, the study hinges on two objectives. These are:

1. To explore the L2MSS of students at Dar El Hadith El Hassania institution by analyzing their ideal L2 self, ought- L2 self and L2 learning experience.
2. To put to test the impact of ideal L2 self, ought- L2 self and language L2 learning experience on on DHH students'intended learning.
3. To elicit these students' views on the usefulness of English as part of the curriculum they need to cover.

It should be pointed out that the variable 'promotional instrumentality' is another instantiation of the 'ought- L2 self' variable (Tagushi, et.al., 2009);

Wijeratne, 2015) and 'attitude towards language learning' and 'cultural interest' instantiate the 'language L2 learning experience variable'.

The present study is motivated by the fact that not enough similar attempts have been made to study motivation in the Moroccan context from the L2MSS standpoint. A couple of exceptions are Amrous (2020) and Amrous and Zouiten (2020). The novelty of the present study resides in its being conducted among students at Dar El Hadith El Hassania, a religious institution where the dominant language had for long been mostly Arabic. This is despite the fact that, over the last fifteen years, a curricular reform was introduced and English became a course that was made an integral part of the academic curriculum.

The study seeks to answer the research question as to which of the L2MSS variables defines DHH students' intended effort. From this emerge two hypotheses:

1. DHH students' ought- L2 self will predict their intended effort more than any of the other independent variables.
2. DHH students' views of English reflects their motivational behavior.

The hypotheses above are justified on the grounds that at DHH, content courses are officially delivered in Arabic, the latter being the language of the Qur'an and therefore language of instruction in Islamic Studies classes. Accordingly, one might be tempted to think that these learners view English as unimportant and are therefore not likely to invest in learning it. The first hypothesis will be tested quantitatively while the second will be invested qualitatively.

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2, a brief account of presence of English in Morocco will be given. Section 3 offers a description of the linguistic situation in the country, while Section 4 provides an overview of the L2MSS and summarizes the basic findings in previous research; The details of data collection are given in section 5. Then, the presentation and discussion of the findings are given in sections 6 and 7.

## **2. The presence of English in Morocco**

In general terms, a typical Moroccan student starts to learn English at junior high school, though there are private schools that offer English courses at levels as low as primary school. At the university level, there is hardly any institution that does not include an English module in its curriculum, at least as part of the need to teach a “language and communication” component. For the students who aim for a major in English, they need to register at the English Department, where the language of instruction of the credit courses is in English. With this, English is carving itself a good position in Moroccan higher education.

Aside from academic institutions, the number of Moroccan people who look for opportunities to learn English is in constant increase. In the same vein, the number of schools that offer courses in languages in general and in English in particular are also rising in number, to such a pass that one can frequently notice posters in streets inviting people to register for English courses. Many of these private schools offer training in English to employees at different ministries as part of staff training initiatives. Many individuals, especially students who need to capitalize on their skills in the language, are ready to pay to join such private schools.

These facts, coupled with occasional official statements on the importance of foreign languages, have made of English in Morocco a rival to French, a language associated with the French presence in the country. The citizens' changing attitudes towards French in favor of English are reported in Buckner (2011), where it was made clear that French is rejected on the grounds of its being associated with colonialism. In the same vein, as is also reported in Amrous (2020), the Rabat Center for Political and Strategic studies have called for the replacement of French in the country “Morocco World News” (July, 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015). This view is corroborated by a survey conducted in 2015, by Hespress, a leading news website, as it concluded that 85% of the population were in favor of this English replacing French in the country (Morocco World News, July 5, 2015)”.

Over the last two decades, at least, the Moroccans have had more access to internet and to the existing social media platforms, which has made the need for English grow in the society. One side-advantage of this is that, through films, documentaries, and live conversations with native speakers, many young Moroccans have access to authentic language input, which has remarkably improved their pronunciation, vocabulary size and the use of idiomatic English on the whole. Many of them follow TV series on English speaking channels and many report that this is of great help to them. These factors have harnessed the spread of English in Morocco.

What the foregoing facts reveal about motivation is that this concept needs to adapt to the new realities of the contemporary Moroccan student, for Morocco as a formal language acquisition context seems to have some characteristics of a “virtual” naturalistic setting given learners’ easy access to naturalistic input and their ability to engage in verbal exchanges with native speakers. As reported in Amrous (2020, p. 98),

“Unlike his 1980s or 1990s predecessor, for example, [the contemporary student] is likely to set different goals to his learning, adopt different means of learning, hold different attitudes towards the language itself and expect different learning outcomes”.

In order to capture these realities in a theory of motivation, the framework of the L2MSS developed by Dörnyei (2009) has proved to be relatively more accurate than its predecessors. In light of the facts stated above in regard to learning English in Morocco, our analysis of facts in the present study will be couched within L2MSS. This model will be discussed at some length in section (4 below). In the next section, a quick review of the linguistic situation in Morocco is in order.

### **3. The Moroccan linguistic situation**

The Moroccan sociolinguistic scene is a mosaic of a number of languages, some local and others foreign. These languages, of course, have different weights in society depending on a number of factors.

Historical facts have resulted in different roles assigned to individual languages in Morocco. While Standard Arabic is the language used in formal contexts and religious sermons by virtue of its being the language of the Qur'an, Moroccan Arabic, also known as *Draija*, is the lingua franca among Moroccans as almost all citizens can use it with no difficulty whatsoever. The Amazigh language is spoken natively by large segments of the Moroccan population. In order to protect it from loss, there have been important initiatives taken to elevate the status of Amazigh to an official language (as is shown in the 2011 constitution). French remains a language that many public and private administrations use for their formal correspondences, oftentimes besides Arabic. This division of roles reflects the importance each of these languages has in what Boukous (2009) calls the "linguistic market", where languages derive their importance from the socio-economic value with which they are associated. Foreign languages that are not a by-product of historical circumstances exist *de facto* in the country. Here one can mention English, German, Italian, Portuguese, Turkish and Chinese, name just a few. These are also languages that many Moroccans find attractive.

#### **4. The L2 motivational self system and English language learning**

The *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* defines the "motivation" as a "feeling of wanting to do something". Theory-faithful definitions of motivation can also be inferred from the existing models, although they diverge in ways they conceptualize and contextualize motivation. Below is an overview of some of these models.

##### **4.1. Models of L2 motivation**

The L2 motivation literature suggests that conceptualizations of motivation can be divided into three periods (see for example Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009, Csizer and Magid, 2014 and Ushioda, 2013). The first is the psychological period and it started in 1950s and lived up to 1990s. The second is known as the cognitive situated period, which started in 1990s and waned at the turn of the century. The third period, known as the

process-oriented period, is the one that has earned contemporary acclaim among researchers. A review of the research representing each of these periods is in order.

The social psychological period was pioneered by Gardner and Lambert (1972). The thrust of the model is that in contexts that are characterized by bilingualism, as is the case of Canada, language learning is determined in large part by whether or not a learner is motivated. An offshoot of this idea is a three-component concept of motivation that consists of motivational intensity, the desire to learn the language and attitudes towards the language learning act (Gardner, 1985). Also along these lines appeared the framework the integrative motive, which Gardner (1985) defines as “motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings towards the community that speaks the language” (p.82-83).

The socio-psychological tradition was a precursor to other models, one of which is developed by Clémens (1986) and was known as the ‘linguistic self-confidence’ model. Basic to the view of motivation presented in Clémens (1986) is the idea that L2 acquisition is predicated on two factors: the extent of contact between two ethnic groups and the quality of this contact. This was followed with a study by Gyles and Byrne (1982) where the ‘intergroup model’ was introduced. Having pointed out that such previous models as that of Gardner (1979) and Clémens (1986) did not consider the variable of ethnic identification, Gyles and Byrne (1982) sought to answer the research question as to “who in an ethnic group uses what language variety, when and why” (p:17). The intergroup model soon gave way to Acculturation theory as à la Schumann (1986), according to which social and psychological distance between the L2 learner and the target language community is the predictor of success in a language L2 learning experience.

In 1990s, the cognitive-situated period emerged, and, for the first time, calls for the study of motivation in a classroom context were made, as can be seen in the work of Crooks and Schmidt (1991). This approach

considers that learners' mental processes influence motivation and points out the fact that previous models failed to take into account this fact. In the same vein, Dörnyei (1994), made a three-level proposal which included language, the learner and the learning context as essential elements in the study of motivation. Motivation, according to this new conceptualization, is not the outcome of social-psychological factors only, but it is also a direct reflection of such key classroom variables as the teacher, the curriculum and the syllabus.

Towards the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the process-oriented approach to the study of motivation emerged. Motivation was for the first time pictured as dynamic construct. This represents a departure from all previous frameworks who adopted a monolithic, static approach to it. This, according to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009), came to fill a gap in the literature by accounting for motivational behavior in real-time. One of the most outstanding model that marks the process-oriented approach is one that was developed by Dörnyei (2005, 2009).

#### **4.2 An overview of the L2MSS framework**

The theory of L2MSS was elaborated in Dörnyei (2005, 2009) based on the theory of "possible selves" articulated in Markus and Nurius (1986) and sought to incorporate the theory of "ought-to" selves as explained in Higgins (1987). In doing so, Dörnyei's L2MSS model of motivation includes, and definitely goes beyond, the socio-psychological model of (Lambert and Gardner, 1972) and the socio-educational model developed in Gardner (1985). The novelty of the theory is that, a part from going beyond the previous frameworks, it envisions motivation as a three-component construct, one that consists of the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience.

As is oft-quoted in the literature, the ideal L2 self refers to the 'L2 facet of one's ideal self (Dörnyei, 2009: 29). This is one way of picturing an L2 learner as projecting his image as a fluent and accurate L2 user on completion of his/her learning. This is because the prospect of interacting



with other users of the language is tantamount to putting the learner in a situation where he/she feels successful in his second language L2 learning experience. Of course, this projected image needs to be stimulated by factors such as attitudes towards the target language and its speakers (Dörnyei *et al.*, 2006) and certainly other affective and psychological factors. Studies concur that the 'ideal L2 self' is more active than the other two components of the model (see, for example, Ryan (2009); Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, (2009); Kim & Kim's, (2014); Ghapanchi, Khajavy, & Asadpour, (2011); Rajab, Far, & Etemadzadeh, (2012); Islam, Lamb, & Chambers, (2013)).

The ought-to self, the second component of the L2MSS model, describes "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and avoid possible negative outcomes" (Dörnyei, 2009: 29). Here, one can easily notice that L2 learning can be driven the type of image learners would construct for themselves. For example, many students learn English because doing so would carve them a good place in society, where they acquire some prestige among its members. This achievement might as well be a barometer for hard work and intellectual success. On another side, many students embark on the process of L2 learning because failing to do so is likely to make their profiles undesirable and their academic achievement unsatisfactory. In a few cases, this might earn them a castigation of sorts from the members of their society. The literature reports, however, that the ought- L2 self shows little effect in students' motivational behavior as compared to the ideal L2 self (Dörnyei *et al.*, 2006; Kormos & Csizér, 2008).

Both the ideal L2 self and the ought- L2 self are variables that relate to the learner's future self-image. To account for the immediate motives for learning, the L2MSS model incorporates the language L2 learning experience as a variable. As Dörnyei (2009) put it, this variable refers to "situated executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (Dörnyei, 2009: 29). This means that

students' motivation is also likely to be affected by such factors as the curriculum, the teacher, the institution and so forth, and differences in these factors may result in differences in overall learning achievement. The importance of the L2 learning experience variable can be inferred from the studies that proved its contribution to intended effort as in Taguchi *et al.*, (2009), Taguchi (2013) and Islam *et al.*, (2013).

The theory of L2MSS is relevant to the analysis of motivation on a number of grounds. First, the concept of motivation is for the first time decomposed into three variables that reflect the role of the learner's future image acting in concert with his/her current motives to learn an L2. This is one way of picturing motivation as a dynamic rather than static construct as was conceived in previous frameworks. Second, the L2MSS seems to be the relevant model to describe the motivation of the modern language learners in that the latter has more opportunities to communicate with people worldwide thanks to the development of information technology.

## **5. Methodology**

This section is an overview of the methodology of data collection and analysis. A brief description of the participants and the instruments used, namely the questionnaire and the interview, will be given along with the rationale of using them.

### **5.1 Participants**

In order to put to test the hypotheses stated in the introduction of this paper, the data was collected from a sample of 44 male and female Master's students at Dar El Hadith El Hassania, Rabat. These students, aged between 21 and 25, have already obtained their BA Degree in a field related to religious studies. The reason behind choosing this sample is that these learners study the main content courses in Arabic by virtue of their being Islamic Studies students. With the reform implemented at the institution in 2005, DHH students can now study English as a credit course, which obviates the need for exploring their English language learning motivation.

These students were introduced to English at least since their first semester of their undergraduate program. Many of them had studied the language in high school for at least three years. The English curriculum they follow at DHH is a mixture of general English and English for religious studies. A group of well-trained professors take charge of instruction. Because a group of these learners participated in the present study at will, there were no cases who declined the researcher's request to fill in the questionnaire.

### **5.2 instruments**

The questionnaire used for the purposes of this study was adopted from Wijeratne (2015), a study that adapted in its turn this instrument from previous works (Dörnyei, and Ushioda (2009) Taguchi et al. (2009) and Ryan (2005). The final version of this questionnaire consisted of a total of 36 questions, each six question targeting one of the six variables in this study. Thus, the six questions that target the students' ideal L2 self yielded a Cronbach-Alpha value of (.73). For the ought- L2 self, this internal consistency measure shows a value of (.74). Equally reliable are the questions that target attitude towards learning, with an Alpha value of (.63). The questions measuring cultural interest were consistent at (.65) while promotional instrumentality questions show a value of (.74). Intended effort, the dependent variable, is shown to be consistent at (.73). The consistency measures generated for each variable were indication that the questionnaire items were consistent, though with varying degrees. The questionnaire was, then, administered as none of the values seems to threaten to invalidate such consistency requirement. The version of the questionnaire administered was translated into Arabic to ensure that the students would understand the questions well.

Administration of the questionnaire took place in the presence of the teacher of the class of participants. This was decided beforehand with the aim of making the environment anxiety-free. Apart from the instructions

at the beginning of the questionnaire that guaranteed anonymity, oral instructions were also given by the English instructor. No problem was noticed during the process of the administration of the questionnaire.

## **6. Results**

The data collected by means of the questionnaire were submitted to statistical analysis. The measures of correlation and regression were run in order to test the relationship among the L2MSS variables of the study on the one hand, and on the other hand, to test the impact of these variables on intended effort, which was chosen as the dependent variable of the study (see hypotheses above).

### **6.1 Relationship among study variables**

Most of the variables are shown to correlate, except the pairs 'ideal L2 self/ ought- to self', and 'intended effort/promotional instrumentality', where the respective correlation coefficients ( $r = 4.14$ ) and ( $r = .276$ ), are insignificant. Intended effort is shown to correlate with the ideal L2 self ( $r = .561$ ), the ought- L2 self ( $r = .341$ ), attitudes towards learning ( $r = .682$ ) and cultural interest ( $r = .348$ ). Similarly, the ideal L2 self is shown to correlate with promotional instrumentality, attitudes towards learning and cultural interest, with a correlation coefficient of ( $r = .404$ ), ( $r = .456$ ) and ( $r = .357$ ) respectively. The ought- L2 self, in its turn, correlates with promotional instrumentality ( $r = .463$ ), attitudes towards the target language ( $r = .440$ ) and cultural interest ( $r = .408$ ). Promotional instrumentality correlates with attitudes towards learning ( $r = .472$ ) and cultural interest ( $r = .348$ ). Finally cultural interest is shown to correlate with attitudes towards learning ( $r = .592$ ). These correlations are better visualized in the correlation table (1) below:

Table 1. Correlation among the study variables.

	Intended effort	Ideal L2 self	Ought-to Self	Promotional Instrumentality	Attitudes toward learning	Cultural interest
Intended Effort	1					
Ideal L2 Self	.561**	1				
Ought-to Self	.341*	.414	1			
Promotional Instrumentality	.276	.404*	.463**	1		
Attitudes towards learning	.682**	.456**	.440**	.472**	1	
Cultural interest	.348*	.357*	.408**	.438**	.592**	1

## 6.2 Impact on intended effort

The impact of the foregoing variables on learners' intended effort was tested by means of a regression model, for correlation coefficients reveal only the relationship among these variables. A regression measure has the advantage of predicting the extent to which changes in a dependent variable can be accounted for by changes in any of the independent variables. The following are the results of the impact of ideal L2 self, ought- L2 self, promotional instrumentality, attitudes towards learning and cultural interest on intended effort:

Table 2. Impact of predictor variables on intended effort.

Model	R	R square	Adj. R square	Standard Error
1	.752 <sup>a</sup>	.566	.508	2.62052

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cultural Interest, ideal L2 self, ought- L2 self, promotional instrumentality, attitudes towards target language learning.

Table (2) above is a summary of the overall impact of ideal L2 self, ought-L2 self, attitudes towards target language learning, cultural interest and promotional instrumentality on intended effort. Since the adjusted R-square slot shows a value of (.508), we conclude with confidence that almost (51%) of the changes observed in intended effort are explained by the changes in the foregoing predictor variables.

The impact of each independent variable on the changes observed in the dependent variable, intended effort, reveal that only the ideal L2 self and attitudes towards learning have an impact on DHH learners' intended effort. Thus, the coefficient reported for the ideal L2 self is (.008) while it is (.000) for the attitudes towards learning. Conversely, these students' intended effort is shown to be affected none of the other independent variables. Thus, the ought- L2 self does not show any significance (.897), nor does promotional instrumentality (.337) and cultural interest (.444). These results will be discussed in section (7) below.

## **7. Analysis and discussion**

The first hypothesis of the study is not confirmed, since the regression output suggests that it is DHH students' ideal L2 self and attitudes towards learning that predicted their intended effort. This finding runs counter the expectation that these students, by virtue of their specializing in religious studies, where Arabic is the main language of instruction, would not consider important the idea of imagining themselves using English in the future. However, this result shows support to studies conducted other contexts, where the ideal L2 self is singled out as the most important component of the L2MSS. For example, in his study on Iranian learners, Papi (2010) shows how the ideal L2 self supersedes other variables. Other studies with similar findings showing the strength of the L2 self include Ryan, (2009), Kim and Kim's, (2014) and Taguchi *et. al.* (2009). This state of affairs finds consolidation among DHH students, as shown in their answers to the interview question they were asked.

Thus, in answer to the question as to what English represents to her, one of the students responded that it is “our collective duty” to learn it. This statement places English language learning among the tasks a researcher in the field of Islamic studies should do, at least to be able to read publications in English. The same response was given by her classmate, who made it clear that, in order to communicate with other civilizations in the world, “we must use English because many studies at the international level are published in English”. These statements can be reconciled with the statistical finding that makes the ideal L2 self a predictor of intended effort. These students seem to envision their future image as users of English at least for scientific and academic purposes. This is inferred from the third student’s statement that “it is a must if you want to publish in good international journals”.

As was mentioned in the introduction, English is increasingly gaining ground in Morocco. In academic circles, including DHH, there are calls for the learning of English insofar as this language continues to be an international language in which a large portion of scientific research is published. This is reminiscent of the assertion of the former Minister of Higher Education, Lahcen Daoudi, that, during recruitment exams, jury members should evaluate the candidate on his/her English. Unless the candidate demonstrates his/her ability to use the language, he/she may not be assigned the position of an Assistant Professor. Factors relating to this awareness the importance of English, together with the spread of the language among Moroccans, has presumably made DHH students foresee their career with English and the added value it is associated with.

Although DHH students’ ideal L2 self is a strong predictor of their intended effort to learn English, the results show that this effort is also honed by the attitude of these students towards learning. One cannot deny the role of positive attitude in successful learning (Finch, 2008; Zainol, et al., 2012). Furthermore, the presence of English at DHH has gained volume with the reform that the institution underwent in 2005.

This is together with diverse academic activities the institution organizes on a regular basis, including international conferences where speakers use a variety of languages, including English. These factors may have made DHH students' attitudes towards learning English more positive and therefore predictive of their intended effort.

### **8. Conclusion**

This study started with a couple of objectives. First, it sought to explore the L2MSS variables and check their impact on DHH students' intended effort. Second, it sought to elicit these students' view on the inclusion of English in the curriculum at their institution. The idea behind this was to see how these students would view this state of affairs. In order to test the hypotheses that were derived from these objectives, a questionnaire was administered to 44 and a short interview with 4 students. The statistical analysis showed the predominance of the ideal L2 self and attitudes towards English language learning. A consistency between the statistical analysis and responses of the students to interview questions was observed, with DHH students welcoming the idea of learning English on the grounds of its importance, especially in the academic sphere.

The study has a few limitations, though. First, it is the first of its kind that analyzed data from DHH students. Therefore, any result achieved in the study needs to be validated against other similar attempts. The second limitation could be related to the interview, which included only four students who spoke for a short period of time given the short and direct nature of the questions. More informative data could have been ferreted out had the questions been more general and had the students been given more time to talk. Third, the study was conducted among Master's students and it therefore lacks in detail in regard to lower, undergraduate levels. One cannot, after all, venture into a generalization on all DHH students of the findings achieved in a study based solely on data from Master's students.

This said, one of the recommendations for future studies that aim at exploring DHH students' L2MSS is that they need to take account of



academic level. One suggestion to consider in this regard is to work towards comparative studies between undergraduate and Master's students. This will answer an unaddressed question as to whether DHH students' L2MSS changes as their academic level gets higher. Comparative studies are also desirable between DHH students and the students from other Islamic studies groups—for example, from the School of Humanities.

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