

# EXPLORING THE L2 MOTIVATIONAL SELF-SYSTEM IN ECUADOR: A QUESTIONNAIRE STUDY IN SECONDARY SCHOOL / HIGH SCHOOL CONTEXTS

EXPLORANDO EL SISTEMA MOTIVACIONAL DEL YO EN L2:  
UN ESTUDIO CUANTITATIVO EN COLEGIOS ECUATORIANOS

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## ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, Zoltán Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) theoretical framework has been used to explore the relationship between successful second language learning and learner motivation in a myriad of language learning contexts. However, not many studies have been carried out in developing countries. Through the lens of L2MSS's three main components: Ideal L2 self, Ought to L2 self, and Learning experience, this study explores Language Learning Motivated Behavior (LLMB) in an Ecuadorian EFL setting. The article is part of a university research project. One hundred twenty-eight senior high school students completed a questionnaire drawn from previous research studies on the L2MSS. The results confirm that the Ideal L2 Self is a strong predictor of language learning motivation in Ecuador, validating this component as one of the

highest-order motivational forces across different populations of L2 learners. Concerning its counterpart, the Ought to L2 self, it was not found a significant correlation between this variable and the criterion measure (LLMB), determining that the external force of the L2MSS presents socio-cultural variances. The Learning experience component also has a noticeable impact on motivated behavior in the context of the study.

*Keywords:* L2 Motivational Self-System, Language Learning Motivation, English as Foreign Language, Ecuador EFL students.

## RESUMEN

Durante la última década, la teoría: 'L2 Motivational Self-system' (L2MSS) de Zoltán Dörnyei se ha utilizado para explorar la relación entre el aprendizaje exitoso de un segundo idioma y la motivación del alumno en diversos contextos de aprendizaje de idiomas. Sin embargo, hay pocos estudios en países en desarrollo. Analizando los tres componentes principales del L2MSS: Ideal L2 self, Ought to L2 self y Learning experience, este estudio explora el comportamiento motivacional en el aprendizaje de idiomas en un contexto de inglés como lengua extranjera en Ecuador. Este artículo es parte de un proyecto de investigación universitario. 128 estudiantes de secundaria completaron un cuestionario extraído de estudios de investigaciones anteriores sobre el L2MSS. Los resultados confirman que el Ideal L2 self es un fuerte predictor de la motivación para el aprendizaje de idiomas en Ecuador, lo que valida este componente como una de las fuerzas motivacionales de más alto orden en diferentes poblaciones de estudiantes de lengua extranjera. En el Ought to L2 self no se encontró una correlación significativa entre esta variable y la variable dependiente, determinando que la fuerza externa de la L2MSS presenta variaciones socioculturales. El componente Learning experience también presenta un impacto notable en el comportamiento motivacional en el contexto de estudio.

*Palabras clave:* L2 Motivational Self-System, Motivación en el aprendizaje de idiomas, Inglés como lengua extranjera, Estudiantes ecuatorianos de inglés como lengua extranjera.

*Recibido:* 12/05/2022. *Aceptado:* 30/11/2022.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a second language or foreign language (L2/FL) is particularly complex. It does not always take place simultaneously with the teaching process and also involves a myriad of individuals, sociocultural, and pedagogical variables (Nolen et al., 2015). Therefore, learning an L2/FL requires a period of assimilation and accretion of contents, which implies the acquiring and mastering of a series of linguistic and intercultural competencies.

English is officially taught as a foreign language in private and public educa-

tional establishments nationwide in Ecuador. The Ministry of Education of Ecuador (MINEDUC) has carried out several actions, later described in this paper, intended to improve the academic success of the English language. Notwithstanding these actions, taking the English First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) as a reference, Ecuador, over the last decade, constantly ranked at the lower end of both the Latin-American and Global scale. Similarly, the current national curriculum establishes that students who graduate from high school must reach a B1 level according to the CEFR. As highlighted by Ortega and Fernández (2017) and Bravo et al. (2017), in terms of academic achievement, Ecuadorian students' language skills at the end of compulsory high school education are far below the preferred level of competence.

The research field in learning an FL has addressed motivation as a pivotal and recurrent factor that influences students' achievements in terms of linguistic outcomes (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Henry, 2009; Lamb, 2017, 2012; Lasagabaster et al., 2014; Sylvén, 2017). In general terms, motivation explains the reasons behind human behavior. In education, motivation is the most common term used by teachers and students to explain what causes success or failure in learning (Guiloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). In Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research; even though there is not a consensus on one definition, academics have agreed on the importance of this construct in the teaching and learning process to be successful (Dörnyei, 2001).

In various EFL contexts, L2 motivation is of paramount importance in their research agenda. Several studies on L2 student motivation have been mapped from different angles and variables (Csizér, 2020). According to (Tuan, 2012), even though students may be equally motivated, their source of motivation and success in learning will differ depending on different linguistic context-related factors. Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposed the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) an overarching theory that potentially accommodates the wide range of psycholinguistic variables affecting motivation that have remained valid yet isolated or confusingly overlapping concepts.

Over the last decade, using the system developed by Dörnyei (2005) as a theoretical framework, several studies have explored the relationship between successful second language learning and learner motivation. However, not many have been carried out in developing countries. In Ecuador, some pieces of research explore students' integrative and instrumental motivation (Ortega & Fernández, 2017) and motivational factors that influence English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching (Cirocki et al., 2019; Sevy et al., 2020). Therefore, this research reacts to the scarcity of studies in this field, particularly in an Ecuadorian context, and can contribute to developing a critical awareness of the importance of motivation in EFL academic success.

This study took place in Ibarra, Ecuador. It is a city in northern Ecuador and

the capital of the Imbabura Province, which is considered a mid-sized city in the highlands. The participants of this study are 128 senior high school students from two public institutions with ages ranging from 16-18. This research builds on previous studies on the L2 Motivational Self System, notably the Lamb (2012) study in urban and rural settings in Indonesia. Since the aim of the study is to perform an exploratory analysis of the components of the L2MSS in the Ecuadorian EFL context, it addresses: What characterizes Ecuadorian students' motivational disposition in learning English; what relationships describe the obtained L2MSS scales; what is the relationship between the three main components of the L2 Motivational Self System and motivated learning behavior; and finally, which motivational variables exert an influence on students' motivated learning behavior.

In the context of the study, by empirically validating the L2MSS and the selected criterion measure Language Learning Motivated Behavior (LLMB), some essential possible pedagogical implications could arise. First, the different dreams, goals, and aspirations students already bring to the class could act as future self-guides that can spur students into action in obtaining the desired level of second language competence. Second, the use of imagery enhancement strategies could be applied in the EFL Ecuadorian classroom to stimulate L2 learning by promoting students' vision of their Ideal L2 self. Finally, the educational community should be cautious about an unwanted imposition; for instance, reaching a B1 level according to the CEFR at the end of high school could counter language learning motivation.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Ecuador

EFL is officially taught in private and public educational establishments nationwide in Ecuador. In this regard, MINEDUC has carried out several actions intended to improve the English language teaching-learning process. One of the first procedures adopted has been the compulsory teaching of English as a Foreign Language subject in Ecuadorian primary and secondary schools since 1992 (Ortega & Fernández, 2017). In 1992, the curricular reform of English led by the Ministry of Education and the British Council through the project called Curriculum Reform and Development for the Learning of English (CRADLE) was integrated into schools of the whole country (Calle et al., 2012). This curricular reform included the creation of six contextualized English teaching books called *Our World Through English*, and approximately 1,200,000 EFL students and teachers used them in the school from 1993-1994 to 1998-1999 (MINEDUC, 2009).

In 2015, the project called *Strengthening the Teaching of English* was promot-

ed by the MINEDUC (2016). This project aimed to improve the language skills of Ecuadorian English teachers as well as their teaching strategies by implementing, in 2016, a new National English Curriculum that responds to the guidelines established in the Common European Framework of Reference for the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment of Foreign Languages (CEFR). This new curriculum was developed by establishing specific guidelines to help Ecuadorian students reach an intermediate level (B1) at the end of high school. However, despite these actions, the English language proficiency achieved by Ecuadorian students has not been satisfactory. The international company specializing in assessing students' English proficiency worldwide ranked Ecuadorian students' English proficiency at 90 out of 112 countries where the test was administered. Moreover, Ecuador obtained the second lowest score in English proficiency among 20 Latin-American countries; this score was 440 (Education First, 2021).

In the Ecuadorian context, different factors prevent teachers and students from teaching and learning English respectively efficiently. For instance, Sevy et al. (2020) claimed that pedagogical factors, infrastructure, and educational policies affect language learning and teaching in this country. Furthermore, Bravo et al. (2017) found that learner autonomy and motivational factors create a cyclical and positive interaction in learning English as a Foreign Language. They also pointed out that, bearing in mind that in Ecuador, education is still focused mainly on grades than actual learning, students who lack motivation and autonomy will hardly engage in the activities to acquire the language.

In this line of research and following Gardner (1985) Instrumental and Integrative orientations, Ortega and Fernández (2017) found that Ecuadorian EFL students are instrumentally motivated to learn a language to have better job opportunities, travel, and study for postgraduate degrees abroad. It has led to positive attitudes towards the English language and the culture of the English-speaking countries they have knowledge.

## 2.2. Language Learning Motivation in the EFL context

Gardner and Lambert (1959) model introduces noteworthy and highly influential concepts in SLA motivation research for the first time. Their socio-educational model proposed the distinction between instrumental and integrative orientations. Instrumental motive relates to the willingness of the learner to learn a language for utilitarian purposes, including but not limited to better career opportunities, a scholarship for future studies, and passing a necessary examination for meeting educational requirements. On the other hand, according to Gardner (2001) the integrative orientation could be identified when "...the individual is learning the language because of a genuine interest in coming, or at least willing to come,

closer psychologically with individuals who speak the language” (p.10).

Although these empirical studies came to represent foundational works in the field, researchers later highlighted a growing dissatisfaction with the concept of integrativeness and the integrative orientation, placing these concepts at the center of L2 motivation research for several decades. According to Yang and Kim (2011), the first dissatisfaction with Gardner’s studies is that the studies were conducted in a Canadian context with English and French as official languages. Furthermore, Taguchi et al. (2009) stated that this understanding of integrativeness “did not make sense that it would have such an impact in a foreign language context like Hungary in which there was practically no English-speaking community in which English learners could join” (p. 67). Consequently, the concept may not be applicable in an EFL context where English is taught almost entirely as a compulsory subject and has instrumental objectives, such as academic and professional motives, a situation which is similar in Ecuador.

Secondly, the applicability of the concept of integrativeness has become increasingly complex due to globalization and the role of English as an international language. According to Dörnyei et al. (2006), there is a need to develop a bilingual identity that does not target a specific L2 community. Thus, it could not be longer affirmed that there is a well-defined culture that the learner could target to integrate into the community. As Coetzee (2006) put forward, the notion of integrativeness is unsustainable for learners worldwide in EFL contexts.

Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) proposed that integrativeness needed a broader interpretation. By dint of the possible selves theoretical framework by Markus and Nurius (1986) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins et al., 1985), the researchers argued that the notion of integrativeness could be comprehended as the ideal L2 self. Dörnyei (2005) stated that the re-conceptualization of integrativeness as the ideal L2 self could help clarify L2 motivation in EFL environments regardless of the exposure to L2 speakers, particularly in contexts where the L2 is mainly learned as a mandatory school subject. This system describes people’s motivation to learn a second language by focusing on the notion of self. The author claimed that “motivation involves the desire to reduce the discrepancy between one’s actual self and the projected behavioral standards of the ideal/ought selves” (2009, p. 215).

### 2.3. Dörnyei L2 Motivational Self System in EFL Contexts

The Self-System proposed by Dörnyei (2005), L2MSS, comprises three main dimensions: The Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 self, and the L2 Learning Experience. According to Martinović and Burić (2021):

The ideal L2 self can be regarded as an individual's image of oneself as a proficient L2 speaker he or she would like to become. The ought-to L2 self consists of motives that involve the expectations of significant others, as well as fear of negative outcomes. L2 learning experience includes motives related to the influence of classroom experiences, including the teacher, curriculum, learner group, or experience of success in the classroom (p. 410).

A significant discrepancy between the desirable self-image of an L2 speaker and his/her actual self-image might act as a powerful motivational force (You & Dörnyei, 2016). The Ideal L2 Self is a major component of the L2 motivational construct proposed by Dörnyei (2005, 2009) and has been found to correlate with integrativeness in Gardner's socio-educational model significantly (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Ryan, 2009; Taguchi et al., 2009). Integrativeness is identified with the Ideal L2 Self, reinforcing learners' integrative disposition to learn the L2.

This system proposed by Dörnyei stems from the interest in shedding light on the integrativeness concept. After being conducted in Hungary, a national longitudinal survey study was carried out between 1993-2004 in which the researchers measured learners' motivation through their election of foreign language subjects at school (English, German, French, Italian, and Russian); it was suggested that the construct integrativeness was the strongest predictor in language choice. Given that, in Gardner's view, integrativeness is being conceived as the positive attitudes that students have toward the target language community; it was bewildering that in a Hungarian EFL setting, where the contact with an English community is limited, this variable would demonstrate to be highly influential. Thus, this incongruence led Dörnyei and Csizér (2002) to contemplate that "... the process of identification theorized to underpin integrativeness might be better explained as an internal process of identification within the person's self-concept rather than an identification with an external reference group" (p. 435).

Dörnyei employed for his proposal of the motivational system of the self the psychosocial theory of Markus and Nurius (1986) which is based on the possible selves. Possible selves represent both the ideas that persons have of themselves in the present and their wishes, objectives, and fears projected in the future. The authors proposed for the first time three possible selves: Ideal selves that we would very much like to become; selves that we could become; and selves we are afraid of becoming. Since desires, objectives, fears, and threats acted as incentives that determine the present and future behavior of the individual, a relationship between cognition and motivation was recognized. Therefore, the possible selves exercise an orientation that guides the present me towards the possible future me.

Dörnyei also relies on Higgins (1987) self-discrepancy theory, according to which the individual's motivation to achieve a goal depends on comparing the real or current self with the future or possible self. In such a way, motivation for

change surfaces when there is a discrepancy between the real self and the other self. Dörnyei, as cited in Yang and Kim (2011) claimed that “motivation involves the desire to reduce the discrepancy between one’s actual self and the projected behavioral standards of the ideal/ought selves” (p. 215).

Higgins et al. (1985), outline three crucial elements in Dörnyei’s theory:

1) The *actual self* represents the qualities that individuals believe they actually possess or qualities assigned to them by others; 2) the ideal self represents the qualities that one would preferably like to possess, including hopes, aspirations, or wishes; 3) the Ought self denotes the representation of characteristics that one believes one ought to possess, including group norms such as duties, obligations, or moral responsibilities. One influential aspect, according to Ushioda and Dörnyei (2009), about possible selves is the fact that they not only encompass palpable images and senses but also are characterized in the same imaginary and semantic way as the here-and-now self, making them an actuality for the person. Nevertheless, as Taguchi et al. (2009) pointed out, contrary to the ideal self which has a definite guiding function, not every type of possible self holds this feature.

For the construction of one’s own identity, Higgins (1987) distinguishes three types of self: 1) the real self that reflects the self-perception of how we think we are, regardless of whether this vision is true or not; 2) the ideal self that reflects how we would like to be, that is, our wishes, aspirations, and expectations regarding our personal development; 3) the responsible self that reflects how we should be, that is, the attributes that we must have to fulfill our obligations and responsibilities. These last two future or possible selves (ideal self and responsible self) foster our motivation by defining our objectives and goals.

As stated by Lamb (2012), Dörnyei L2 Motivational Self System amply redefines Gardner’s important concepts, making them congruent to global English learning contexts. Taguchi et al. (2009) echoed in their study that L2MSS has external validity and helps us appraise certain cross-cultural motivational unrelatedness in different educational settings. The ideal L2 Self-construct has been validated as a strong motivational force across different populations of L2 learners in previous studies: Chile (Kormos et al., 2011), Germany (Busse, 2013), Hungary (Csizér & Lukács, 2010; Kormos & Csizér, 2008), Indonesia (Lamb, 2012), Iran and Japan (Taguchi et al., 2009), Pakistan (Islam et al., 2013), Saudi Arabia (Al-Shehri, 2009), Spain (Brady, 2019) and Sweden (Henry, 2009, 2010, 2011). Therefore, it could be concluded that Dörnyei’s model findings are not country-specific. However, “the way L2 self-guides may operate in different socio-cultural contexts has not been investigated” (Lamb, 2012, p. 998). That is why it is of paramount importance to improve English language learning in Ecuador to explore the L2MSS in the proposed EFL context.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

The present study took a quantitative approach, as its purpose was to map the language learning motivational profile of high school Ecuadorian students by using and testing Dörnyei's second language (L2) Motivational Self System as the theoretical framework. Another reason why the quantitative research paradigm was chosen was that, in this way, it was possible to involve more participants in the observation (Dörnyei, 2007).

#### 3.1. Research Questions

Based on the literature review and the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What characterizes Ecuadorian students' motivational disposition to learn English?
2. What relationships do the obtained L2MSS scales described?
3. What is the relationship between the three main components of the L2 Motivational Self System and motivated learning behavior?
4. Which motivational variables exert an influence on students' motivated learning behavior?

#### 3.2. Participants

In total, 128 Ecuadorian senior high school students, 63 (49,2%) females and 65 (50,8%) males, filled in the questionnaire, the participants' ages ranged from 16 to 17 years old. According to the participants' self-report, regarding ethnicity, three students (2,3%) were identified as white, 101 participants (78,9%) considered themselves as mestizos, 16 (12,5%) as afro, and eight respondents (6,3%) described themselves as indigenous.

#### 3.3. Instrument and procedure

The questionnaire items used in this study were primarily drawn from previous researches on the L2 Motivational Self System, notably the Lamb (2012) questionnaire in urban and rural settings in Indonesia. Each of the variables in this research was measured by several five-point scale Likert-type questionnaire items. The response options of the questionnaire were based on a Likert scale with five

response options: 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Undecided), 4 (Agree), 5 (Strongly Agree). Once the questionnaire was adapted to the context, it was validated by four experts in research and applied linguistics.

The questionnaire was administered in Spanish; therefore, to ensure the equivalence of the two versions, it was translated from English to Spanish by a bilingual Ph.D. professor in the field and then back-translated by a bilingual professor from an Ecuadorian university resulting in the rewording of several items. Once the questionnaire was translated, as suggested by Dörnyei and Csizér (2012), the first stage of the pilot study involved a think-aloud protocol with two students of the target population. The detailed feedback provided by the students allowed the researchers to rewrite some items using clear-cut language. Then, the instrument was piloted with 40 high school students from the institutions participating in the study.

Since the aim of the study was to perform an exploratory analysis of the components of the L2MSS in the Ecuadorian EFL context; the final version contained the following psychometric scales: one criterion measure scale: Language Learning Motivated Behavior (LLMB), and four constructs: the tripartite structure of the L2 Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2005), 1) the Ideal L2 self, the personal vision of the language users they would like to become; 2) the Ought-to L2 self, which concerns the qualities that one ought to acquire to meet expectations and to elude possible negative outcomes; and 3) the L2 Learning Experience, which concerns situated, executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience. This construct is viewed initially as a single dimension in the L2 MSS but similarly to Lamb's (2012) study; it was decided to divide it into two constructs represented by Learning Experience in school and Learning Experience outside school. Lamb (2012) proposes that "...it is not only school experiences that count; the potential enjoyment gained by learning outside school, for example through listening, watching or reading English language media, is also a contributory factor" (p. 1014).

All of the completed questionnaires were computer coded, and SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 25.0 was used to analyze the data. The study involved descriptive and inferential analyses of the variables. The descriptive statistics allowed us to identify the mean and standard deviation values of the scales. Then to find out if the differences between the mean values were significant or not, paired sample t-tests were applied. On the other hand, correlations and linear regression analyses were carried out to describe the relationships between the dimensions.

Due to the careful piloting process, all scales yielded favorable Cronbach's alpha coefficients, as Table I shows. Dörnyei (2007) states that "somewhat lower Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are to be expected, but even with short scales of three or four items, we should aim at reliability coefficients over 0.70; if the Cronbach's Alpha of a scale does not reach 0.60, this should sound warning bells" (p. 183).

**Table I.** Variables, scales, and items employed in the study.

| Type of variable                      | Scales                                      | Items  | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------|
| Criterion measure                     | Motivated learning behavior                 | I really try hard to learn English.<br>I put much into learning English outside school.<br>I am doing my best to learn English.<br>I always do my English homework<br>I like to spend lots of time studying English  | .79                 |
| L2 motivational self system variables | Ideal L2 self                               | For the things I want to do in the future I need to know English.<br>I often imagine myself as someone who's able to speak English.<br>I want to be the kind of Ecuadorian who speaks English well.<br>I see myself one-day speaking English with other people from all over the world.<br>It is easy to think of myself as a future English user.<br>If my dreams come true, I'll one day use English in my studies.<br>If my dreams come true, I'll one day use English in my job. | .88                 |
|                                       | Ought-to L2 self                            | I need to know English to avoid failing the subject<br>Young Ecuadorians are obliged to learn English well.<br>I feel that I must study English well to be a good student.<br>Learning English is necessary because people surrounding me expect me to do so.<br>Adults who can't use English may be considered ignorant.<br>If I don't learn English, I'll be letting other people down.  | .69                 |
|                                       | Language learning experience in school      | I like the way how English classes are taught in my school.<br>I enjoy English classes in my school.<br>My school English teachers make lessons interesting.<br>I really like the activities we do in English classes.   | .84                 |
|                                       | Language learning experience outside school | I enjoy learning English from magazines.<br>I like to study English at home.<br>I enjoy watching movies or series in English.<br>I like listening to music in English.   | .65                 |

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to answer the first research question (What characterizes Ecuadorian students' motivational disposition in learning English?), descriptive statistics for the scales were computed, and the results are presented in Table II. We can see from the data that within the four variables under study, the Ideal L2 self and Language learning in school showed the highest mean values, 3.7 and 3.53, respectively, which highlights several implications. First of all, it can be observed that students in this context are strongly motivated to learn English by their Ideal L2 selves. Secondly, the language learning experience in school is a determining factor in their motivational disposition. Finally, their language experience outside school also plays a relatively important role in their motivational profile.

**Table II.** Descriptive statistics of the scales.

| Construct                                   | Mean value | Standard deviation |
|---|------------|--------------------|
| Ideal L2 self                               | 3.70       | .85                |
| Language learning experience in school      | 3.53       | .85                |
| Language learning experience outside school | 3.42       | .80                |
| Ought-to L2 self                            | 2.80       | .73                |
| Motivated learning behavior                 | 3.66       | .72                |

As Table II shows, students are strongly motivated by their ideal L2 selves. It supports the original assumption made by Dörnyei (2009), that the Ideal L2 Self can be viewed as a highly relevant concept in L2 motivation and Second Language Acquisition. These findings also confirm that the Ideal L2 Self-construct could be validated as a strong motivational force across different populations of L2 learners, as found in previous studies: Chile (Kormos et al., 2011), Germany (Busse, 2013), Hungary (Csizér & Lukács, 2010; Kormos & Csizér, 2008), Indonesia (Lamb, 2012), Iran and Japan (Taguchi et al., 2009), Pakistan (Islam et al., 2013), Saudi Arabia (Al-Shehri, 2009), Spain (Brady, 2019) and Sweden (Henry, 2009, 2010, 2011).

Concerning the second construct of the L2 self-system, the Ought-to L2 self, which encapsulates the influence of externally sourced expectations on L2 learning, registered the lowest overall mean score ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = .73$ ). By performing a paired sampled t-test, there was a significant difference between all the scales and the Ought-to L2 self ( $p < .001$ ).

**Table III.** Paired sample t-test results for the Ought-to L2 self and the rest of the L2 MSS variables ( $p < 0.05$ ).

|   | Mean | SD  | t value | df  | Sig (two-tailed) |
|---|------|-----|---------|-----|------------------|
| Ideal L2 self                               | 3.70 | .85 | 9.32    | 127 | < .001           |
| Ought-to L2 self                            | 2.80 | .73 |         |     |                  |
| Language learning experience in school      | 3.53 | .85 | 8.14    | 127 | < .001           |
| Ought-to L2 self                            | 2.80 | .73 |         |     |                  |
| Language learning experience outside school | 3.42 | .80 | 6.60    | 127 | < .001           |
| Ought-to L2 self                            | 2.80 | .73 |         |     |                  |

It is worth noting that this dimension is the only one placed below the mid-point of the 5-point scale. According to Kormos and Csizér (2008), the Ideal L2 Self counterpart does not lend itself to instant recognition or transfer across different socio-cultural EFL contexts. Previous educational research conducted in different language learning settings has also shown inconsistency in the results of this construct. The influence of an external force on L2 learning was to some extent evident, e.g., in Japan (Taguchi et al., 2009), or not significant at all, as was the case in the sample examined in Hungary (Csizér & Lukács, 2010; Kormos & Csizér, 2008). Consequently, it could be stated that the results are not easily transferable when it comes to the Ought to L2 Self.

Finally, the measures related to the experience of learning the language in and outside school are still well above the median range of neither agree nor disagree, proposing generally positive attitudes. These results could be considered somewhat unexpected because Ecuador is ranked as having a very low proficiency in English (Education First, 2021). Therefore, it could be affirmed that this level is not necessarily due to a poor learning experience in the classroom, at least in the study population. The mean obtained both in school and out the school experience was above the median range. Nevertheless, no significant difference was found between the two scales by conducting a paired sample t-test (you need the t and p values here). Since the questionnaire was focused on getting to know if the students not only use English but also if they enjoy using the language in extracurricular activities, such as music, movies, and hobbies; the results obtained reflect a neutral attitude of the participants on spending time doing activities related to English.

The criterion measure was aimed to measure students' efforts and persistence

in learning English. The results showed that students seem to demonstrate a moderately motivated learning behavior, which means that the result obtained in this variable was on the positive side of the scale.

#### 4.1. Relationships among the scales

In order to answer the second research question (What relationships do the obtained L2MSS scales described?), we carried out correlational analyses. Table III presents the significant correlations among the scales, whereas Table IV shows the significant correlations between the four variables of the L2MSS and the criterion measure scale, LLMB. To guarantee a much smaller likelihood of the events occurring simply by chance, only correlations where  $p < .01$  are reported.

Table IV. Significant correlations ( $p < .01$ ) between the L2MSS scales.

| Construct                                     | 1    | 2    | 3 | 4 |
|---|------|------|---|---|
| 1. Ideal L2 self                              |      |      |   |   |
| 2. Ought-to L2 self                           |      |      |   |   |
| 3. Language learning experience in school     | .343 | .189 |   |   |
| 4. Language learning experience out of school | .598 |      |   |   |

As can be seen in Table III, the correlational analyses yielded one moderate (between 0.5 and 0.7), and two weak (between 0.2 and 0.5) correlation coefficients (Salkind, 2010). The moderate correlation between the Ideal L2 self and Language learning experience outside school (.524) indicates that the participants who spend more time outside school using English in activities such as music, videos, and hobbies tend to have a more developed self-image of the ideal language speaker they want to become. The ideal L2 self is also positively correlated with the learning experience inside the school. Even though it is a weak correlation (.383), it demonstrates that students who have an enjoyable learning experience in school would produce a thorough and realistic vision of a future L2 using self. Similarly, a weak correlation between the Ought to L2 self and Learning Experience in School is found in the data. The results echoed the diminished motivational function of this construct that was also recurrent in other EFL contexts. In several studies, it was found that the Ought to L2 self did not have a significant correlation with course grades (Csizér & Lukács, 2010; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Taguchi et al., 2009). Authors like Dörnyei and Chang

(2013), have also stated that in various EFL language settings, the obligations and pressures of the environment could only outline what they called learners’ “motivational mindset” but its motivational force did not influence the participants’ motivated learning behavior (MLB).

**Table V.** Significant correlations ( $p < .01$ ) between the L2MSS and the criterion measure scale.

| Construct                   | Ideal L2 self | Learning experience in school | Learning outside school |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Motivated learning behavior | .798*         | .386*                         | .585*                   |

*Note.* \* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

#### 4.2. Relationship of the scales and the criterion measure

The significant correlations among the scales and the criterion measure answer the fourth research question (What is the relationship between the three main components of the L2 Motivational Self System and motivated learning behavior?). Between the scales of MLB and the Ideal L2 Self, there is a significant relationship and the scales were found to be strongly and positively correlated, (.798). For the whole sample, the ideal L2 self was the variable most highly correlated with the criterion measure of intended learning effort, providing support for Dörnyei’s theory in this cultural context and tying in with findings in previous L2MSS studies (Taguchi et al., 2009). This strong positive correlation, which confirms the motivational potential of the Ideal L2 self for foreign language learning in the Ecuadorian EFL context, was also found in previous studies with similar EFL settings (Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Ryan, 2009; Šafranjan et al., 2021).

#### 4.3. Ought to L2 self

Using a Pearson Correlational test, the Ought to L2 Self variable was found not to have a significant correlation with LLMB. Since the participants are senior high school students who, according to the current national curriculum, are required to hold a B1 in CEFR at the end of their studies (Ministerio de Educación, 2016, p. 7), it was hypothesized that this component of the L2MSS would have a more significant role in the motivational disposition of the study population. Nonetheless, there is no significant correlation between the ought to L2 self and motivational behavior. It can be deduced, then, that for the participants, the fact of having an

obligation to comply with an imposed requirement does not contribute to the motivational effort to learn English. Contrarily to those found in Japanese and Chinese contexts (Taguchi et al., 2009) and in Spain (Amengual-Pizarro, 2018), where even if it was weak, they found a significant correlation between these two constructs. Interestingly, a similar study carried out in another Latin-American country, Chile (Kormos et al., 2011), obtained parallel results where no significant relationship was found between the Ought to L2 self and the criterion measure Language Learning Motivated Behavior.

As aptly stated by Taguchi et al. (2009), the Ought-to L2 self could impact language learning motivation in educational settings where foreign language teaching is decidedly exam-oriented, putting excessive pressure on students' accomplishment (e.g., China and Japan). On the other hand, in a totally different research context, studies conducted primarily in the USA have reliably corroborated that external regulation plays a restricted role as a predictor of language learning motivation unless students internalize the imposed obligations by their social environment (Deci et al. as cited in Kormos & Csizér, 2011). In our study, the Ought-to L2 self does not show a significant correlation with the criterion measure and displays the lowest mean value among the scales, corroborating that this component presents cultural variances.

#### *4.3.1. Learning Experience in School*

There was a significant relationship between the scale LLMB and Learning Experience Inside School. The two scales were moderately positively correlated, (.386)  $p < .01$ . As in Ecuador, according to the Education First (2021) report, the level of English proficiency of the inhabitants of the country is very deficient, placing Ecuador in position 90 out of 112 globally and position 18 out of 20 countries in Latin-America, a weaker correlation was expected between the two variables. However, in the present study, a moderate positive correlation was found between the learning experience and the criterion measure, which is in accordance with Amengual-Pizarro's (2018) study. Therefore, based on those results presented above, it is worth pointing out that the correlational link between the Learning Experience and students' efforts and persistence in learning English is generally strong in EFL contexts.

#### *4.3.2. Learning Experience Outside School*

Between the scales of LLMB and Learning experience outside school, in the present research, a significant correlation was found between these two variables, which reinforces the arguments presented by Lamb (2012) in his study. The scales were found to have a relatively strong correlation, (.585)  $p < .01$ . It means that the

participants are motivated to learn and use English outside of the school. These results could be explained by the fact that since the pandemic, classes have been held online, and teachers are putting a stronger emphasis on using online learning apps to teach and assess students. Those apps were generally unknown to students before the pandemic since teachers in Ecuador did not use them regularly. Given that the results confirm that students are increasing their use of English outside the class, it could be hypothesized that the learning apps encourage them to invest effort in learning the language in their own houses.

To determine causality and to find out which of the L2 MSS constructs act as predictor scales of the students’ LLMB, we carried out linear regression analysis with a stepwise approach.

**Table VI.** Results of regression analysis of the L2 MSS scales with LLMB as the criterion variable (significance level  $p < .05$ ).

| Variable                           | $\beta$ | $T$  | $P$  |     |
|------------------------------------|---------|------|------|-----|
| Ideal L2 self                      | .64     | 9.34 | .000 |     |
| Learning experience outside school | .19     | 2.92 | .004 |     |
| Learning experience in school      | .15     | 2.64 | .009 |     |
| $R^2$                              |         |      |      | .67 |

It can be seen from the data that the proportion of variance in Motivated learning behavior that the three independent variables can explain is 67.4% and that the impact of the Ideal L2 self (.64) is more than three times stronger than the effect outside of school (.18), and four times stronger than the effect inside of school (.14). Therefore, as Table V shows, the Ideal L2 Self exerts the most decisive influence on the study participants concerning their motivation to learn English.

Since in the formulation of the L2 MSS, according to Dörnyei (2009), mental imagery, that is, the ability to imagine oneself as a successful L2 user is pivotal to enhancing students’ vision of their Ideal L2 self, in this study questionnaire, three items were included that openly encompass statements relating to the imagination of the participants (“I often imagine myself as someone who’s able to speak English”; “I see myself one day speaking English with other people from all over the world”; and “It is easy to think of myself as a future English user”).

Two other items referred to distinct future goals, hopes, aspirations, and wishes (“If my dreams come true, I will one day use English in my studies; If my dreams come true, I will one day use English in my job; and for the things I want to do in the future I need to know English”). In so doing, it was intended to include

the vision of the future in the Ideal self. Additionally, one of the items includes the expression “being able to” and one item “I want to be the kind of Ecuadorian who speaks English well” was also incorporated, aiming to have a combination of future-oriented goals and perceptions of student ability to reach these goals. For the above mentioned, it could be stated that the Ideal self of the study indeed is acting as a future self-guide to learning English.

According to this research results, the Learning Experience Outside School is the second strongest predictor of LLMB behind the Ideal Self and above the Learning Experience in School. Similarly, some studies in Indonesia (Lamb, 2012) and Iran (Teimouri, 2017), found the Learning experience to be the strongest predictor of student motivational behavior. Therefore, it could be stated that the learning experience could be viewed as a motivational force in EFL settings. Specifically, Lamb (2012), in his study, compared the results of students from the metropolitan area, the provincial area, and the rural area and found that the participants from the metropolitan area had a favorable view of learning outside of school and with the provincial students was the variable with the most significant effect on motivational behavior. In our case, both learning experiences are found to positively affect students’ LLMB.

Conclusively, based on the regression analysis results, the Ideal L2 self and the Learning experience have the potential to spur into action to invest effort and perseverance in obtaining the desired level of second language competence. In other words, they could be considered a strong motivational predictor in an Ecuadorian EFL context.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to research related to the L2 Motivational Self system by offering a new EFL context to validate its three core pillars empirically. To answer the study’s research questions, descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted. The analysis confirmed that the Ideal Self is a strong predictor of language learning motivation in Ecuador. In fact, in the correlational analysis with the criterion measure, the Ideal Self shows the strongest correlation considerably. Additionally, the regression analysis results confirm that the Ideal L2 self exerts the strongest influence on Ecuadorian students’ endeavors and perseverance that they devote to learning English, validating this component as one of the highest-order motivational forces across a different population of L2 learners.

The counterpart, the Ought to L2 self-variable, which according to Kormos et al. (2011) deals with external motivational influences, not only does not show a significant correlation with the criterion measure but also displays the lowest mean value among the scales. The results imply two major implications in the

context of the study. It could be concluded that the external force of the L2 MSS presents socio-cultural variances, as thoroughly discussed in the previous section. As well as in agreement with Brady (2019), who states that it could even cause certain reticence when referring to English learning engagement. In our study, it could be determined that external requirements; for instance, reaching a B1 level according to the CEFR at the end of high school could be counterproductive to language learning success.

The third component of the L2 MSS was divided into two independent variables Learning Experience in School and Outside school. It is essential to mention that both of the scales positively correlated with the Ideal self and with the criterion measure; consequently, the Learning Experience has a noticeable impact on motivated behavior in the study context. Although the Learning experience was not the strongest predictor as in other EFL settings (Teimouri, 2017), this research results denote that this component is noticeably associated with Ecuadorian students' future-self guide to stimulate goals into action, the results are, to some extent encouraging.

The fundamental bedrock of Ecuadorian students' L2 motivational self is present and might be further boosted. It is therefore advisable for EFL teachers in Ecuador to use motivational strategies aimed at enhancing their vision of their Ideal L2 self, such as the use of imagery (Magid, 2013), and some other research-based motivational teaching strategies (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008), with Dörnyei's (2001) book "offering the most comprehensive summary of the second language (L2) motivational strategies to date" (Magid, 2013, p. 228). It is also pivotal that MINEDUC continues offering training programs to EFL teachers and includes the myriad of theories and strategies to improve language learning motivation in their agendas. As previously stated in Ecuador, this SLA field has not been thoroughly studied; consequently, it urges Ecuadorian EFL researchers to keep exploring this vital line of research in the SLA field.

Our study, nonetheless, is not deprived of limitations. Similarly to other studies in this field, the choice of a limited number of scales for this research meant that other potentially important variables were left out which could have proven influential in language learning motivation in the EFL context (e.g., international posture or family and peer influence). Secondly, by increasing the number of participants, it would be obtained more generalizable results. Finally, significant differences between gender were not analyzed which may have had an impact on the internal structure of motivation. This decision was made because in Ecuador the L2 MSS has not yet been empirically tested; therefore, it was determined to first characterize the system in this EFL context as a whole to then explore gender differences. Despite the limitations, since this is the first empirical validation of the L2 MSS in Ecuador to the best of our understanding, it still offers a springboard to further analysis in the field.

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