

# Second language motivational self-system, self-regulatory capacities and behavioral engagement: A proposal of an enhanced language learning program

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## ***Abstract***

This study investigates the second language motivational self-system (L2MSS), self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement of non-English major college students in Chinese local universities, aiming to address the existing gap in research on this particular group. The research explores the impact of these factors on college English courses and analyzes the relationships among them. A questionnaire was administered to 371 participants, revealing significant differences in motivational self-systems based on gender and academic background. Furthermore, the study identifies noteworthy distinctions in L2MSS, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement among participants categorized by sex, grade, and major. The results indicate substantial relationships between these variables. The study concludes with a proposed enhancement plan to improve students' academic achievements by adjusting their L2MSS, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement in college English courses. Recommendations for extending the target group to include prestigious university students and other educational levels are provided, along with the suggestion to broaden the research scope to encompass universities from various regions for a more comprehensive understanding of effective college English courses.

***Keywords:*** second language motivational self-system, self-regulatory capacities, behavioral engagement, language learning, program

## Second language motivational self-system, self-regulatory capacities and behavioral engagement: A proposal of an enhanced language learning program

### 1. Introduction

English, the first Lingua Franca, is essential in the age of globalization and information technology. Globalization and growing English internationalization have made English a real planetary lingua franca and a world language. Learning English as a second or foreign language has become increasingly important. Scholars and decision-makers alike have acknowledged the importance of EFL competency among Chinese university students. In response, the Chinese government has significantly invested in EFL education to improve the nation's overall English proficiency in recent years. Nevertheless, because EFL classrooms lack a natural language context, many Chinese university students continue to struggle with English, especially when it comes to speaking and listening. The teaching and learning of college English, as well as English education and reform in China, has gained popularity recently.

Some academics have questioned the efficacy of the EFL teaching strategies in Chinese higher education and have called for a re-evaluation of EFL pedagogy in light of contemporary issues (Li, 2018). The practice and study of English teaching plans for college students have drawn much attention and are being widely implemented as China's higher education reform progresses (Zhiyong et al., 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize developing graduate students' comprehensive academic English skills to create a high-level, methodical, and helpful teaching system for college students to fundamental English knowledge (Lungu, 2021). Mastering a foreign or second language (L2) is a daunting task that requires significant time and effort. Learners must use various cognitive, affective, and behavioral strategies to overcome obstacles they face when acquiring the target language to persevere and eventually succeed.

The intended output is to design an English curriculum system compatible with the Second Language Motivation Self System (L2MSS). This output will be a valuable addition to Dornyei's three-part L2MSS model. Although it has shed light on the dynamics of L2MSS variables, Dornyei's model cannot adequately capture the temporal fluctuations and developmental dynamics of L2MSS. As such, it can be described as a primarily static model. Hopefully, this study will deepen the teachers' understanding of second language motivational self-systems from a temporal perspective by developing an innovative language learning program.

**Objectives of the study** - This study usually sought to improve the academic successes of EFL Chinese local university students by analyzing the relationship between second language motivational self-system, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement. More precisely, the study determined the second language motivating self-system of the students when divided into categories such as ought-to L2 self, dreaded L2 self, and ideal L2 self; identified their self-regulatory capacities with regard to goal-setting, time management, emotion control and self-evaluation; assessed the students' behavioral engagement in terms of independent learning, collaborative learning, student-teacher interaction and participation in academic-oriented activities; tested the relationships among the three variables in responses on the second language motivational self-system, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement when grouped according to demographic variables, and proposed a language learning program based on the study's findings.

### 2. Methods

**Research Design** - This study employed a descriptive research design to investigate the relationships among the second language motivational self-system, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement among language learners. A purposive sampling approach was adopted to select participants, ensuring representation across diverse demographics such as sex and grade major. This descriptive research method involved gathering

quantitative data through questionnaires and scales. The results contributed to a deeper comprehension of the present condition of these variables within the targeted population. This descriptive research design facilitated the efficient collection of data from participants.

**Participants of the Study** - The study was carried out at a local Chinese University. Approximately 8,000 first- and second-year students majoring in scientific majors and liberal arts participated in the study as respondents. Raosoft Sample Size Calculator was applied to determine the number of samples. The recommended sample size is three hundred seventy-one (371). The subjects were first- and second-year university students because they had studied the language for one or two years in college when their language teachers were teaching them and were familiar with the English course. Consequently, the study's conclusions may be more genuine and comprehensive.

**Data Gathering Instrument** - Questionnaires are employed for gathering information. The respondent profile, including sex, grade, and major, was included in the first section of the questionnaire. The second section was the L2 Motivational Self System Questionnaire, which was created using the theoretical literature on L2 self-guides, Papi's (2010), Liu, Yao, and Hu's (2012), and Dornyei's (2009) definition of L2 self-guides. The Self-Regulatory Capabilities Questionnaire was the third section. Goal-setting, time management, emotion control, and self-evaluation are its four subscales, each with twenty statements. The goal-setting items were taken from Zheng et al.'s (2018) questionnaire on L2 self-regulatory capacities and Locke and Latham's (2002) goal-setting theory. Time management elements were taken from the MSLQ by Pintrich et al. (1993), the L2 learning time management questionnaire by Kormos and Csizér (2014). The Self-regulatory Capacity for Vocabulary Learning by Tseng et al. (2006) served as the model for the emotion control tasks. The L2 self-regulatory capacities questionnaire by Zheng et al. (2018) served as the model for the self-evaluation items. The fourth part was the Behavioral Engagement Questionnaire, mainly adapted from NSSE-China (Luo et al., 2009), the Chinese version of NSSE. The survey questions were evaluated by participants utilizing a Likert Scale ranging from 4 for "Strongly Agree" to 1 for "Strongly Disagree." Employing the checklist questionnaire method, participants responded to individual questions with one or more options, indicating their choice by placing a checkmark in the corresponding table. The selection of this questionnaire format was based on its recognized reliability and practicality. The questionnaire underwent content validation by field professionals and underwent pilot testing to ensure its reliability.

**Data Gathering Procedure** - Wen Juanxing was used to administer an online survey and collect data. A direct link to the online survey was given to the respondents' WeChat accounts, which were known to the researcher. Expert consultation and a pilot test were used to validate the questionnaire before data collection. It was carried out to guarantee the instrument's validity. The respondents' permission for the researcher to conduct the study through their participation was requested as part of the survey questionnaire. After tabulating, interpreting, and evaluating the data, the researcher examined the relevant correlations between the second language motivational self-system, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement. She also suggested curricular enhancements for language learning.

**Data Analysis** - After data collection, each questionnaire was reviewed separately, and those found incomplete were discarded. The data from the 371 valid questionnaires were coded for statistical analysis. The data was statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The students' answers to improve their academic achievements and the sample background were compiled using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The independent-sample T-test was used to determine statistical significance regarding the sex differences in the use of the second-language motivational self-system, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement; the analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the significant differences in second-language motivational self-system, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement; Pearson correlations analysis was used to examine the relationships among second language motivational self-system, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement.

**Ethical Considerations** - This research addressed ethical considerations at various stages of the survey.

Initially, an official consent letter was prepared and submitted to obtain approval from a local Chinese university. The participants were thoroughly briefed on the study's objectives and the tasks they were required to undertake. Participants were given the option to withdraw from or join the study at any point. Furthermore, the students were assured that the data and findings from the study would be strictly used for research purposes only. Additionally, ethical clearance was obtained from the research center at Lyceum University of the Philippines.

### 3. Results and Discussion

**Table 1**

*Summary Table on Second Language Motivational Self System*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Ideal L2 Self	2.91	Agree	2
Feared L2 Self	3.01	Agree	1
Ought-to L2 Self	2.87	Agree	3
Composite Mean	2.93	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The comprehensive average value presented in Table 5 is 2.93, which reflects the respondents' attitudes towards the above three indicators. The descriptive analysis showed that the mean score of the feared L2 self (3.01) was significantly higher than that of the ideal self (2.91), which in turn was significantly higher than that of the ought-to L2 self (2.87).

The study revealed that the feared L2 self-played a role in both Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) scenarios, emphasizing its universal impact on learners throughout their academic careers. It also reinforced the notion that the ideal L2 self is a primary motivator for language learners, associated with higher levels of motivational behavior and improved language skills. In contrast, the ought-to L2 self-received the lowest mean score, aligning with findings that suggest a decline in the sense of duty to family and important people after two years of college. This downward trajectory was linked to evolving self-perceptions and a diminishing sense of external pressure. Teravainen-Goff (2022) pointed that concrete tactics can be employed to establish a classroom environment that fosters positive connections among students and between students and the teacher. It is crucial to recognize and address the diverse abilities and motivations within the classroom to guarantee active. Furthermore, as success in L2 learning is positively correlated with higher confidence levels, achieving success in L2 learning will likely reinforce the ideal L2 self (Kanat-Mutluoğlu, 2016).

It is conceivable that successful L2 learners are motivated to reach greatness by stronger motivational possible selves, such as the ideal and feared L2 selves, rather than only satisfying external expectations (i.e., the ought-to L2 self).

**Table 2**

*Summary Table on Self-Regulatory Capacities*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Goal-setting	3.02	Agree	2
Time Management	3.01	Agree	3
Emotion Control	2.95	Agree	4
Self-Evaluation	3.04	Agree	1
Composite Mean	3.01	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

This summary table presents the weighted mean scores for various self-regulatory capacities. Self-evaluation emerged as the highest-ranking indicator, with a weighted mean of 3.04, indicating agreement. Goal-setting, time management, and emotion control also received agreeable scores, contributing to a composite mean of 3.01. The rankings highlight self-evaluation as the most prominent self-regulatory capacity among the indicators analyzed.

The emphasis on robust self-evaluation processes was underscored by research, emphasizing its pivotal role in guiding behavior and enhancing individuals' ability to navigate challenges. Additionally, positive self-evaluation, coupled with a strong sense of self-efficacy, was found to improve academic and personal outcomes. The study highlighted the crucial role of goal-setting as a first step toward achieving overarching objectives, with self-regulatory capacities significantly enhancing the formulation and pursuit of meaningful goals. Urgo & Arguello (2023) presented a study that explored the role of goal-setting on learning, studied the role of goal-setting, and developed a tool called the Subgoal Manager. The Subgoal Manager allowed participants to take notes with respect to specific subgoals and mark subgoals as complete. The study also indicated that students understood the value of time management in learning English and believed they possessed some time management skills. Challenges in handling emotional problems were noted among students, impacting their sensitivity to others' opinions and the vulnerability of their second language motivational self-system growth.

**Table 3**

*Summary Table on Behavioral Engagement*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Independent Learning	3.06	Agree	1
Collaborative Learning	3.05	Agree	2
Student-teacher interaction	2.95	Agree	3
Participation in academic-oriented activities	2.75	Agree	4
Composite Mean	2.95	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The table presents weighted mean scores for different indicators of behavioral engagement. Independent learning achieved the highest score of 3.06, followed closely by collaborative learning at 3.05. Student-teacher interaction received a score of 2.95, while participation in academic activities scored 2.75. The composite mean for all indicators is 2.95, indicating a consensus on the significance of these behavioral engagement factors in education.

The research underscores the enduring advantages of independent learning, shaping individuals into adaptable, self-directed learners capable of continuous skill acquisition. Embarking on the diverse terrain of independent learning unveils its profound influence on both students and educational institutions. Independent learning enables students to aspire to significant goals and take charge of their educational journeys, a sentiment echoed by figures such as Michelle Obama and Simon Sinek. It dismantles the confines of traditional classroom education, urging students to welcome new experiences and collaborate on real-world projects. This method not only provides them with valuable knowledge but also cultivates a sense of self-motivation and adaptability, essential qualities for navigating a rapidly evolving world (Alajmi & Al-Mutairi, 2023).

Also, the shift towards collaborative learning was attributed to the increased emphasis on group projects and discussions assigned by university teachers, fostering teamwork skills and shared learning goals. Additionally, the hierarchical nature of teacher-student relationships and the lack of teaching assistants in local universities hinder effective interaction. It also suggested that despite diverse purposes for attending such activities, including improving spoken English and making new friends, students generally engage in various teach-ins and conferences to learn from successful senior schoolmates.

**Table 4**

*Relationship Between Second Language Motivational Self System and Self-Regulatory Capacities*

Ideal L2 Self	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Goal-setting	.424**	0.000	Highly Significant
Time Management	.412**	0.000	Highly Significant
Emotion Control	.354**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-Evaluation	.402**	0.000	Highly Significant
Feared L2 Self			

Goal-setting	.483**	0.000	Highly Significant
Time Management	.459**	0.000	Highly Significant
Emotion Control	.371**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-Evaluation	.436**	0.000	Highly Significant
<b>Ought-to L2 Self</b>			
Goal-setting	.568**	0.000	Highly Significant
Time Management	.520**	0.000	Highly Significant
Emotion Control	.439**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-Evaluation	.471**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 4 shows the link between self-regulatory capacities and the motivational self-system of the second language. Regarding the relationships between the second language motivational self-system and self-regulatory abilities, the correlation analysis revealed a strong relationship between the ideal L2 self, feared L2 self, and ought-to L2 self.

The self-system of an individual encompasses both L2 self-guides and self-regulatory capacities, serving as stimuli for motivation at the macro and micro levels, respectively. Studies have unveiled a robust correlation between micro-level self-regulatory abilities and macro-level L2 self-guides. From birth, individuals learn to regulate their behavior in alignment with their identities. The activation of self-regulatory abilities is prompted by the gap between potential and actual selves. Future self-guides represent immediate objectives students establish for completing tasks, including proximal and distal goals that intertwine with self-regulatory capacities. Notably, the Ideal L2 self holds the significant capacity to predict self-regulatory strategies. Researchers have identified strong associations between potential selves, self-evaluation, and goal-setting in the context of relationships between L2 self-guides and specific self-regulatory capacities. Therefore, the supportive structures indeed correlate with the implementation of self-regulatory methods.

Henry & Liu (2023) evaluated the effectiveness of a self-system conceptualization by tackling five issues associated with the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) and its connection to the model's self-system conceptualization. These challenges include the "fantasy problem," the "ought-to L2 self-problem," the "integrativeness problem," the "learning experience problem," and the "context problem." A thorough examination of these problem areas reveals the constrained nature of the self-system conceptualization embedded in the L2MSS and highlights the enhanced utility provided by a self-regulatory system framework.

**Table 5**

*Relationship Between Second Language Motivational Self System and Behavioral Engagement*

Ideal L2 Self	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Independent Learning	.405**	0.000	Highly Significant
Collaborative Learning	.367**	0.000	Highly Significant
Student-teacher interaction	.396**	0.000	Highly Significant
Participation in academic-oriented activities	.386**	0.000	Highly Significant
<b>Feared L2 Self</b>			
Independent Learning	.430**	0.000	Highly Significant
Collaborative Learning	.406**	0.000	Highly Significant
Student-teacher interaction	.388**	0.000	Highly Significant
Participation in academic-oriented activities	.377**	0.000	Highly Significant
<b>Ought-to L2 Self</b>			
Independent Learning	.448**	0.000	Highly Significant
Collaborative Learning	.432**	0.000	Highly Significant
Student-teacher interaction	.427**	0.000	Highly Significant
Participation in academic-oriented activities	.444**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

The correlation analysis reveals a robust and highly significant relationship between the Second Language Motivational Self System (including Ideal L2 Self, Feared L2 Self, and Ought-to L2 Self) and multiple dimensions of behavioral engagement. The Ideal L2 Self demonstrates strong positive correlations with independent learning, collaborative learning, student-teacher interaction, and participation in academic-oriented activities. Similarly, the Feared L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self also exhibit highly significant positive correlations across these behavioral engagement factors. These findings emphasize the substantial influence of motivational self-perceptions on diverse aspects of student engagement in language learning activities, highlighting the intricate interplay between the Second Language Motivational Self System and behavioral engagement dimensions.

According to the study, the ideal L2 self might strongly predict collaborative learning. The ideal and fearful L2 selves might significantly predict participation in academically related activities. A strong correlation suggests that people are more engaged when their motivational system is more robust. Dörnyei (2019), who recently defined second language learning experience as “the perceived quality of the learners’ engagement with various aspects of the language learning process”. He further detailed multiple facets of learners’ L2 learning process and environment that can be engaged with, including the school context, teaching materials, learning tasks, peers, and teachers. This retheorisation can be considered an expansion of the original definition of L2 learning experience in the L2MSS, which refers to the executive motives of learning situations, such as the impact of the teacher, curriculum, peer group, and experience of success (Dörnyei, 2009).

**Table 6**

*Relationship Between Self-Regulatory Capacities and Behavioral Engagement*

Goal-setting	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Independent Learning	.687**	0.000	Highly Significant
Collaborative Learning	.603**	0.000	Highly Significant
Student-teacher interaction	.621**	0.000	Highly Significant
Participation in academic-oriented activities	.535**	0.000	Highly Significant
<b>Time Management</b>			
Independent Learning	.703**	0.000	Highly Significant
Collaborative Learning	.652**	0.000	Highly Significant
Student-teacher interaction	.670**	0.000	Highly Significant
Participation in academic-oriented activities	.577**	0.000	Highly Significant
<b>Emotion Control</b>			
Independent Learning	.673**	0.000	Highly Significant
Collaborative Learning	.609**	0.000	Highly Significant
Student-teacher interaction	.621**	0.000	Highly Significant
Participation in academic-oriented activities	.605**	0.000	Highly Significant
<b>Self-Evaluation</b>			
Independent Learning	.787**	0.000	Highly Significant
Collaborative Learning	.654**	0.000	Highly Significant
Student-teacher interaction	.660**	0.000	Highly Significant
Participation in academic-oriented activities	.556**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

The presented correlation analysis unveils a highly significant and positive relationship between Self-Regulatory Capacities (including Goal-setting, Time Management, Emotion Control, and Self-Evaluation) and diverse dimensions of Behavioral Engagement. Across independent learning, collaborative learning, student-teacher interaction, and participation in academic-oriented activities, all self-regulatory capacities demonstrate strong positive correlations. These findings emphasize the pivotal role that goal-setting, effective time management, emotion control, and self-evaluation play in fostering active and meaningful engagement in various learning activities. The robust associations underscore the importance of cultivating self-regulatory skills for promoting enhanced participation and success in the educational journey.

Gaxiola-Romero et al. (2020) explored the connection between positive learning environments, academic engagement, and self-regulated learning. They found that a positive learning environment is linked to academic

engagement, and academic engagement is related to self-regulated learning. Estévez et al. (2021) explored the contribution of cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement to self-regulated learning. The result revealed that the highly engaged learners better controlled their time and study, were the most tactical in searching information, had less maladjusted regulatory actions, and gained the best scores.

**Table 7**

## Proposed Language Learning Program for Local Chinese University

Key Result Area	Plan Objectives	Enhancement Activities	Success Indicators	Persons Involved
<b>Second Language Motivational Self System</b>				
Ought-to L2 Self I want to meet the academic language expectations required for my coursework.	To enhance students' English language proficiency, specifically aligning with academic expectations;  To foster a sense of obligation and responsibility towards achieving language competence in academic contexts.	Linguistic Excellence Hub: Conducting workshops on academic writing and speaking skills.  Designing assignments that require the application of formal English language structures.  Encouraging peer collaboration in language practice activities.	80% of students demonstrate improvement in academic language proficiency.  70% of students express a heightened sense of obligation towards meeting academic language standards.	Students; Instructors; University Administrator
<b>2. Self-Regulatory Capacities</b>				
Emotion Control I want to manage stress and emotions effectively during my English learning journey.	To equip students with strategies for emotional control and stress management in the English learning context.  To create a supportive and positive learning environment that promotes emotional well-being.	MINDFUL LEARNING OASIS: Implementing mindfulness and stress-relief activities in class.  Providing resources on emotional intelligence and self-awareness.  Organizing virtual support sessions for students to discuss challenges and share coping strategies.	85% of students report an increase in emotional resilience and well-being during the English learning process.  80% of students actively engage in stress-management activities.	Students; Instructors. University Administrator
<b>3. Behavioral Engagement</b>				
Participation in academic-oriented activities I want to actively engage in extracurricular academic activities that enhance my English language skills.	To promote students' participation in extracurricular academic activities, fostering a well-rounded language learning experience;  To encourage students to apply language skills in practical academic scenarios.	LANGUAGE MASTERY NEXUS: Organizing English language workshops, seminars, and academic competitions.  Facilitating collaborative projects that require the use of advanced English language skills;  Encouraging participation in language-focused clubs and societies.	70% of students actively participate in extracurricular academic activities to enhance English language skills.  75% of students demonstrate improved confidence in applying language skills in real academic situations.	Students; Instructors. University Administrator

**4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

In conclusion, the study establishes highly significant relationships among second language motivational self-systems, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement within the English course at local Chinese universities. This interconnectedness emphasizes the holistic nature of language learning dynamics and



underscores the importance of addressing motivational and regulatory aspects concurrently. In response to the findings, a proposed language learner enhancement program seeks to facilitate learners' adjustment of their second language motivational self-systems, self-regulatory capacities, and behavioral engagement within the English course. This proactive initiative aims to optimize language learning outcomes by addressing identified challenges and fostering a supportive learning environment.

In order to enhance the overall university experience, administrators should strategically allocate resources to establish support systems tailored to the specific needs of the student body. Given the prevalence of female students and a notable number of first-year Liberal Arts students, the implementation of mentorship programs and orientations can play a pivotal role in facilitating a smoother transition to university life. These initiatives aim not only to foster a sense of belonging but also to directly address the unique challenges faced by this demographic. Language teachers are advised to employ diverse instructional pedagogies to cater to the varied preferences within the second language motivational self-system. Enhancing students' engagement and motivation in language learning can be achieved through the design of classroom activities that alleviate anxieties associated with the second-language self while simultaneously fostering the development of ideal and ought-to second-language selves.

English as a foreign language university learners are encouraged to actively participate in available support programs. Attending workshops that emphasize emotional regulation techniques and engaging in academically focused activities can significantly improve behavioral engagement. Seeking individualized guidance to address variations in self-regulatory and motivating self-systems is recommended to create a more personalized and successful learning environment. Future researchers should delve into subtle variations in self-regulatory abilities, behavioral engagement, and motivational self-systems for second languages across diverse demographic groups. Investigating the impact of customized assistance programs on learning outcomes and general well-being can provide crucial insights for the ongoing development of language instruction. Language learning program developers have the opportunity to enhance their programs by integrating elements aligned with the research findings. Developing interventions that emphasize emotion management techniques and encourage involvement in education-related activities can elevate the overall quality and efficacy of language acquisition. To ensure inclusivity and effectiveness, program content should be specifically tailored to the needs identified across various demographic profiles.

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