

Hamline University

DigitalCommons@Hamline

---

School of Education and Leadership Student  
Capstone Theses and Dissertations

School of Education and Leadership

---

Fall 2021

## Investigating the L2 Motivational Self System of Mauritanian EFL Learners: A Unique L2 Learning Experience

Casey Hatlevoll

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse\\_all](https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all)



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hatlevoll, Casey, "Investigating the L2 Motivational Self System of Mauritanian EFL Learners: A Unique L2 Learning Experience" (2021). *School of Education and Leadership Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations*. 4538.

[https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse\\_all/4538](https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all/4538)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education and Leadership at DigitalCommons@Hamline. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Education and Leadership Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Hamline. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@hamline.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@hamline.edu), [wstraub01@hamline.edu](mailto:wstraub01@hamline.edu), [modea02@hamline.edu](mailto:modea02@hamline.edu).

Investigating the L2 Motivational Self System of Mauritanian EFL Learners: A Unique  
L2 Learning Experience

by

Casey Hatlevoll

A capstone thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

September 2021

Primary Advisor: Amy Stolpestad  
Content Reviewer: Suzanne McCurdy  
Peer Reviewer: Abby Reeves

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction .....	5
Background .....	5
Meeting Highly Motivated EFL Learners .....	6
Current Perspectives of EFL Learning Motivation .....	10
Summary .....	12
CHAPTER TWO: Review of the Literature .....	13
Overview .....	13
Global English, Imagined Communities, and Identity .....	14
Motivation and the L2 Motivational Self System .....	19
The L2 Motivational Self System in EFL Contexts .....	24
Motivation and the L2 Learning Experience .....	29
A Gap in Current L2 Motivational Self System Research .....	33
Summary .....	34
CHAPTER THREE: Methods .....	36
Overview .....	36
Research Paradigm and Rationale .....	37
Framework and Design .....	38
Setting and Participants .....	41
Ethics .....	44

Materials .....	45
Procedure .....	48
Analysis.....	50
CHAPTER FOUR: Results.....	52
Introduction.....	52
Questionnaire Analysis .....	54
Interview Analysis .....	63
Conclusion .....	71
CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion .....	73
Introduction.....	73
Review of Key Findings .....	75
Implications.....	76
Limitations .....	79
Areas for Further Research .....	80
Reflection .....	81
REFERENCES .....	82
APPENDIX A: Questionnaire .....	86
APPENDIX B: Semi-Structured Interview Guiding Questions .....	89

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Sample Questionnaire Items.....	46
Table 2. Sample Interview Questions.....	48
Table 3. Overall Motivation Questionnaire Response Mean Values.....	57
Table 4. Average Mean Values for Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience.....	58
Table 5. Ideal L2 Self Questionnaire Item Response Rates.....	59
Table 6. Ought-to L2 Self Questionnaire Item Response Rates.....	61
Table 7. L2 Learning Experience Questionnaire Item Response Rates.....	63
Table 8. Mean Value for L2 Learning Experience Items.....	65

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Components of Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System.....	24
Figure 2. Overall Motivation Questionnaire Responses.....	57
Figure 3. Ideal L2 Self Questionnaire Item Response Rates.....	59
Figure 4. Ought-to L2 Self Questionnaire Item Response Rates.....	61
Figure 5. L2 Learning Experience Questionnaire Item Response Rates.....	63
Figure 6. Comparison of L2MSS Components from the Questionnaire.....	64

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Background

“Good morning, teacher!” At the top of the dark, uneven staircase sat four or five of my students. Although I had arrived at the center over an hour before it was scheduled to open, my students were the first ones to arrive. I had come to expect this now, knowing that my students were just as devoted as I was to coming to our small, dusty, warm, lively English center. As I met these eager faces, I was struck by the contrast between the eagerness of these learners and that of some of my past students. Just a few months prior, I was finishing my student teaching experience in an American high school mathematics classroom. Each lesson of that semester was a hard-fought battle for not only learners’ attention, but for their energy as well. These English learners, however, chose to invest much time and effort into learning a language that is rarely spoken outside the classroom, in the context of daily life in their community and country.

Throughout my first two years of teaching English learners in Mauritania, I was continually inspired and somewhat perplexed at the high level of interest and effort that my students maintained in order to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). I wondered if there might be more to motivation for learning English than its usefulness in daily living. Specifically, I became curious about the motivating influence of our students’ identities and the learning environment of our English center. This led me to develop the research question for this study: Within a private English center context, how is the motivation of Mauritanian EFL learners impacted by their L2 selves and the L2

Learning Experience? In pursuing an answer to this research question, I investigated the following sub-questions:

1. Within learners' L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?
2. Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center's learning environment foster learner motivation?

This introductory chapter explains how I first encountered the motivation of these Mauritanian EFL learners and their reasons to learn English at a local private English center. It also introduces the L2 Motivational Self System, a currently popular framework for understanding L2 (second language) learning motivation. Finally, I preview this study's investigation of the motivation of a current group of university-aged Mauritanian EFL learners studying at this private English center in Mauritania.

### **Meeting Highly Motivated EFL Learners**

Motivation is an abstract concept, and the idea of learning motivation carries a variety of interpretations. For the purposes of this study, motivation refers to a learner's interest in the learning process along with the effort a learner intends to put toward that learning process (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972, as cited in Clement et al., 2009). Within the domain of education, motivation is an area of high interest within language teaching and second language acquisition (SLA) research, often cited as an important indicator and necessary condition of learning success (Cheung Matthew Sung, 2013; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Moskovsky et. al, 2016; Pavelescu, 2019). Teacher preparation materials seem to devote significant attention to the concept of motivation, specifically how to increase and sustain motivation in unmotivated learners. For example,

the teaching English as a second or foreign language text used in my own coursework devotes an entire chapter on motivation, providing pedagogical moves for motivating learners in class (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). Thus, it appears important to not only address lack of motivation in the classroom but to understand the nature of motivation itself and how it differs from learner to learner.

As I navigated my way through the first semester with my students at the English center, I perceived that they came from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. They had different levels of prior knowledge, different attitudes toward the English language, and different goals and future dreams that involve English. Many students at the center participated in our programming in order to supplement their studies in the English department of the local university. Others studied English at our center in addition to a full course load at other institutions that specialize in religion, business, and other trades. Several of our learners, though, learned exclusively at our center. One such learner, Lucy (pseudonym), was one of the first learners that I got to know well. Lucy had been learning English since primary school, as education and language learning were important to her and to her family. In a way, though, Lucy was in the process of breaking a cultural mold. While most women her age were either married with children or helping to take care of the home, Lucy's primary aim was to further her education and reach her academic goal of obtaining a master's degree in the United States. She faithfully came to all the classes that were offered at our center, set personal reading goals, and studied meticulously for the TOEFL exam. As a result, she gained a scholarship to pursue her academic goals at an American university.

One of Lucy's classmates, Hannah (pseudonym), is another example of a motivated learner. Much of Hannah's initial exposure to English, like many of our students, came from American or British music, television, and movies. She often balanced many responsibilities in order to take care of her children and run her household. Although Hannah did not have much need for English outside of the English center, she was passionate about making English learning a priority. She traveled a long distance from her home and children to come and participate regularly at our center. Though Lucy and Hannah's lives and experiences differed in many ways, they shared an inspiring commitment and drive to learn English at a high level. Lucy and Hannah's stories clearly depict the complex and dynamic nature of interest and invested effort in EFL learning.

While I was amazed at learners' motivation for learning English at the center, I was also confused by how learners with such different backgrounds and goals could be so equally devoted to the language-learning process. Throughout my two years of teaching, I gathered more information about what drove students to practice English at our center, especially for the long term. Although there were a select few learners like Lucy, who needed English in order to pursue immediate academic opportunities and goals, many of my students described being interested in English as the language of the world. They wanted to identify as English speakers, secure better jobs, connect with other English speakers through media like Facebook and WhatsApp, and access media produced in English. In other words, learners expressed a desire to expand their worldviews and social networks through English. This caused me to wonder if motivation runs deeper

than utility. I asked myself, “Is motivation influenced by learners’ self images or how they want to be perceived by others?”

In my observations, a factor that also seemed to contribute to learner motivation at our center was the center itself. Although attendance was always optional, many students participated diligently in all of our courses and special events. One of the main focuses of the center’s teachers was to facilitate a learning community that prioritizes connecting learners in relationships, especially among learners of different—and historically hostile—ethnic backgrounds. I heard several learners comment that the center was the only place in which they interacted on a deep level with those from ethnic backgrounds different from their own. In addition to drawing learners together in community, the center provided a learning experience that engaged the learners in a variety of ways, including content-based courses, emotional intelligence courses, and special events. Overall, in contrast to many other English centers in the city, our programming engaged learners within different content areas and challenged them to think and interact in new ways through English. Thus, the classes, activities, atmosphere, and relationships at the English center seemed to also play a role in motivating these university-aged L2 English learners.

### **Current Perspectives of EFL Learning Motivation**

In order to understand the nature of EFL learner motivation, it is first necessary to understand what it means to learn English in the current age of globalization. English, an emergent global language, has now been conceptualized and labeled in a variety of ways, including World Englishes (WE), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), and English as an International Language (EIL) (Mckay, 2018). Each of these constructs are described in

detail in chapter two. Although the different labels for English have subtle differences in focus and meaning, they all portray quite clearly that English learners are distributed across a wide variety of learning contexts and speech communities. Mauritanian English learners are situated in one of these unique learning contexts, and the ever-changing nature of English in our globalized world has implications on how to conceptualize their learning motivation.

As English has shifted into its position as a global language, so has a shift occurred in conceptualizing EFL learner motivation. There are increasing opportunities for English learners to develop their identities as participants in a wider variety of speech communities that Norton (2003; 2007) has named imagined communities. As a result, motivation to learn English is not for the sole purpose of integrating into a target culture, but should include aspects of learner identity (Ryan, 2006). A framework called the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) provides an account of L2 learning motivation that incorporates both learner identity, or self image, and the learning environment (Dörnyei, 2009). Recently, it has provided a tool for understanding motivation for language learning, particularly motivation for learning English as a global language. In general, the framework describes how elements of a learner's self and the language learning experience work together to drive language learning motivation. A more thorough description of the L2MSS and its application in EFL learning contexts are provided in chapter two, but it is important to recognize that it offers an explanation of EFL learner motivation that is applicable to a wide variety of contexts, including the private English center context in Mauritania.

Though many studies have confirmed the L2MSS framework and utilized it in order to investigate the motivation of university-aged EFL learners around the world (Islam, 2019; Martinović & Sorić, 2018; Ryan, 2009; You, 2016), the L2MSS has yet to be applied to the learning context of this study. Since motivation is central to the language learning process, an understanding of the motivation of these Mauritanian EFL learners can support their progress in several ways. Through describing their own perspectives on their motivation, students themselves may be more aware of what drives their commitment to learning and more effectively set future learning goals. In addition, the center's teachers can recognize the impact their learning environment has on their students' motivation. If, or when, I return to this English center as a teacher myself, I will be more aware of what drives my students' motivation and how I may play a role in helping learners sustain their motivation for learning. Finally, those responsible for programming have an opportunity to make more informed choices about curriculum and implement teacher training that effectively facilitates learner motivation within the center.

### **Summary**

This chapter introduced the Mauritanian EFL private center context and the learners who are highly motivated to acquire English as a global or international language. When I first met these learners, I was both pleasantly surprised and confused by their motivation, given the lack of opportunity for most students to use English outside of school or to travel, work, or study in English speaking countries. Through informal conversations with learners throughout my two-year teaching commitment at the center, I began to wonder if learners' motivation to learn English at our center was fostered by more than using English in daily life or as a ticket to future opportunities. This prompted

me to investigate more deeply the nature of L2 learning motivation within the Mauritanian EFL private center context. The L2 Motivational Self System, including the L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience, offers a framework from which to understand EFL learning motivation within a variety of contexts, and it is the framework that was used to investigate the motivation of these Mauritanian learners. The question that this study aimed to answer was: Within a private English center context, how is the motivation of Mauritanian EFL learners impacted by their L2 selves and the L2 Learning Experience? In order to answer the general research question, this study addressed the following sub-questions:

1. Within learners' L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?
2. Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center's learning environment foster learner motivation?

Chapter two describes the change in L2 motivation theory over the past decades and how the L2MSS can describe EFL learner motivation in a variety of contexts, particularly the private English center context of Mauritania. Chapter three explains the methods used to conduct this investigation, including the use of learner questionnaires and interviews to learn more about learners' L2 selves and L2 Learning Experience at the English center. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the results of the study and discuss implications for the learners, teachers, and the broader language learning research and teaching communities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

#### Overview

Since the concept of motivation is quite general and widely interpreted, it is helpful to work from a specific definition. For the purposes of this paper, motivation refers to a learner's intended effort put toward language learning along with interest in the language-learning process (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972, as cited in Clement et al., 2009). This chapter reviews literature related to developments in L2 motivation theory and how the L2MSS can be used to investigate EFL learner motivation. This chapter aims to build a foundation for answering a specific question about the motivation of Mauritanian EFL learners: Within a private English center context, how is the motivation of Mauritanian EFL learners impacted by their L2 selves and the L2 Learning Experience? In pursuing this research question, this study addressed the following sub-questions:

1. Within learners' L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?
2. Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center's learning environment foster learner motivation?

The remainder of this chapter traces how the globalization of English and the phenomenon of imagined communities have influenced the conceptualization of L2 English learning motivation. In addition, this chapter describes various ways in which the L2MSS provides an accurate view of the dynamic nature of EFL learner motivation. The

chapter closes with examples of how aspects of a specific English learning experience, or English learning environment, may play a significant role in motivating EFL learners.

### **Global English, Imagined Communities, and Identity**

This section presents a variety of terms currently used within the field of language learning research to conceptualize global English. In addition, this portion of the chapter describes how the globalization of English has made a variety of imagined communities and identities available to L2 English learners. The remainder of this section discusses the impact that imagined communities and identities have on English learning motivation.

#### ***English as a Global Language***

In recent decades, English has emerged as the world's language of globalization, and it is often referred to as a global language (Ryan, 2006). The contexts in which English is spoken as an additional language around the world are diverse. A variety of terms have been offered to refer to L2 English in this age of globalization, including World Englishes (WE), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), and English as an International Language (EIL). According to McKay (2018), although these terms seem somewhat synonymous, they conceptualize the language in slightly different ways.

WE encompasses the linguistic features of English spoken in each specific context around the world. McKay (2018) describes three distinct angles from which WE is understood by scholars. The first angle of WE refers to the collection of all English-speaking contexts in the world. These contexts are able to be sorted into what Kachru (1985) calls Inner, Outer, and Expanding circles (as cited in McKay, 2018). Inner circle contexts include those in which English is spoken as a first language. In the Outer circle, English is used widely in society and is likely an official language. In the

Expanding circle, English is often learned as a foreign language, and it is not often used as an official language. McKay (2018) explains that the terms International English and Global English are often used to refer to this whole collection of varieties and contexts.

An additional angle of WE includes a focus mostly on the contexts within Kachru's (1985) Outer circle, where English is spoken in the broader community as an official language. Some examples include Nigerian, Malaysian, and Jamaican varieties of English. The third approach to WE also focuses mostly on the Outer circle contexts, but it explicitly emphasizes the validity of English varieties in all contexts, particularly those not contained in the Inner circle (McKay, 2018). Each of these three perspectives of WE differ slightly, but they all refer to the content or linguistic features of English spoken in all circles around the world. Within the concept of WE, Mauritanian English learners are situated in an Expanding circle context, where English is not used as an official language in Mauritanian society, but is learned as a foreign language.

In addition to the WE construct, English is also currently labeled as ELF and EIL. ELF refers to the nature of interactions between two or more English speakers who speak different native languages and have only English in common. Instead of focusing only on the linguistic features of the varieties of English like WE, ELF is also interested in what happens when English speakers of different sociocultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds interact. Essentially, ELF concerns the linguistic content as well as the sociocultural elements involved in ELF interactions (McKay, 2018). EIL is one of the newer terms used to describe the movement of using English in the age of globalization. In contrast to WE and ELF that describe the features and interactions involving English, EIL is more of a set of principles for English use. In other words, EIL focuses most on

the process of using English for international communication and establishes a set of principles to guide that process. According to McKay (2018), these principles describe that EIL is not bound by a particular set of sociocultural norms, and thus it is essential for English learners to develop strategic and intercultural competence in order to use English as an international language.

Applying the discussed terminology to the study at hand, it can be said that Mauritanian EFL learners most often use English with other Mauritanian EFL learners in class, but may also utilize ELF or EIL through social media platforms and entertainment. For most students, though, English is not yet used exclusively in daily interactions outside of English class. Connected to the idea of English as a global language is the concept of imagined communities, as described by Ryan (2006). The next sections serve to define and provide examples of imagined communities and how they may play an instrumental role in understanding EFL learner motivation.

### ***Imagined Communities***

The concept of imagined communities builds a bridge between EFL learners in Expanding circle contexts like Mauritania and their motivation to learn English. To most, the idea of community is tangible and physical. We participate in communities within families, friend groups, the workplace, schools, neighborhoods, and other social settings. In those examples, people are likely physically present and involved in community activities. Imagined communities, on the other hand, “refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination” (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p.241). They are what the term implies: communities constructed within an individual’s imagination. Kanno & Norton (2003)

provide the nation state as an example of an imagined community. For instance, those who live in the United States of America would likely identify themselves as a part of American society. In doing so, Americans affiliate themselves with other Americans, members of this community that they may never meet. According to Ryan (2006), globalization has expanded the way in which we understand space, how we understand time, and how we interact with people. For example, through developments in technology and communication, we can identify with people or groups far outside our immediate physical environments. We can even identify with a community spread across the whole world. As a result, a wider variety of imagined communities are available than ever before.

It is important to remember that although imagined communities are not physical and tangible, that does not mean that they are a fantasy or have no impact on their members. Imagined communities have specific guidelines for membership, norms, and rules for participation and entrance into the community (Ryan, 2006). For example, in the case of nation states or countries, there are specific guidelines for citizenship and laws that outline rules for membership within the country. Further, membership in an imagined community and the desire for relationships within that community in the future can have an impact on daily actions and decisions. Per Kanno & Norton (2003), “imagined communities are no less real than the ones in which learners have daily engagement and might even have a stronger impact on their current actions and investment” (p.242). In other words, imagined communities can motivate behavior just as much as, or even more than, physical communities can. Thus, imagined communities have the ability to drive motivation for activities like language learning, particularly English language learning.

### ***Identity and Motivation***

Desired identification or affiliation with an English-speaking imagined community can be a powerful motivator for learning English. Pavlenko & Norton (2007) suggest that individuals may learn English in order to construct an identity that is able to participate in specific imagined communities. For instance, individuals and countries make learning English a priority in order to find a place within the global marketplace, using English as the “language of world economy” (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, p.594). Even if the immediate context does not require using English in order to communicate with other members of society, one may choose to learn English in order to increase career or economic opportunities. English can also be used as a “language of empowerment” (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, p.597) and provide opportunities for establishing and constructing different gender identities. Thus, if an English language learner participates in an imagined community through the use of English, the work done to learn English is not only skill acquisition or accumulation of linguistic competence, but it is construction of an identity within that imagined community (Ryan, 2006).

The reconceptualization of English as a global language and the widening variety of available imagined communities of English has inclined scholars to reconstruct theories of L2 learning motivation. According to Ryan (2006), before the 1990’s, L2 language learners were generally thought to have what Gardner (1985) called integrative motivation or instrumental motivation for learning a language. Integrative motivation describes the appreciation of a target culture and a desire to be accepted into it, whereas instrumental motivation describes the motivation for using language for more practical purposes (Gardner, 1985, as cited in Ryan, 2006). Through globalization and the

establishment of English as a global language, motivation to learn English has become more complex than using the language to gain entrance into a target culture or for immediate communication needs. Motivation for L2 English learning is now understood as a dynamic concept that takes into account learners' desired self images or identities that involve using English (Sung, 2013). Therefore, for learners in Expanding circle contexts like Mauritania, EFL learning motivation should take into account how learners work toward constructing their personal self images or identities within a desired imagined English-speaking community. The next section describes how L2 learning motivation theory has evolved in light of learner identity and imagined communities.

### **Motivation and the L2 Motivational Self System**

This section of the literature review outlines the major shift in understanding language learning motivation as a result of the globalization of English. A re-definition of Gardner's (1985) Socio Educational (SE) model along with theories of the self from psychology helped researchers to consider motivation from a modern, global lens. As a result, a framework called the L2 Motivational Self System has been proposed in order to account for and investigate EFL learning motivation.

### ***Integrativeness Redefined***

Dörnyei (2009) has outlined the development of an L2 learning motivation theory that accounts for learners' specific L2 identities within a variety of language learning contexts. Until around 2005, Gardner's (1985) Socio Educational (SE) model was the dominating view of L2 learning motivation, and it contains three components: motivation, integrativeness, and the learning experience. Motivation represents the level of interest learners have in the language learning process and how much effort they put

toward learning (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972, as cited in Clement, Macintyre & Mackinnon, 2009). Integrativeness, as mentioned in the previous section, relates to a learner's appreciation of and desire to be accepted as a member of a particular target culture. According to the SE model, the third component of motivation is driven by the learner's sense of integrativeness and by the impact of the language learning experience.

The component of integrativeness within the SE model has been challenged in light of the wider availability of imagined communities and the concept of learner identity. Integrativeness in the SE model involves identifying and imitating the linguistic and sociolinguistic behaviors of another culture (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). With the spread of global English and the growing variety of imagined communities and identities available to English learners, integrativeness now includes identifying with an imagined community outside of a specific target culture. Thus, integrativeness "might be better explained as an internal process of identification within the person's self-concept, rather than identification with an external reference group" (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002, p.453, as cited in Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, p.3). In other words, current L2 learning motivation theory is a result of re-interpreting Gardner's (1985) concept of integrativeness. Psychological theories of self and identity complement this new view of integrativeness, and they are discussed in the following section.

### ***Influence of Psychology***

Along with the re-framing of Gardner's (1985) construct of integrativeness, theories of self also played a role in the shift of L2 learning motivation theory. The Possible Selves theory, developed by Markus & Nurius (1986), describes three different

types of selves, or identities, that are possible in the future. The first is the Hoped-For Self, which refers to who we want to become, or what we want to be like in the future. The Expected Self refers to what we expect we will become in the future, or what we are likely to be like. The third possible self, the Feared Self, is who we are afraid to become in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986 ). When taken as a whole, Possible Selves theory encompasses all scenarios of how a person may be in the future.

In addition to the elements of future identity offered by Markus and Nurius's (1986) Possible Selves theory, Higgins (1987) presented three domains of the self: Actual, Ideal, and Ought-to. While the Actual Self is one's current self, the Ideal Self represents the characteristics we would ideally like to possess, or what others would like us to possess. Closely connected to the Ideal Self, the Ought-to Self represents what we feel obligated to become in the future. Inspired by these domains of the self, Higgins (1987) developed the Self Discrepancy theory, linking Possible Selves theory to L2 learning motivation. In general, Higgins's (1987) Self Discrepancy theory asserts that people have a tendency to make an effort to close the gap between their current selves and their desired possible future selves. Thus according to Higgins (1987), motivation originates from noticing the discrepancy between the two and working toward attaining the desired possible self or identity.

Different aspects of self impact motivation in different ways. The Ideal Self has what is called a promotional focus that centers on working toward growth and achievement. In contrast, the Ought-to Self contains a prevention focus where motivation centers on fulfilling obligations or responsibilities and avoiding negative outcomes (Higgins, 1987). Dörnyei (2009) incorporates these theories of self along with the new

understanding of integrativeness into a comprehensive explanation of L2 learner motivation: The L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). The next section presents the three components of this system, the major drivers of language learning motivation.

### ***The L2 Motivational Self System***

Like Gardner's (1985) SE model of motivation, the L2MSS contains three parts. Dörnyei's (2009) L2MSS is made up of the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience. Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the three components of the L2MSS. The system is essentially a combination of the future self guides, or possible selves, and the immediate language-learning environment. Put simply, the Ideal L2 Self is the L2 portion of a learner's Ideal Self. It represents who the L2 learners want to be in the future, specifically how they can see themselves as competent and fluent users of the L2.

In the same way that the Ideal L2 Self is a portion of the Ideal Self, the Ought-to L2 Self is the learner's L2 portion of their Ought-to Self. It includes the characteristics that L2 learners think they need to have in order to avoid negative consequences in their lives. Family or peer expectations provide a good example of an aspect of the Ought-to L2 Self. If a learner's parents or peers expect that the L2 learner will become fluent in the L2, then not succeeding in that aim has negative social consequences.

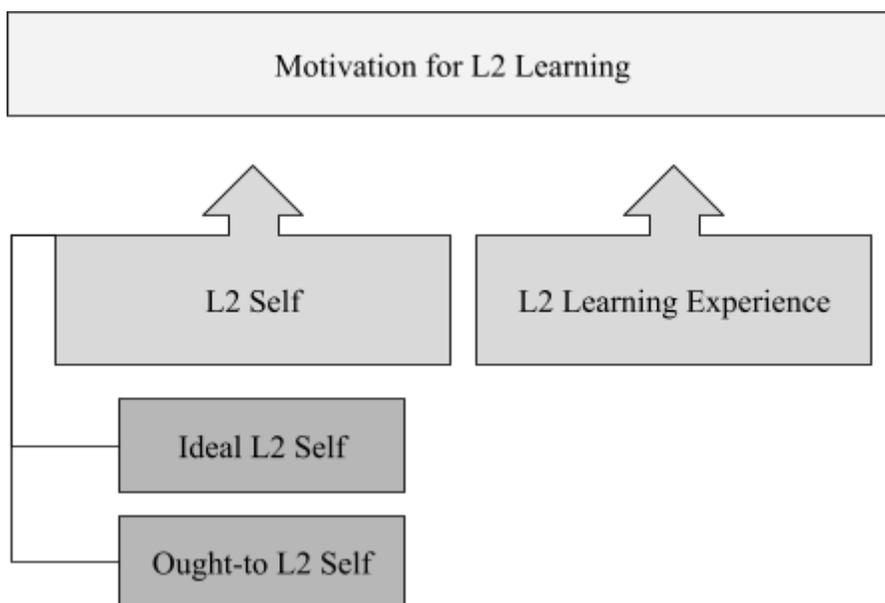
The final part of the L2MSS framework, the L2 Learning Experience, is not related to the learner's identity, but is related to the language learning environment. This could include the learning activities within the school or classroom, learning materials, teacher disposition and pedagogy, or peer relationships and interactions (Dörnyei, 2009).

Overall, this framework of L2 learner motivation proposes that motivation is driven by learners' specific L2 identities or self images combined with the environment

in which they learn. The next section reviews studies that have confirmed the validity of the L2MSS, specifically in EFL learning contexts similar to the Mauritanian EFL context.

### Figure 1

*Components of Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System*



### The L2 Motivational Self System in EFL Contexts

This section provides an overview of studies that have investigated learner motivation using the L2MSS framework in an EFL learning context. General observations and trends from a large number of studies are presented as well as findings from specific EFL settings. These studies have sought to determine whether or not the L2MSS provides an accurate picture of EFL learner motivation, and which aspects of the framework most strongly motivate EFL learners.

#### *General Observations*

Numerous studies have sought to understand language learning motivation, and many researchers have been using the L2MSS framework as a guide in order to investigate EFL learner motivation. Boo et al. (2015) conducted a publication pattern

analysis of L2 motivation studies from 2005-2014. They found that L2 motivation studies favored using a theoretical framework, such as the L2MSS, to investigate L2 motivation. Studies also gravitated toward university-aged EFL learners in locations like Japan, China, Taiwan, and Indonesia. In addition, a majority of the research utilized quantitative methodology, but there has been a rise in both qualitative and mixed-methods methodologies as well. Finally, although other theories and frameworks have been used, the L2MSS emerged as the dominant framework from which to view and analyze L2 learning motivation (Boo et al., 2015). Thus, studying L2 language learning has become quite popular, and the L2MSS seems to be the favored theoretical framework implemented in current L2 learning motivation research.

More recently, Al-Hoorie (2018) conducted the first meta analysis of L2MSS studies. This analysis found that most L2MSS studies tend to measure motivation in terms of learning interest and intended learning effort, not L2 achievement (Al-Hoorie, 2018). This suggests that motivation thus far has been measured more subjectively than objectively. Al-Hoorie (2018) also suggested that, in general, the L2MSS can be an accurate predictor of intended L2 learning effort and interest in learning, but it may not necessarily be a predictor of measurable L2 achievement.

Although the L2MSS is often used to investigate learner motivation, it is important to note that it may not be a direct indicator of language learning achievement. In Moskovsky et al.'s (2016) study of Saudi EFL learners, the L2 Self and L2 Learning Experience correlated with learning interest and intended learning effort, but not English proficiency. Although the learners had higher levels of intended learning effort, it did not directly translate to achievement on reading and writing tests (Moskovsky et al., 2016).

Thus, it has been confirmed that the components of the L2MSS can account for L2 learning motivation in terms of interest and intended learning effort, but the L2MSS does not necessarily predict L2 achievement as measured by an assessment.

### ***Investigating Specific EFL Contexts***

As mentioned by Boo et al. (2015), many of the studies pertaining to the L2MSS have focused on a variety of EFL contexts, where learners do not have immediate access to an English-speaking target culture. One of the initial studies using the L2MSS framework investigated secondary and university EFL learners in Hungary (Csize' r & Kormos, 2009). Findings from that study suggest that the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience all contribute to learner motivation, but to different degrees. The study found that the Ideal L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience may contribute more to learner motivation than the Ought-to Self. Further, the L2 Learning Experience, or immediate learning environment, correlated most strongly with motivation for the participants, implying that the L2 Learning Experience may impact motivation the most. These findings serve as some of the initial empirical evidence to support the L2MSS framework of motivation.

Ryan (2009) conducted a follow-up study with secondary and university Japanese EFL learners to determine if the L2 Self, including the Ideal and Ought-to L2 selves, would account for Japanese learner motivation like it did for the EFL learners in the Hungarian study. Again, results indicated that the Ideal L2 Self seems to be an accurate predictor of motivation and can be applied to contexts where learners are learning EFL in an Outer or Expanding circle context (Ryan, 2009). Thus, initial studies of the L2MSS

provided empirical evidence for its validity, but found that the three parts of the framework may not equally contribute to EFL learning motivation.

Croatia is another context in which EFL learning motivation has been examined through the lens of the L2MSS. In a study of EFL learners at a university in Croatia, Martinović & Sorić (2018) found that the Ideal L2 Self impacted motivation more strongly than the Ought-to L2 Self. Male and female learners presented equally strong L2 selves and corresponding levels of motivation, but findings related to the Ought-to L2 Self were different between male and female participants. Female learners, in general, displayed higher levels of motivation in terms of intended effort and interest as well as extrinsic motivation and anxiety. Martinović & Sorić (2018) also concluded that the female participants were more motivated by interpersonal relationships than male participants were. Although there were differences between individual learners, the L2MSS was still able to account for EFL learner motivation in this Croatian EFL context.

In contrast to the studies discussed above, other studies have compared EFL learning motivation across different contexts, not just within a particular context. Taguchi et al. (2009) sought to test the L2MSS framework and compare motivation among EFL learners from Japan, China, and Iran. This large-scale study included almost 5,000 total participants from secondary age to adult, and it found that the L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience accounted for the motivation of learners in all three contexts. As within the Hungarian, Japanese, and Croatian EFL learning contexts, there were slight variations in the distribution of the L2 Self and L2 Learning Experience and how they accounted for L2 motivation. Many of the variations, however, were likely due to certain cultural differences and expectations placed upon learners to learn English (Taguchi et

al., 2009). Thus, the L2MSS has accounted for motivation both within and across various EFL contexts, although there may be small differences due to cultural norms and perspectives on the prestige of knowing English.

Another large-scale study of EFL learning motivation sought to apply the L2MSS to the country with one of the largest populations of EFL learners. You (2016) aimed to compare the motivation of secondary and university EFL learners across all of China. In general, findings suggested that the L2MSS also effectively explains EFL learning motivation for Chinese learners. Interestingly, similar to the Hungarian context (Csize' r & Kormos, 2009) the L2 Learning Experience accounted for most of the variation in learners' EFL learning motivation, followed by the Ideal L2 Self and the Ought-to L2 Self. In addition, females generally displayed higher levels of motivation than males, but male EFL learners had stronger Ought-to L2 selves. In terms of geographic location, learners in the eastern part of the country typically displayed higher levels of EFL learning motivation than learners in the western part of the country, potentially due to larger cities in the east having more of a global perspective and interest in international affairs. Thus, even within a particular EFL context, motivation seems to be dynamic in nature and can vary based on learners' gender and location.

The L2MSS studies reviewed thus far indicate that the L2MSS framework, when applied to EFL settings in European, East Asian, and Middle Eastern countries, appears to account for EFL learners' intended learning effort and interest in learning, but the L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience may motivate individual learners unequally, regardless of context.

In addition to simply confirming the validity of the L2MSS framework, many studies have used the framework to examine specific learner characteristics that affect the strength of the L2 Self, like learning style. Al-Shehri (2009) studied EFL learners at a university in Saudi Arabia, university-aged Arab ESL learners in Britain, and secondary Saudi EFL learners. Results indicated that those who identified as visual learners tended to have a higher sense of imagination and imagery. This sense of imagination could help the learner develop a more specific, detailed, and strong Ideal L2 Self, heightening levels of motivation (Al-Shehri, 2009). Thus, the ability for a learner to envision an imagined identity within an imagined community can strengthen the L2 Self and increase motivation for L2 English language learning.

In the last fifteen years, EFL learning motivation has primarily been investigated through the lens of the L2 Motivational Self System, in which the L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience are the main components and predictors of motivation. Studies have confirmed the validity of the model within a variety of EFL contexts and across a variety of EFL contexts and groups of learners, but the three components contribute to motivation in varying proportions, depending on the individual learner and unique learning environment. Next, the focus is on the impact that the L2 Learning Experience has on EFL learning motivation.

### **Motivation and the L2 Learning Experience**

This portion of the chapter narrows the focus to a specific component of the L2MSS: The L2 Learning Experience. First, this section includes examples of how motivation for EFL learning may be influenced by movement between L2 Learning Experiences and the introduction of a new L2 Learning Experience. In addition, studies

that investigated the dynamic nature of motivation within a single L2 Learning Experience are investigated.

### ***L2 Learning Experiences Between Environments***

Within the L2MSS framework, the L2 Learning Experience component, or learning environment, appears to be a powerful predictor of EFL learning motivation (You, 2016; Taguchi et al., 2009). Even for English learners with similar backgrounds, a change in the learning environment can affect motivation in a variety of ways. Li's (2014) study of Chinese English learners sought to both verify the L2MSS and compare the motivation between Chinese ESL (English as a Second Language) and Chinese EFL learners. Results indicated that the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience all contributed to intended learning effort, but the L2 Learning Experience had the strongest impact on motivation. This is consistent with L2MSS studies in other EFL contexts. What was surprising, though, was the very limited effect of the Ideal L2 Self on interest and intended learning effort for the EFL learners. In comparing the two types of learning environments, the ESL learners were more motivated to learn English than EFL learners, had a stronger L2 Self, and had a more positive attitude toward learning English than the EFL learners. These findings portray that even for learners with similar backgrounds, the type of L2 Learning Experience may strongly affect L2 English learning motivation.

L2 English learners can also experience changes in motivation due to the introduction of new L2 Learning Experiences over time, like studying abroad. In a longitudinal study of Japanese EFL university age learners studying abroad in Australia (Fryer & Roger, 2018), findings showed that participating in a study abroad experience

had varying effects on participants' motivation in the short and long term. The goal of the study was to investigate how the motivation of eight Japanese EFL learners was impacted by a semester of studying English in Australia. Pre and post interviews, as well as student-created photo journals, provided rich descriptions of learners' motivation before, during, and after the study abroad. Some of the participants, even months after their return to Japan, experienced a stronger sense of Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self that inspired new goals for their English learning. Others had a study abroad experience that pointed out their deficiencies in English, which proceeded to drive motivation for EFL learning. Overall, it seems that novel learning experiences and different learning environments can affect learner motivation in both the short term and long term, even after the experience has ended.

### ***L2 Learning Experiences within Learning Environments***

Even if EFL learners do not move between different learning environments, the dynamic nature of the L2 Learning Experience can still affect motivation in a variety of ways. This has been described through various longitudinal studies of EFL learner motivation. Over the course of two years, Kikuchi (2019) observed the motivation for EFL learning of four female Japanese university students majoring in international studies. Monthly surveys and interviews provided a detailed description and account of each learner's motivation throughout the two years with respect to the L2 Self and the influence of the L2 Learning Experience. Certain aspects of the learning environment along with future English learning goals played a role in learners' fluctuating motivation. For one of the learners, motivation was increased through inspiration of a study abroad experience, decreased by peers in her English class, and increased during a TOEFL

preparation course where she was surrounded by motivated and driven peers. Another learner started semester courses with a fairly high level of motivation, but a teacher's and peers' negative attitudes and lack of interest contributed to a decrease in motivation for English learning. Kikuchi (2019) suggests "that without continuing rich L2 experiences and a personal goal to use English, learners in EFL situations have a hard time finding reasons to study; thus, they do not study hard for great lengths of time" (p.173).

Therefore, EFL motivation can be impacted by the dynamic nature of the L2 Learning Experience.

In agreement with Kikuchi (2019)'s findings, Islam (2019) found that EFL learners in Pakistan also experienced differing levels of motivation within the university setting. Interviews with 20 Iranian EFL learners in a Pakistani university revealed generally positive attitudes toward the L2 Learning Experience within their learning environment, but there were some discrepancies. Some of the learners who were less proficient in English described feeling less comfortable participating in class because they were afraid of feeling ashamed for making a mistake. Even some of the more advanced learners felt hesitant to involve themselves in class activities out of fear of being corrected by the teacher in front of peers (Islam, 2019). Findings from these two studies display that even a constant L2 Learning Experience can have varying effects on learner motivation depending on learning material, proficiency level, teacher attitudes, emotions, and even previous language learning experiences.

Emotions within the classroom learning environment are a potent part of the dynamic L2 Learning Experience, and these emotions may play a role in EFL learner motivation. Pavelescu (2019) found this portrayed clearly within a case study of two

adolescent EFL learners in Romania. Student-written narratives, semi-structured interviews with the learners and their teachers, and classroom observations were used in an attempt to gather a more complete picture of motivation. In particular, the focus of the study was on how emotions within the learning environment can affect EFL learning motivation. Mika, one of the learners, had EFL learning motivation that was closely connected to feelings of love of English, admiration for a native English speaking celebrity, and encouragement from her first English teacher. Kate, the other learner studied in this context, did not experience the same emotions or motivation. Her motivation was driven more by components of the Ought-to L2 Self like the need to know English for the future. In addition, Kate's motivation decreased as a result of negative emotions that she felt during interactions with her first English teacher (Pavelescu, 2019). Thus, these two learners from the same EFL context were significantly impacted emotionally by past and present English teachers, emphasizing the role that the EFL teacher can have in learner motivation, both in a positive and negative way.

### **A Gap in Current L2 Motivational Self System Research**

Although the L2 Learning Experience has shown to be a powerful influence on learner motivation within the L2MSS (You, 2016; Li, 2014; Taguchi et al., 2009), much of the L2MSS literature has focused on developing the concept of the L2 Self and its influence on L2 learning motivation. As a result, the third component of the L2MSS has been somewhat overlooked, generalized, and simplified (Dörnyei, 2019). In comparison to the Ideal L2 Self and the Ought-to L2 Self, the L2 Learning Experience has not been conceptualized or referred to completely or consistently. Only recently has a more

detailed view of the L2 Learning Experience been proposed. Instead of a vague reference to the learning environment, the L2 Learning Experience might be better understood as “the perceived quality of learners’ engagement with various aspects of the language learning process” (Dörnyei, 2019, p.25). These aspects could include the teacher, peers, learning activities or tasks, curriculum and learning materials, and the wider school or learning community.

The disproportionate focus on the L2 Self and lack of clarity about the L2 Learning Experience highlight the need to look at the L2 Learning Experience more carefully within L2MSS studies. In addition, Mauritanian EFL learners have yet to be included in the wide variety of contexts already studied using the L2MSS. Further, the impact of L2 Learning Experience within a private English center in Mauritania has yet to be investigated.

Thus, this study seeks to expand application of the L2MSS to university-aged Mauritanian EFL learners and investigate aspects of the L2 Learning Experience that affect learner motivation in a private English center setting in Mauritania’s capital city of Nouakchott. This study of Mauritanian EFL learners sought to answer the question: Within a private English center context, how is the motivation of Mauritanian EFL learners impacted by their L2 selves and the L2 Learning Experience? In pursuing this research question, this study attempted to answer the following sub-questions:

1. Within learners’ L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?
2. Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center’s learning environment foster learner motivation?

## Summary

This chapter reviewed the development of English as a global or international language, particularly how that development has expanded English learners' possibilities of self-images or imagined identities. As a result, English learners' desired identity or self image can serve to drive motivation for learning EFL, even if the learner is not in an English-speaking context. In order to better conceptualize L2 learner motivation, Gardner's (1985) SE theory of motivation was reframed to account for the influence of global English and to incorporate Possible Selves theory by Markus and Nurius (1986), and Self-Discrepancy theory by Higgins (1987). The result was Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, consisting of the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience, which combine to account for L2 learner motivation.

The L2MSS has been utilized in order to study EFL learning motivation within and across a wide range of contexts. Results of these studies indicate that the L2MSS adequately accounts for EFL learners' interest in the learning process and intended learning effort, but that the influence of the L2 Self and L2 Learning Experience is unique for each individual and changes over time. The extensive collection of literature devoted to the L2MSS and EFL learner motivation has yet to include Mauritanian EFL learners, particularly within a private English center learning environment.

Chapter three outlines this study's investigation of Mauritanian EFL learners' L2MSS within the environment of a private English center. It provides details of the chosen mixed-methods paradigm and the rationale behind using both student questionnaires and interviews. In addition, details about the private center setting as well as the characteristics of the student participants are provided. Finally, the procedure for

obtaining permission for the data collection, the specific questionnaire and interview items to be used, and the plan for gathering data about learners' L2MSS are presented.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

#### Overview

This chapter outlines a mixed-methods study of EFL learner motivation in Mauritania. Motivation, as defined in the previous chapter, refers to learner interest in the EFL learning process along with intended effort to invest in that process. In particular, this study focused on a small group of university-aged EFL learners who take classes at a private English center in Nouakchott, Mauritania's capital city. This chapter first explains the rationale for using a combination of questionnaires and interviews in order to investigate learners' motivation followed by a brief description of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). Then, it describes the setting of the study, the group of student participants, and the specific materials used to gather information. Finally, this chapter outlines the procedure that was carried out in order to learn about learners' motivation for learning English at the center.

In the end, this study aimed to answer a specific research question: Within a private English center context, how is the motivation of Mauritanian EFL learners impacted by their L2 selves and the L2 Learning Experience? In pursuing this research question, this study addressed the following sub-questions:

1. Within learners' L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?
2. Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center's learning environment foster learner motivation?

## **Research Paradigm and Rationale**

A mixed-methods paradigm was chosen in order to investigate Mauritanian EFL learner motivation. Use of a closed-answer questionnaire quantified otherwise abstract components of learner motivation. In addition, using semi-structured student interviews allowed for a deeper, more descriptive understanding of the learners' interest and intended learning effort. Implementing such a combination of research methods or variety of measures is referred to by Mackey & Gass (2016) as methodological triangulation. In general, triangulation “involves the use of multiple, independent methods of obtaining data in a single investigation in order to arrive at the same research findings” (p.233). According to Mackey & Gass (2016), investigating a research question with more than one method or measure increases the validity and reliability of the information. Thus, triangulating data through the use of both questionnaires and interviews increases the likelihood of a clear picture of learners' L2MSS in this study. Rationale for using these specific methods in order to answer this particular research question is discussed in the following section.

## **Framework and Design**

This section provides an overview of Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System and the reason for investigating Mauritanian EFL learners' motivation through the lens of this framework. In addition, this section introduces and provides rationale for using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews in order to investigate the research question. The drawbacks of using these instruments with this study's group of participants are also addressed.

### ***The L2MSS***

Learner motivation was investigated through the lens of Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). This framework, which is explained in detail in chapter two, describes L2 learning motivation as having three basic sources: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience. The L2MSS has become one of the most favored perspectives from which to understand and investigate L2 learning motivation within a variety of EFL contexts in recent years (Boo et al., 2015). This study continues the tradition by using the same approach.

### *Student Questionnaire*

One of the instruments used in order to investigate Mauritanian EFL learners' L2MSS was a motivation questionnaire. The questionnaire asked learners about each of the three elements of their L2MSS as well as their interest in and intended effort for learning English. A questionnaire was chosen because questionnaires provide a way to "gather information that learners are able to report about themselves, such as their beliefs and motivations about learning or their reactions to learning and classroom instruction and activities—information that is typically not available from production data alone" (Mackey & Gass, 2016, p.102). In addition, questionnaires are a significant component of many EFL learner motivation studies, including those that utilize the L2MSS framework (Csize' r & Kormos, 2009; Ryan, 2009; You, 2016; Taguchi et al., 2009). Motivation is more of an abstract entity that is difficult to quantify, so using a questionnaire provides a quantitative view of the three components of participants' L2MSS.

A potential drawback of using questionnaires is inaccurate responses due to misunderstanding questions written in participants' L2 (Mackey & Gass, 2016). In order to address this, the wording of each of the questions was simple, and some of the

questions were pilot-tested to ensure clarity. Since participants had an intermediate to advanced level in English and the prompts are simply worded, completing the questionnaire in English was feasible. In addition, the questionnaire was kept short, less than 15 items, excluding the demographic questions. This helped to prevent inaccurate responses due to participant fatigue. Another of the major drawbacks considered was the possibility that learners may respond to the questionnaire items in the way that they feel is expected of them, instead of answering honestly (Mackey & Gass, 2016). In order to encourage realistic responses, the items were written to address participants' individual current attitudes. Participants were also reminded that their responses are anonymous and that they should answer according to their honest thoughts and feelings about learning English. Using a simple, clear, piloted, questionnaire falls in line with Mackey & Gass (2016) recommendations for using questionnaires in research, and effort was put forth to acquire the most honest participant responses as possible by ensuring participant anonymity.

### ***Student Interviews***

In addition to participant questionnaires, follow-up interviews were conducted as well. The format of the interviews was semi-structured, meaning that the interviewer was guided by a list of questions, but the interviewer also had the freedom to ask follow-up questions in order to elicit more information from the participant (Mackey & Gass, 2016). Since motivation is not an easily observable entity, semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity to gather more detailed information that questionnaire responses do not allow for, which allows for a more well-rounded and detailed reflection from learners about their motivation for English learning (Mackey & Gass, 2016). Qualitative

methods like interviews have been used regularly in L2 motivation research. In fact, several recent studies of EFL learner motivation have incorporated interviews, classroom observations, or learner-created journals and motivation logs (Kikuchi, 2019; Fryer & Roger, 2018; Pavelescu, 2019; and Islam, 2019). The interview for this study contained six main guiding questions about participants' Ideal and Ought-to English-speaking selves and about the L2 Learning Experience within the English center. In addition to those questions, the interviewer also asked interviewees to explain various questionnaire responses, particularly in reference to the items dealing with the three components of the L2MSS.

In order to address the potential drawbacks of interviews like the halo-effect, where participants respond in a way they believe the interviewer expects, and cross-cultural pragmatic failure, where cultural differences cause breakdown in communication (Mackey & Gass, 2016), a mode of communication that is both familiar and integral to learners' lives was selected: WhatsApp audio messaging. Participants are accustomed to conversing with peers through the exchange of recorded audio messages, so the interview format likely felt more natural and low-stakes than a face-to-face interview. As a result, learners likely felt more comfortable partaking in the interview and were more apt to provide honest perspectives and attitudes toward their motivation and their L2 Learning Experience at the center. In addition, since I, the interviewer, lived in Mauritania in the past, I am generally familiar with participants' pragmatic competence and can foresee potentially confusing statements. This helped to anticipate, avoid, and address potential communication problems. These considerations for implementing

participant interviews are aligned with what Mackey & Gass (2016) suggest for gathering data through interviews.

In extending the tradition modeled by previous L2 learning motivation studies, this study used a variety of methods to investigate learners' L2MSS. A motivation questionnaire gave a general view of the make-up of learners' L2MSS. In addition, participants provided more nuanced and detailed information about their motivation through semi-structured interviews, following the pattern of other L2MSS studies that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods into an analysis of EFL learner motivation. Since both methods have their own unique advantages and potential drawbacks, using a combination allows for triangulation of data about participants' motivation (Mackey & Gass, 2016). As a result, a more accurate and complete picture of Mauritanian EFL learner motivation within the Mauritanian private English center context was obtained.

### **Setting and Participants**

This section of the chapter provides information about the setting of this study, including a description of the private English center and its activities. It also provides background information about the participants who are students at the center, including learners' first language, English level, educational experience and commitments outside the center.

#### ***Setting***

The context of this study was a private English center located in the capital of Mauritania. Mauritania is situated along the Atlantic coast of North Africa, North of Senegal and South of Morocco. Although participants take classes at this particular

English center, actual data collection did not necessarily take place within the center or during its regularly scheduled programming. Data was gathered virtually from the U.S. via Qualtrics and WhatsApp. Since the country was a French colony, French is often utilized as a lingua franca, present with the local Arabic dialect and other West African languages. Although English is not widely used in Mauritanian society, university-aged students are engaged in learning English, particularly in the private center setting.

Courses and activities at the center in this study provide learners with a wide range of options to hone certain English skills or to utilize their full repertoire of linguistic skills. In each week of instruction, learners can participate in a wide variety of courses. For example, a TOEFL preparation course sharpens learners' skills in the four language domains, equipping them to access rigorous academic content in English. In addition, regular special events offer an opportunity to collaborate and practice in a meaningful communicative context. For example, a past event called Mystery Night required learners to work in teams to both sequence a mystery narrative accurately and to solve the mystery using a set of hidden clues. Just as the offerings of the center are diverse, so are the goals, expectations, and experiences of the learners who participate in the learning process there.

### ***Participants***

Participants included a group of 20 male and female university-aged Mauritians who have studied English at this private center. Two of the questionnaire participants also completed a follow-up interview. In general, participants have an intermediate level of proficiency in English. Since the entrance protocol of the center fluctuates and the program's setting is more characteristic of a one-room schoolhouse, the learners have

levels of English proficiency that range anywhere from high-beginner to low-advanced. In addition to variable English proficiency, learners also bring a variety of linguistic resources with them to the English-learning experience. The national dialect of Arabic, Hassaniya, is the native language of many of the learners. Other learners also speak Hassaniya, but have a West African first language (L1) like Pulaar, Wolof, or Sonike. Some learners speak a more limited number of languages in addition to their L1, and some learners speak their L1 along with all other local languages and English. Within this group of participants, twelve listed Arabic/Hassaniya as a first language, five listed Pulaar, and three listed other languages or left that field blank. In addition to the L1, six of the participants included French in their list of languages. In other words, although all the participants are Mauritanian, they have diverse linguistic resources.

Investment in English learning is another area in which participants differ. Commitment to the center's courses and activities can vary from student to student. Some learners have very regular weekly and daily attendance at the center, and some of the learners come on a more sporadic basis for a variety of reasons. Learners may also invest time and effort in learning English at other institutions. Some learners are enrolled at the local university, in the English department or with other programs of study; other learners take English courses at other private English centers in Nouakchott or study in other religious, professional, or trade programs. Fifteen of the participants in this study indicated that they study English at at least one other institution. This study's participants represent a mixture of situations in reference to linguistic background, time investment in English learning at the center, and educational experiences and commitments at other

institutions. Thus, it is expected that they provide a diverse view of Mauritanian EFL learner motivation and present a variety of L2MSS.

### **Ethics**

Following Hamline's research policy, approval from Hamline's Institutional Review Board and from staff at the English center was obtained before gathering data from participants. Further, informed consent was obtained from participants through an informed consent letter. During the process of gathering data, learner questionnaire responses via Qualtrics were anonymous. Privacy of the interviewees was ensured through omission of identifiable information and use of pseudonyms in the written results. Since the motivation questionnaire was quite short, participation required only a few minutes of time to complete. The two participants who took part in the interviews invested more time, but no more than 30 cumulative minutes of discussion via WhatsApp. Although participants are affiliated with the English center, the study took place outside of regular programming, so there was no interruption or loss of instructional time. As a result, there was no incentive to provide particular answers to the questions in the questionnaire or during the interview. Therefore, for a minimal time commitment, participants had the opportunity to reflect on and share their motivation for learning EFL at the center and how their L2 Learning Experience affects that motivation.

### **Materials**

Both the questionnaire and interview were designed to gather information about the impact of the three components of participants' L2MSSs: Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience. In addition to the main L2MSS components, learners described their personal motivation for EFL learning and the aspects of the English center

that foster their motivation. This section describes and provides rationale for selection of the actual questionnaire and interview items used in data collection. Samples of each instrument are included in this section, but the full versions of the questionnaire and interview can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.

### ***Questionnaire***

This study utilized a short Likert (1932) style questionnaire, inspired by the questionnaire used by Taguchi et al.(2009). Items on the questionnaire relate to learners' Ideal L2 selves, Ought-to L2 selves, their L2 Learning Experiences at the English center, and interest and intended effort to learn English. The L2MSS questionnaire used by Taguchi et al. (2009) contained 67 and 76 items across the three questionnaire versions. In addition to the three components of the L2MSS, their extensive questionnaire incorporated questions in the areas of instrumentality, family influence, and cultural influence. Due to the relatively small scope of this study, the questionnaire utilized by Taguchi et al. (2009) was modified and scaled down to incorporate a few items for the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, the L2 Learning Experience, and interest/intended learning effort. The end of the questionnaire contained a short demographic section including questions about participants' L1 and English-language learning experience. A sample of each type of question is provided in Table 1 below, and the full questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

### **Table 1**

#### *Sample Questionnaire Items*

L2MSS component	Questionnaire item	Response options
-----------------	--------------------	------------------

Ideal L2 Self	<i>I imagine myself as someone who is able to speak English.</i>	“strongly disagree”	“disagree”	“agree”	“strongly agree”
Ought-to L2 Self	<i>Learning English is necessary because my family and friends think it is important.</i>	“strongly disagree”	“disagree”	“agree”	“strongly agree”
L2 Learning Experience	<i>The activities and lessons at <b>the English center</b> are interesting to me.</i>	“strongly disagree”	“disagree”	“agree”	“strongly agree”
Motivation (interest and intended learning effort)	<i>I am prepared to use a lot of effort to learn English.</i>	“strongly disagree”	“disagree”	“agree”	“strongly agree”

Note: The actual name of **the English center** appeared on participants’ copies.

### ***Semi-Structured Interview***

The semi-structured interview, as defined by Mackey & Gass (2016), for this study was adopted directly from the learner questionnaire. Thus, within the interview, the interviewees were able to draw upon their original questionnaire responses in order to provide more detailed information on their motivation for English learning. The interview devoted one open-response question to each of the three aspects of the L2MSS. One question pertained to the Ideal L2 Self, another addressed the Ought-to L2 Self, and another asked about the learning experience at the English center. Two of the questions of the interview were more open-ended questions about motivation, providing space for learners to elaborate on their own reasons for English learning and the source of their interest and learning effort. Prior to the main questions about motivation, two introductory questions allowed learners to warm-up with the topic of English learning and become comfortable with the interview format. The six main questions of the

interview are shown in Table 2 below, but Appendix B provides the total set of interview questions.

**Table 2**

*Sample Interview Questions*

L2MSS component	Interview question
Motivation (interest and intended learning effort)	<i>Why did you choose to learn English and not another language?</i>
Motivation (interest and intended learning effort)	<i>Do you work hard to learn English? Why? Why not?</i>
Ought-to L2 Self	<i>Do other people expect you to learn English? Who? Why?</i>
L2 Learning Experience	<i>What do you like about learning English at <b>the English center</b>?</i>
L2 Learning Experience	<i>Does <b>the English center</b> help you work hard to learn English? How?</i>
Ideal L2 Self	<i>How can you see yourself using English in the future?</i>

Note: The actual name of **the English center** appeared on participants' copies.

**Procedure**

After receiving permission and consent from appropriate personnel, one of the English center's instructors invited students to participate in the study. To do this, the instructor first had potential participants watch a short introductory video created by the researcher. The main goal of the study was introduced to them and a simplified version of the informed consent letter was read. The instructor shared the video during the beginning of at least one class session at the center. However, since attendance at the

center was low during the time of data collection, the instructor also shared the video with students on an individual or small group basis outside of class.

After students were introduced to the study via video, those who were interested asked the instructor for access to the questionnaire. The instructor verified that the student understood the nature of participation in the study by having them review the informed consent document. Once the student decided to consent to participate, they navigated to the Qualtrics questionnaire using a QR code located at the bottom of the simplified informed consent letter. If a participant did not have access to a phone that is able to read the QR code on the informed consent letter, the participant clicked on a link located at the bottom of a virtual copy of the letter. Since the researcher was in the United States and the participants were in Mauritania, using an electronic version of the questionnaire was most convenient for all involved in the study.

At the end of the questionnaire, 17 of the participants indicated interest in engaging in a follow-up interview and provided their WhatsApp contact information. Most of the learners who come to the center frequently use WhatsApp for communication with classmates, friends, and family, so it is a tool that is familiar to them. WhatsApp was selected as a tool of communication due to the country's weak and inconsistent internet connection along with the time difference to the United States. WhatsApp provided a way to converse with audio messages without the need to have an internet connection or synchronous connection. After all questionnaires were submitted and numbered, two of the interested participants were selected via random number generator and contacted to complete a WhatsApp interview.

Via WhatsApp, selected participants verified that they were interested in an individual follow-up interview and the interviewer described the process. The two interviews took place on separate days, but each individual interview was completed within an hour of the first message exchange. Throughout the interview, audio messages were exchanged with each interviewee in order to ask the interview questions. Prior to the main part of the interview, learners were asked the first two warm-up questions, where they established their English-learning history and how they got connected to the learning center. During the main part of the interview, participants were asked the guiding questions about their Ideal L2 selves, Ought-to L2 selves, learning experiences at the English center, and their interest in and intended effort for learning English as a foreign language. In between audio messages, the interviewer took time to note interesting responses and formulate follow-up questions for the interviewee. At the end of each interview, the interview was transcribed using Rev, an online audio transcription service, so that it was prepared for analysis.

The data collection process took place in May and June of 2021. Once the English center's instructor received the introductory video and copy of the informed consent documents, she invited students to participate. In order to account for a potentially modified class schedule at the English center, the questionnaire was open for three weeks before selection of interview participants took place. Once interview participants were selected, up to three weeks were dedicated to complete and transcribe the interviews.

### **Analysis**

Responses to the motivation questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively, and the interview responses were analyzed qualitatively. Qualtrics analysis tools were used to

gather average responses for each questionnaire item in order to determine average values for the categories of the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, the L2 Learning Experience, and reported motivation. The average reported interest/intended learning effort values were observed and then the responses to questions about the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience were compared. This provided a general view of which of the three parts of the L2MSS is strongest for this group of learners. The values of the L2 Self and L2 Learning Experience items were also compared to determine which seems to be more prominent in learners' L2MSS. This analysis provided a general numeric overview of the participants' L2MSS, including which of the components is most impactful overall.

Since the semi-structured interview was designed to be a follow-up to the learner questionnaire, interview responses were analyzed with respect to participants' corresponding questionnaire responses. This provided a deeper and more descriptive view of each of the three components of their L2MSS. General trends in the L2MSS of each interviewee were noted first. Themes in participants' responses to the general motivation questions were then observed in order to illuminate their most compelling reasons to engage in English learning. Specifically, each aspect of their Ideal L2 selves, Ought-to L2 selves, and their unique L2 Learning Experiences at the English center were observed. Then, aspects of the L2 Learning Experience at the English center were highlighted in order to identify the aspects most motivating to each interviewee.

After looking at each interview separately, interesting similarities and differences between interviewees' descriptions of their Ideal L2 selves and Ought-to L2 selves were drawn to attention. In addition, responses that pertained to the activities and atmosphere

of the English center were compared. Finally, based on the interview responses, parts of the English center's learning experience that seem to foster motivation were identified.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the mixed-methods paradigm used in order to study Mauritanian EFL learner motivation through the lens of the L2 Motivational Self System. Rationale for the use of learner questionnaires and semi-structured interviews was provided as well as a description of the setting and participants of the study. In addition, the content of the questionnaire and interview were presented along with the procedure that was followed in order to gather data from participants. Finally, the plan for analyzing questionnaire and interview responses was presented in order to answer this research question: Within a private English center context, how is the motivation of Mauritanian EFL learners impacted by their L2 selves and the L2 Learning Experience? In order to answer the general research question, this study addressed the following sub-questions:

1. Within learners' L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?
2. Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center's learning environment foster learner motivation?

The next chapter provides a more detailed account of how learner questionnaire and interview responses were analyzed and summarizes the findings from the study.

Questionnaire analysis includes a description of participants' general motivation. Then, it compares the impact of the Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience components on participants' motivation. Interview responses were organized into major themes and trends in order to provide a deeper view of the participants'

L2MSS. Responses were also analyzed in order to illuminate the particular aspects of the English center's learning experience that facilitate learner motivation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

#### Introduction

This mixed-methods investigation took place in Nouakchott, Mauritania. Participants were university-aged EFL learners who have studied at a private English center in the city. The aim of this study was to learn about their source of motivation, or interest and intended learning effort. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research question: Within a private English center context, how is the motivation of Mauritanian EFL learners impacted by their L2 selves and the L2 Learning Experience? In pursuing this research question, this study attempted to answer the following sub-questions:

1. Within learners' L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?
2. Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center's learning environment foster learner motivation?

In pursuit of an answer to these questions, information was gathered from students through a motivation questionnaire and individual semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire and interview guide can be found in Appendix A and B, respectively. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide an overview of the motivation of the group of participants and to illuminate the component of the L2MSS that impacts their motivation most. The interviews served to both confirm questionnaire results through a qualitative lens and to provide two individual descriptions of the L2MSS components within this group of participants.

Twenty participants answered a short Likert (1932) style questionnaire that asked about their general motivation as well as about each component of their L2MSS: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience at the English center (Dörnyei, 2009). After collecting questionnaire data, two of the 20 participants were randomly selected to be interviewed by the researcher through an exchange of WhatsApp audio messages. The interviews provided an opportunity for the two participants to further describe elements of their Ideal L2 selves and Ought-to L2 selves. Further, they shared about how the English center specifically supports their motivation for learning English.

In order to understand which element of the L2MSS impacts motivation the most, the L2MSS with the strongest responses on the Likert (1932) scale were identified. For this group of students, the Ideal L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience at the English center seem to impact motivation the most, with the Ideal L2 Self having a slightly larger impact on motivation. The interviews with two of the participants revealed their Ideal L2 selves by describing specific future visions for how they want to use English to increase opportunities for themselves and the next generation. While the motivation questionnaire did not reveal any specific part of the L2 Learning Experience at the English center to be more motivating than another, the interviewees both highlighted the impact of the relational aspect of the English center on their motivation within the English learning process.

The remainder of this chapter expands on the initial results summarized above and provides a more detailed analysis of questionnaire and interview data. First, a description of the general trends in the L2MSS for the group of 20 participants is presented. This

helps determine which component of the L2MSS supports motivation the most for this group of participants. Then, two specific learners are analyzed in order to gain a more detailed picture of both the Ideal and Ought-to L2 selves and more clearly see how the L2 Learning Experience at the English center may foster their motivation.

### **Questionnaire Analysis**

The motivation questionnaire was analyzed based on the average value, or the mean value, of the responses for the group of 20 participants. The responses to the four Likert (1932) scale items were coded on a scale of one to four (1=“strongly agree”, 2=“agree”, 3=“disagree”, 4=“strongly disagree”), a possibility suggested by Mackey and Gass (2016). In general, the closer the average responses are to one, the more that the particular L2MSS component in focus may support motivation.

### ***Reported Motivation***

Before comparing the impact of each of the three parts of the L2MSS for this group of participants, it is important to first confirm that they generally have a high level of motivation in terms of interest and intended learning effort. To do that, the average of the mean values for each of the motivation items, questions 10 and 11, on the questionnaire were observed. Question 10 was: *I am prepared to use a lot of effort to learn English.* Question 11 was: *I would like to spend lots of time studying English.* As shown in Table 3, the average response for question 10 was 1.20 on the Likert (1932) scale, and question 11 had an average response of 1.55 on the Likert (1932) scale. Combined, participants responded to the motivation items on the questionnaire with an average score of 1.375. These mean values indicate a relatively high level of motivation for the group of participants as a whole. Figure 2 provides a visual comparison of the

response rates of these motivation questions. Question 10 had a higher rate of “strongly agree” responses than question 11, with eleven and seven “strongly agree” responses, respectively.

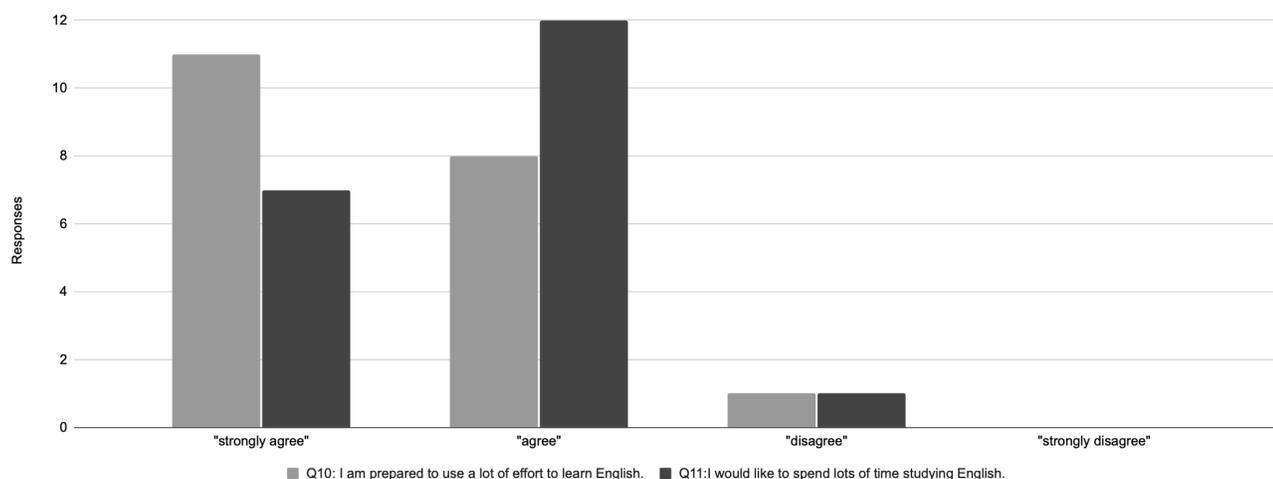
**Table 3**

*Overall Motivation Questionnaire Response Mean Values*

Questionnaire item	Mean value of responses	Average response for motivation
Q10: <i>I am prepared to use a lot of effort to learn English.</i>	1.20	1.375
Q11: <i>I would like to spend lots of time studying English.</i>	1.55	

**Figure 2**

*Overall Motivation Questionnaire Responses*



***Impact of the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience***

Next, in order to determine how the three components impact learner motivation, the average mean value for each of the three parts of the L2MSS were compared. As

reported in Table 4, the average mean value for the Ideal L2 Self was 1.35 on the Likert (1932) scale, the closest to a score of one of all the components. The L2 Learning Experience had a slightly higher average mean value at 1.47. The Ought-to L2 Self had the largest average mean value of 2.13. Thus, the data show that the Ideal L2 Self has the strongest presence within participants' L2MSS, closely followed by the L2 Learning Experience. The next section analyzes each of the three components individually.

**Table 4**

*Average Mean Values for Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience*

L2MSS component	Average mean value of questionnaire responses
Ideal L2 Self	1.35
Ought-to L2 Self	2.13
L2 Learning Experience	1.47

### **Ideal L2 Self**

The Ideal L2 Self component of the L2MSS pertains to how the language learner would like to be in the future, in their ideal state. Within this particular study, the Ideal L2 Self refers to how the participants see themselves using English and identifying as English speakers in the future. This could include using English for future education, job opportunities, and expanding social opportunities by interacting with other English speakers around the world. Questions 1 through 3 on the questionnaire focused on the Ideal L2 Self. Question 1 was: *I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends, classmates, or colleagues.* Question 2 was: *The things I want to do in the future require me to use English.* Question 3 was: *I imagine myself as someone who is able to*

*speak English*. Overall, participants responded to each of the three Ideal L2 Self items on the motivation questionnaire with an average response of 1.35, which is closest to “strongly agree” on the Likert (1932) scale. This suggests that this group of learners may have strong L2 selves and that the Ideal L2 Self may be the strongest support for their motivation. Table 5 reports and compares the response rates to each of the Ideal L2 Self questions, and it shows that question 1: *I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends, classmates, or colleagues* had 16 “strongly agree” responses, the highest rate of the three Ideal L2 Self items. As Figure 3 portrays, none of the Ideal L2 Self questionnaire items accumulated a “disagree” or “strongly disagree” response from the participants. The responses for the Ought-to L2 Self questions displayed a different pattern, which is discussed in the next section.

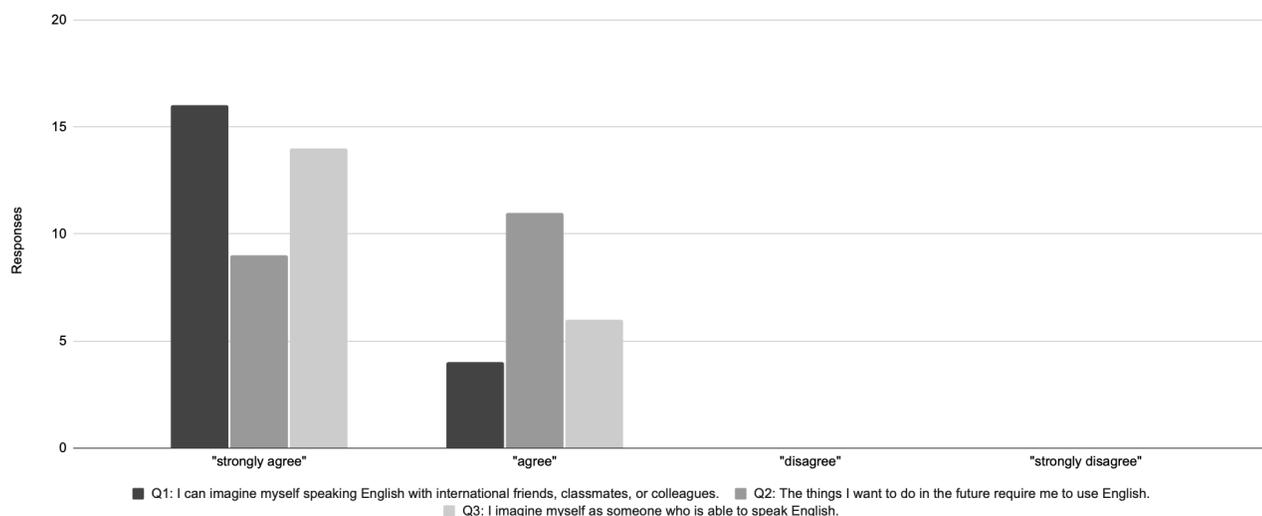
**Table 5**

*Ideal L2 Self Questionnaire Item Response Rates*

Response	Q1	Q2	Q3
“strongly agree”	16	9	14
“agree”	4	11	6
“disagree”	0	0	0
“strongly disagree”	0	0	0

**Figure 3**

*Ideal L2 Self Questionnaire Item Response Rates*



### Ought-to L2 Self

The Ought-to L2 Self portion of a learner's L2MSS includes what they think they should be like in the future, particularly how they should be able to use English in the future. The Ought-to L2 Self can be formed by outside influences like friend and family expectations as well as school or program requirements. On the motivation questionnaire, questions 4, 5, and 6 focused on the Ought-to L2 Self. Question 4 was: *It will have a negative impact on my life if I don't learn English.* Question 5 was: *Learning English is necessary because my family and friends think it is important.* Question 6 was: *Studying English is important to me because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak English.* The mean value of responses for this group of participants on the Ought-to L2 Self items on the questionnaire was about 2.13, placing the average response between "agree" and "disagree" on the Likert (1932) scale. Table 6 provides the response rate for each of the Ought-to L2 Self items on the questionnaire and shows that question 5 had the most responses in the "disagree" and "strongly disagree" categories, with nine "disagree" responses and one "strongly disagree" response. None of the other questionnaire items in

this study obtained a “strongly disagree” response. Figure 4 portrays this comparison of the Ought-to L2 Self responses and shows that each of the questions incurred at least some “disagree” responses. This is in contrast to the Ideal L2 Self results discussed above. The data suggest that the Ought-to L2 Self may not support or impact motivation as much as the Ideal L2 Self does for this group of EFL learners.

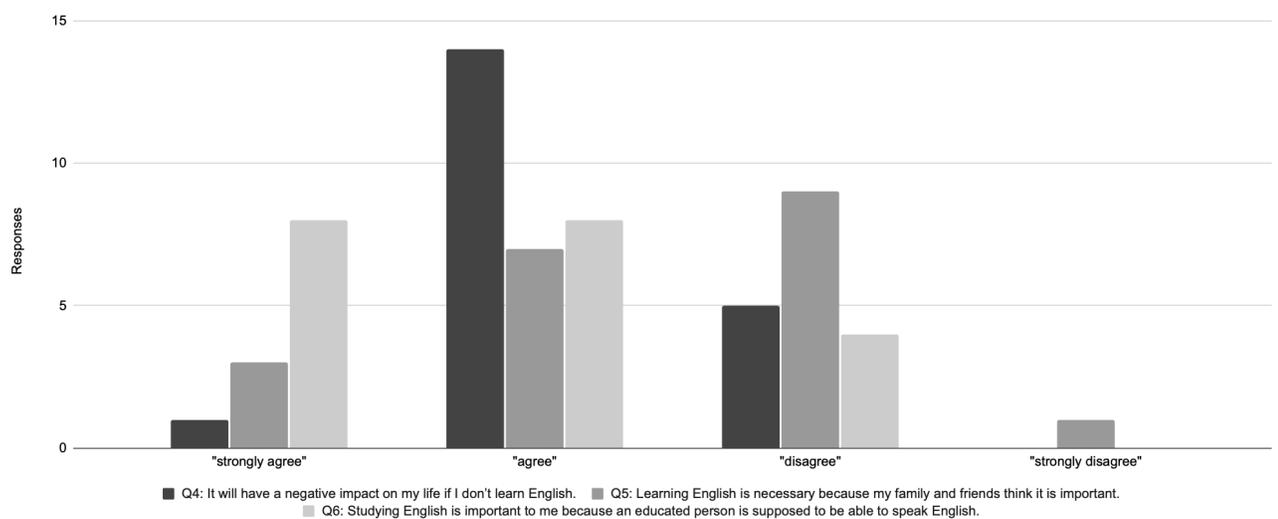
**Table 6**

*Ought-to L2 Self Questionnaire Item Response Rates*

Response	Q4	Q5	Q6
“strongly agree”	1	3	8
“agree”	14	7	8
“disagree”	5	9	4
“strongly disagree”	0	1	0

**Figure 4**

*Ought-to L2 Self Questionnaire Item Response Rates*



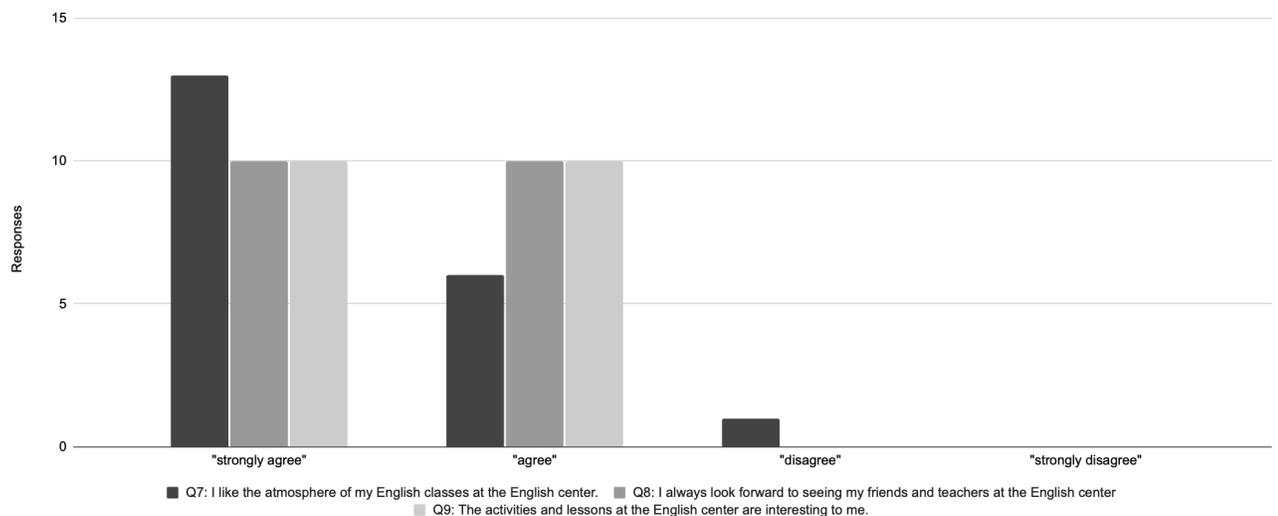
## L2 Learning Experience

The L2 Learning Experience is the part of the L2MSS that is concerned with the environment and activities in the classroom. This could include the content, lessons, and materials involved as well as the relationships that students have with other students and instructors. In this study, participants were asked to report about their specific experiences with learning English at the English center, even if they also study at another institution. On the questionnaire, questions 7, 8, and 9 focused on the L2 Learning Experience at the English center. Question 7 was: *I like the atmosphere of my English classes at the English center.* Question 8 was: *I always look forward to seeing my friends and teachers at the English center.* Question 9 was: *The activities and lessons at the English center are interesting to me.*

The combined responses on the L2 Learning Experience items on the questionnaire was about 1.47, landing between “strongly agree” and “agree” on the Likert (1932) scale, which is close to the combined responses to the Ideal L2 Self items. As Table 7 reports, all three of the L2 Learning Experience items had a fairly similar distribution of responses, with nearly all of the responses as “strongly agree” or “agree” on the Likert (1932) scale. Only question 7 had a single response of “disagree”. Figure 5 shows the comparison of response rates for the L2 Learning Experience questions. It clearly portrays that the responses were quite evenly distributed between “strongly agree” and “agree”. Data for this portion of the questionnaire implies that aspects of the L2 Learning Experience at the English center are a fairly strong component of learners’ L2MSS—nearly as strong as the Ideal L2 Self. This means that the L2 Learning Experience at the English center appears to make a positive impact on motivation for this group of learners, though not necessarily quite as strongly as the Ideal L2 Self.

**Table 7***L2 Learning Experience Questionnaire Item Response Rates*

Response	Q7	Q8	Q9
“strongly agree”	13	10	10
“agree”	6	10	10
“disagree”	1	0	0
“strongly disagree”	0	0	0

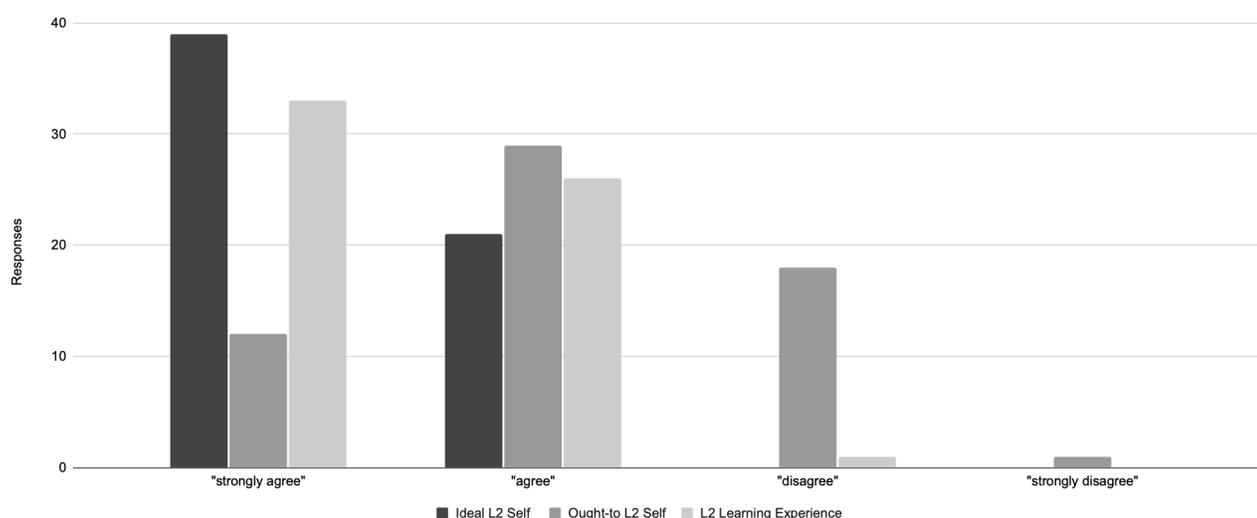
**Figure 5***L2 Learning Experience Questionnaire Item Response Rates*

In order to answer the first subquestion of the main research question: *Within learners' L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?*, it was helpful to compare each of the L2MSS components. Figure 6 below provides a visual comparison of all three L2MSS components as indicated by the questionnaire data collected. The Ideal L2 Self items had the highest rate of “strongly agree” responses, followed closely by the L2 Learning

Experience items. The Ought-to L2 Self questions had a significantly lower rate of “strongly agree” responses than the Ideal L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience items. In addition, the Ought-to L2 Self items obtained the majority of “disagree” responses and the only “strongly disagree” response on the questionnaire. Thus, questionnaire data imply the Ideal L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience at the English center contribute most to the motivation for this group of learners. Further, the Ought-to L2 Self has a smaller impact on EFL learning motivation for this group of participants.

**Figure 6**

*Comparison of L2MSS Components from the Questionnaire*



These results are consistent with findings from some previous L2MSS studies carried out in EFL contexts, but slightly inconsistent with others. Both Csizér & Kormos (2009) and Martinović & Sorić (2018) found that the Ideal L2 Self made a stronger impact on motivation than the Ought-to L2 Self for their groups of EFL learners in a Hungarian EFL context and a Croatian EFL context, respectively. In contrast to the results from this study, some L2MSS investigations observed that the L2 Learning

Experience was the strongest driver of motivation, not the Ideal L2 Self (You, 2016; Li, 2014). But, since the results from this study's questionnaire point to a fairly similar impact of both the Ideal L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience, this study does not seem to contradict what has been learned about the L2MSS thus far. The next section analyzes the specific elements of the L2 Learning Experience at the English center and seeks to determine if certain aspects of the learning experience foster motivation more than others.

### ***L2 Learning Experience and Motivation***

To begin answering the second part of the research question, *Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center's learning environment foster learner motivation?*, responses to the three L2 Learning Experience questionnaire items were compared. For each of the three L2 Learning Experience items, the mean value of responses for the group were all within 1.40-1.50. Question 7 had a mean value of 1.40, and questions 8 and 9 each had a mean value of 1.50, as shown in Table 8 below.

**Table 8**

*Mean Value for L2 Learning Experience Items*

L2 Learning Experience item	Mean value of responses
Q7: <i>I like the atmosphere of my English classes at the English center.</i>	1.40
Q8: <i>I always look forward to seeing my friends and teachers at the English center.</i>	1.50
Q9: <i>The activities and lessons at the English center are interesting to me.</i>	1.50

Thus, questionnaire data does not indicate that one component of the English center's learning environment fosters motivation more than the others. The item about the atmosphere of the English classes had a mean value slightly closer to "strongly agree" than the others, but the items asking about the activities and relationships at the center had a similar response rate. This suggests that the participants may find many aspects of the English center equally motivating, but the interview analysis in the next section illuminates this further.

### ***Questionnaire Conclusions***

In general, questionnaire data confirmed high learner motivation based on the responses to motivation items. In response to the first part of the research question: *Within learners' L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?* results indicated that the Ideal L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience at the English center make the strongest impact on the motivation of this group of students. Specifically, the Ideal L2 Self appears to be the component of the L2MSS that impacts motivation most significantly, which does differ slightly from previous studies that found the L2 Learning Experience to be the most impactful overall (You, 2016; Li, 2014). The second part of the research question: *Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center's learning environment foster learner motivation?* was addressed by comparing responses to the L2 Learning Experience items on the questionnaire. Within the L2 Learning Experience, the questionnaire results do not indicate that any one part of the learning environment at the English center fosters motivation more than the others. Next, interviews with two of the questionnaire participants serve to support questionnaire results, depict individual L2

selves, and illuminate specific aspects of the English center's learning environment that seem to impact motivation.

### **Interview Analysis**

This section of the chapter analyzes the semi-structured interviews (Mackey & Gass, 2016) completed by two of the study's participants. These two interviewees were randomly selected after indicating interest in an asynchronous interview via exchange of WhatsApp audio messages. From the responses of each interviewee, the most motivating component of the L2MSS is determined. Then, interesting aspects of the Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience at the English center are highlighted for each interviewee. Any interesting similarities or differences between the two interviewees are noted as well. The remainder of the section focuses specifically on which aspects of the English center contribute most to EFL learning motivation.

#### ***Mohammed***

The first interviewee, who will be referred to as Mohammed, started studying English as a mandatory subject in school a few years ago but is a fairly new addition to the English center. He speaks Pulaar, Wolof, and French as primary languages and learns English exclusively at this time. Apart from classes at the English center, he does not study at any local institutions and learns English mostly independently. Although it is not mandatory to do so, he states that his academic focus is almost exclusively on learning English at a high level in order to obtain future personal and professional goals. Mohammed's responses to the motivation questionnaire are consistent with the rest of the group in this study: the mean values for his responses are highest for the Ideal L2 Self, then the L2 Learning Experience, and then the Ought-to L2 Self.

When asked the two interview questions about motivation, Mohammed explained that he hopes to use English as a tool to provide opportunities that he might not otherwise have. He is also determined to achieve a high level in English through pursuing English in his higher education and is driven to be perceived as an excellent speaker:

Yeah. So, I decided to learn English and not other languages because to me, English is not only a language. Maybe people see it just as a language, but to me, it is a tool because it opens a lot of opportunities. And also, what happened for me was, I decided to shift my studies in English a year ago. And I knew that if I wanted to do that, I really better be great, excellent, in English.

Mohammed indicates in this response that his dedication to English learning and his motivation comes from viewing English as a tool to experience more personal opportunity. Later on in the interview, Mohammed stressed that the main goal for his English is to provide more opportunities to the next generation in his country, not only opportunities for himself: “But the main reason for that was because, in reality, I want to give my community the opportunities that my generation did not have...And as I just mentioned, I just want to give the next generation the opportunity to learn in English. And I know once they do that, they will have a lot more opportunities open for them. So that's the main reason why I'm learning right now.” When describing the main reasons for pursuing English learning, Mohammed focused almost exclusively on how he wants to use English in the future and be perceived as an English speaker. Since his response includes detailed description about his ideal future state, the Ideal L2 Self component of his L2MSS seems to play an integral role in supporting Mohammed’s motivation for learning English, which aligns with his questionnaire responses.

When asked about aspects of his Ought-to L2 Self, Mohammed revealed somewhat un-motivating aspects of his Ought-to L2 Self. He explained that the general community around him does not seem to value English, and his family and friends are either uninterested or opposed to his ambition of learning English at a high level. When speaking about reasons for working hard to learn English, he said:

And it is very tough right now, because of the environment. It's very hard to try to just raise your skills up in this type of environment. Because most of the time, you don't have people to practice with. A lot of people see that as a waste of time. Or most of the people, they just can not understand you.

Mohammed revealed a somewhat lonely experience that he encounters as an English learner in his community. He currently lacks access to other English speakers who value the language as he does. Then, when asked if his family or friends value English, he responded:

No, no, no. So I don't think my family members are interested in learning English. No. So I just got one brother. He's actually quite good in English, but he's not interested at all. He's just interested in... I don't know. And same thing to my friends. So I got one friend who are really excited to just learn English, but after he decided to quit, because I think he had no reason. So when you're doing something without reason, you will end up quitting nothing, because you don't want to do something without reason... Because my goal actually is to be like a native speaker, and I explained it to my mom. She said, "That's impossible. You cannot sound like that."

In this response, Mohammed depicts peers and family members who are either indifferent to English or who actually have negative attitudes towards Mohammed's pursuit of English proficiency. This portion of the interview portrays certain aspects of Mohammed's Ought-to L2 Self as barriers that he continues to overcome in pursuit of learning English. He finds support for his motivation from his Ideal L2 Self image but also from his learning experience at the English center. He shared more about this in the following portion of the interview.

When asked about the learning environment at the English center, Mohammed first described just how different going to the English center was from the traditional classroom setting he was used to. Then, he shared more specifically about the relational and supportive aspects of the center that support his motivation:

But at **the English center** (pseudonym), it was like, just be yourself, you know? Be yourself. They don't care about where you're coming. They don't care about if you are excellent or not. It is up to you to try to improve yourself, not as an English learner, but as a person in reality. Because you're going to learn things such as listening to people, such as being sensitive to certain type of things, without them telling you just act like that, but you're going to learn those things there. They are welcoming. You can seek help to all of those persons there. These opportunities, you cannot have them here, even in your family, sometimes you cannot share certain type of things. During these three months, I just creating some relationships at the English center. That was very, very difficult for me to get there.

Mohammed found a community at the English center that welcomes students from all backgrounds and abilities in English. In addition, he found the English center as a unique place to pursue personal growth along with others who are doing the same. That support is what seems to stick out to him the most:

That was one of the greatest experience that I ever had in my learning experience in English, to be honest. I even got people who are willing to support me in all the domains different than learning English....That support, I think, is beyond just taking lessons or is beyond just trying to learn some grammar rules or some vocab words, stuff like that. It goes beyond that.

To Mohammed, feeling welcomed, supported, and a part of the community appears to bolster his interest in continuing to pursue English learning, even when there were many influences around him that were not supportive. In his case, the L2 Learning Experience and the Ideal L2 Self seem to work together to maintain this learner's motivation for working toward excellence in English.

### ***Mariam***

The second interviewee, who will be referred to as Mariem, began learning English as a teenager, using music and movies in order to learn independently. She speaks Arabic and French as primary languages and states that she has always been interested in learning more about English. Though she has only been coming to the English center for about one year, she has been devoting a lot of time to English through studies at a local university. At the time of our interview, she was in the process of applying for a scholarship that would allow her to further her studies at the university level in an English-speaking context. In general, she hopes and plans to use English in a variety of

aspects of her daily life including academic, professional, and social. Her mean values of questionnaire responses were closest to a score of one on the Likert (1932) scale for her Ideal L2 Self, then the L2 Learning Experience at the English center, then her Ought-to L2 Self. This aligns with the responses of the rest of the participants, including Mohammed.

When asked in the interview about her main source of motivation for English learning, Mariem also described aspects of her Ideal L2 Self: academic, personal, and professional opportunities. She envisions herself using English for future studies, using English in daily life, and eventually using English to broaden the types of global and local companies that she can work for. In the very near future, she plans to use English in order to live and study in an English-speaking context: "...And from two months from now I will use English a lot because I will be starting my master's degree this fall. So as you can see, I'll use English a lot in my education, travel, job, life, and so a lot." Thus, Mariem described aspects of her Ideal L2 Self, like using English for future education, career, travel, and social pursuits, to be the major drive behind her motivation for English learning at this time.

When asked questions about her Ought-to L2 Self during the interview, Mariem listed people who support her English learning and value learning English as well: "Yes, it's important for my family and friends to learn English, and they support me to improve my English level. But each of them has its own idea why English is important..." She continued to say that some people in her life think that learning English is a nice hobby and mix some English words into current vocabulary. Others believe it is more necessary for future success. She does not imply in her responses, though, that there are any

particular people or influences who have really pushed her to learn English. It seems that the interest is more personal to her.

In terms of the L2 Learning Experience at the English center, Mariem shared some of the same things that Mohammed shared in his interview. She commented on encountering new experiences at the English center as well as opportunities for personal growth and increased confidence through receiving support from other students and teachers:

My experience at the English center was so good and I love it. My favorite part was the conversation classes and the game that we did, the English game, because it gave me the opportunity to learn English with being stressing myself to do that. Also, it's helped me to improve my personality and not feeling shy or weird when I speak or try to speak English...So thanks to the conversation classes and other classes, I got the chance to express my feeling and to speak the language in front of people, my classmates, colleague and native speakers there.

Like Mohammed, Mariem's motivation is supported and impacted by the relational aspects of the environment at the English center. She is able to learn without stress and express her emotions to others through English, which adds to her interest in the learning process. It seems that the Ideal L2 Self and future goals are the main driver of motivation for Mariem, but the experience at the English center supports that image and provides tangible ways for her to move toward that self image.

### ***Interview Conclusions***

Interview responses from Mohammed and Mariem portray them to be driven by clear Ideal L2 Self images. Specifically, their responses to the motivation questions

demonstrate that they want to use English as a tool for more future opportunities and want to be perceived as competent English speakers. Mohammed hopes to become an excellent English speaker in order to inspire and provide more opportunities for future generations of students. Mariem is currently using English to pursue further education in an English-speaking context and hopes to use English as a way to increase job options within both local and global markets. This supports questionnaire data that indicates the Ideal L2 Self as the most impactful part of the L2MSS for this group of participants.

In terms of the Ought-to L2 Self, this is where the more obvious differences between the L2MSS of the two interviewees was displayed. Mohammed described experiencing negative reactions from family and friends to his pursuit of English learning. Mariem, on the other hand, felt more supported by family and friends in learning English. For both interviewees, though, it does not seem that they are experiencing any feelings of obligation or pressure from others to perform at a high level in English. From their descriptions, the drive to learn English seems primarily a personal motivation guided by their Ideal L2 selves. The questionnaire data found that the Ought-to L2 Self was the least impactful component of the L2MSS, and the descriptions provided by the interviewees portray this as well.

The L2 Learning Experience at the English center appears to support the motivation of both interviewees, but they each had slightly different perspectives on the learning environment at the center. Mariem received help with preparing for a rigorous English exam and was able to improve speaking confidence in conversation class. Mohammed focused mostly on the impact of the welcoming atmosphere and the benefit of the relationships that he built at the English center. Both participants do agree on the

uniqueness of the close community-like environment of the English center and the new experiences that increased their interest in the English learning process. This is similar to the results found in Fryer & Roger's (2018) study of Japanese EFL learners who had higher motivation for EFL learning after encountering new and positive learning experiences during study abroad in Australia. Overall, both interviews demonstrate that the L2 Learning Experience component of the L2MSS impacts motivation and supports their Ideal L2 selves, which is consistent with the results of the questionnaire.

The interviews of both Mohammed and Miriam highlight the emotionally supportive aspect of the English center's community. Both learners described their favorite parts of the English center by portraying the emotionally supportive aspects of the environment and how they supported their English learning and personal growth. Mohammed has experienced the English center's environment as a unique place to be himself and express himself in English to other students and teachers. Mariem described the English center as a place that has built her confidence as a person and English learner. Thus, interviewee answers suggest that the content and activities provided at the English center, while valuable, are not the only motivating aspects of the center. It seems that their motivation for EFL learning was supported by and fostered by the opportunities to express themselves more deeply and build relationships with others through English. These findings suggest that the relational aspect of the L2 Learning Experience at the English center plays an important, if not the most important, role in fostering EFL learner motivation there.

The motivating power of the emotional and relational aspects of the learning environment are mirrored in other studies of EFL learning motivation. Kikuchi (2019),

Islam (2019) and Pavelescu (2019) also found that certain social aspects of the learning environment such as teacher disposition, peer attitudes, and personal emotions all contribute to either increased or decreased motivation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the data gathered in this study in order to investigate the motivation of a group of Mauritanian EFL learners through answering this research question: Within a private English center context, how is the motivation of Mauritanian EFL learners impacted by their L2 selves and the L2 Learning Experience? In pursuing this research question, this study attempted to answer the following sub-questions:

1. Within learners' L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?
2. Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center's learning environment foster learner motivation?

The study utilized a Likert (1932) style motivation questionnaire in order to learn about the impact of each of the three components of participants' L2 Motivational Self Systems on motivation. This was followed by semi-structured interviews (Mackey & Gass, 2016) to zoom in on the specific L2MSS of two of the participants in order to gather a more detailed description of how learner motivation is impacted by certain aspects of the L2 Learning Experience at this private English center.

Questionnaire data implies that the Ideal L2 Self drives motivation the most, followed very closely by the L2 Learning Experience at the English center. The Ought-to L2 Self, as demonstrated by questionnaire responses, appears to impact motivation the least. Results are somewhat consistent with other L2MSS studies that also found the

Ought-to L2 Self to have the smallest impact on EFL learning motivation (Csize´r & Kormos, 2009; Martinović & Sorić, 2018). However, some studies have found that the L2 Learning Experience is the most predictive of motivation, as opposed to the Ideal L2 Self (Li, 2014; You, 2016). Since the margin between the Ideal L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience was quite small in this study, the results do not seem to contradict any previous L2MSS research findings in a significant way.

Interview data confirmed the findings suggested by the questionnaire, but it also provided more insight into the L2 Learning Experience component of the L2MSS. Even though the questionnaire did not reveal any particular aspects of the L2 Learning Experience that were more motivating than others, the interviews highlighted a few interesting aspects of the English center’s role in motivation. Interview responses from both participants suggest that the supportive community and relational nature of the learning experience at the English center plays an important role in fostering EFL learning motivation. Thus, it seems that the learning experiences serve to support and work with the Ideal L2 Self image of students to foster motivation.

The next chapter highlights what was learned in this study in relation to the research questions and then discusses the implications of the findings for the students, the staff at the English center, and for the broader language learning and research community. This is followed by limitations of the study and suggestions for areas of future research. Finally, I reflect on the capstone thesis process as well as my growth as a researcher and teacher throughout.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

This paper has reported a research study investigating Mauritanian EFL learners who have studied at a private English center in Nouakchott, Mauritania. Chapter one of this paper described my encounters with highly motivated EFL learners in Mauritania during a teaching assignment at the English center. Chapter two provided the theoretical background of EFL learning motivation and defined motivation within Dörnyei's (2009) framework of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). The L2MSS suggests that motivation for second language learning stems from three sources: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience. Chapter three outlined the study designed in order to investigate the L2MSS of this group of 20 Mauritanian EFL learners. In addition, the study aimed to investigate the impact of the environment of the private English center on learner motivation. Specifically, the study was designed to answer the following research question, along with two specific sub-questions: Within a private English center context, how is the motivation of Mauritanian EFL learners impacted by their L2 selves and the L2 Learning Experience? In pursuing this research question, this study attempted to answer the following sub-questions:

1. Within learners' L2 Motivational Self Systems, how does the impact of the L2 Self compare with the impact of the L2 Learning Experience?
2. Which aspects of the L2 Learning Experience within the English center's learning environment foster learner motivation?

Chapter four presented the data gathered from a motivation questionnaire and two semi-structured interviews. Data gathered via questionnaire provided an overall view of the L2MSS of the 20 participants, specifically which of the components seems to impact EFL learning motivation the most. Interviews provided a more detailed description of individual L2MSS for two students and then highlighted motivating components of the learning experience at the English center. This final chapter discusses and reflects on the findings from this mixed-methods motivation investigation. First, a summary of key findings from the questionnaires and interviews in light of the initial research question are presented. Then, the implications of those findings for the students and staff at the private English center and for the field of TESOL as a whole are discussed. Limitations of this study as well as areas of potential future research are observed. Finally, I as the researcher reflect on my growth throughout the research and writing process as a part of my capstone for the MA TESOL program at Hamline.

### **Review of Key Findings**

Results from the motivation questionnaire indicate that the Ideal L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience are the most motivating components of the L2MSS for this group of Mauritanian EFL learners. According to responses from the two interviews, the interviewees' Ideal L2 Self images include a very specific vision for the future role of English in their lives. For one interviewee, the reality of continuing education in an English speaking context and hope for extended job opportunities were the two major components of her Ideal L2 Self. For the other interviewee, the Ideal L2 Self included a vision of inspiring the next generation and helping those after him access more opportunities through learning English.

Although survey results indicate that the Ideal L2 Self drives motivation the most, the L2 Learning Experience may play an almost equally crucial role in supporting the motivation of learners. Meaningful activities seemed to help sustain motivation of the interviewees, but the course content was just a small portion of the L2 Learning Experience's impact on them. It was the emotionally supportive, community-oriented atmosphere at this private English center that was at the center of our conversation about the L2 Learning Experience. This is in agreement with other studies that found that emotions, peer interactions, and teacher attitudes can all positively or negatively affect motivation (Kikuchi, 2019; Islam, 2019; Pavelescu, 2019).

Data imply that the third component of the L2MSS, the Ought-to L2 Self, has much less of an impact on the motivation of the study participants. This is supported by the questionnaire and interview data. One interviewee mentioned that family or friends do not see the value or the possibility of him achieving proficiency in English; as a result, the English center is the place where he is encouraged by other students and teachers to continue working hard. For the other interviewee, family and friends have positive attitudes toward learning English, but it does not seem to be at the forefront of her mind when describing her motivation for learning. The smaller impact of the Ought-to L2 Self on EFL learning motivation could be a result of the still small presence of English in everyday Mauritanian life. The university-aged participants in this study did not disclose any pressure or obligation to become proficient in English. Rather, the influence of others on their motivation ranges from indifferent to supportive and encouraging. The next section will offer some implications the results have for learners, staff, and the research community as a whole.

## **Implications**

### ***For the Learners***

The results of this motivation investigation can provide some interesting insight for this group of Mauritanian EFL learners and potentially for other EFL learners in Mauritania and other similar contexts. Since this study found Ideal L2 Self to have the biggest influence on motivation for EFL learning for this group, having a specific future vision for being an English speaker may be important for maintaining motivation.

Constructing, verbalizing, and maintaining a clear vision for learning English and developing a detailed ideal future self may sustain motivation for learning, even if very few people in the broader community see its value. Mohammed vocalized this briefly during his interview while describing why others lost motivation for learning English:

So I got one friend who are really excited to just learn English, but after he decided to quit, because I think he had no reason. So when you're doing something without reason, you will end up quitting nothing, because you don't want to do something without reason.

Here, Mohammed describes a friend who may have decided to quit learning because he had no specific reason to study English. Although this friend began his studies with a lot of interest, Mohammed attributes the end of this friend's English learning to a lack of purpose for English.

In addition to making sure students have a clear vision for their English-speaking selves in the future, participating in a positive, engaging, English-learning community may help to support, or even inspire, a clear vision that sustains motivation. Engaging in a community like this private English center provides opportunities to build relationships

so that students can express themselves in ways they may not have been able to outside of the English center. Overall, results from this investigation highlight the importance of having a strong sense of identity as an English speaker in the future and the motivating benefits of participating in a supportive, rich learning experience at an English center or school.

### ***For the Instructors and Staff***

Staff at this particular English center will hopefully find the results of this study encouraging and affirming. Staff can appreciate that the English center's relational atmosphere supports students' Ideal L2 Self images and fosters motivation. In the future, they may be even more intentional about maintaining the relational environment by incorporating social-emotional awareness and relationship-building into the curriculum at the English center on a regular basis. In addition, this investigation will potentially provide direction as the staff approach programming and curriculum development in the future. One thing that may not be a current priority is cultivating students' Ideal L2 selves. Staff could do this by helping students verbalize their visions of themselves as English speakers in the future as well as helping them set specific goals that will move them toward that vision.

### ***For the TESOL Community***

This investigation of EFL motivation extends the tradition of analyzing EFL learner motivation through the lens of Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System. This study furthered the investigation of EFL motivation by applying the L2MSS to a new EFL context: a private English center in Mauritania. In addition, this study provided some new insight about the L2 Learning Experience component of the L2MSS. It seems

that the relational aspect of the learning experience may impact motivation just as much, if not more, than the content and learning activities.

Overall, the results align with studies in other EFL contexts that found that the Ought-to L2 Self seems to affect motivation the least and that the Ideal L2 Self and L2 Learning Experience affect motivation the most (Csize' r & Kormos, 2009; Martinović & Sorić, 2018; Li, 2014; You, 2016). In addition, the data also highlights some unique aspects of the L2 Learning Experience in the private English center context that support the Ideal L2 Self in a valuable way. This is consistent with other studies that found social and emotional aspects of the L2 Learning Experience like peer attitudes and teacher interactions to have a significant impact on motivation (Kikuchi, 2019; Islam, 2019; Pavelescu, 2019). The next section presents some limitations of this mixed-methods study, particularly related to the size of the study and the logistics of the data collection process.

### **Limitations**

At the beginning of 2020, the world was introduced to a contagious strain of coronavirus, named Covid-19. During this period of time, in order to prevent the spread of the virus, it was necessary to physically isolate or distance from others and wear a face mask. As a result, a majority of businesses were closed indefinitely. Work and school began to take place from home, and local and international travel restrictions were put in place. At the time of data collection for this study, May and June 2021, the vaccination process was underway in many countries, but protecting self and others from the virus was still a priority. Although many businesses and schools were beginning to open again

to the public, several countries maintained travel restrictions and stay-at-home orders in an attempt to prevent new outbreaks.

Initially, data was to be gathered by the researcher in person in Mauritania. During the Covid-19 pandemic, traveling to Mauritania from the United States was not feasible. Thus, data was gathered from a distance with help from a colleague at the English center. Although many logistical problems were anticipated and avoided, gathering data in Mauritania from the United States did result in difficulty. At first, it was challenging to get enough students at the center to participate in the questionnaire. An adequate response rate was only achieved after some follow-up from the colleague at the English center. This may have been due to lower attendance rate at the center during the pandemic or as a result of Ramadan or summer vacation.

A second unanticipated obstacle was the need for phone credit. Participants needed to ensure they had enough credit on their phones so that they could complete the digital questionnaire and WhatsApp interview. Outside of the English center and some other larger businesses, access to free wifi is limited. Thus, in order to access the online questionnaire and send WhatsApp audio messages, several participants needed to purchase data before they could be a part of the research. Not only did this issue cause a delay in data collection, but more significantly, it may have prevented some potential participants from completing the questionnaire.

It may have been more effective to have interested students complete the questionnaire all at once, immediately after the invitation to participate. This way, the researcher would not need to rely on or wait for students to initiate their own follow-up in order to access the questionnaire. In addition, participants could have utilized the free

wifi from the English center, avoiding the obstacle of needing to purchase phone credit. Thus, an obvious first limitation of this study was the challenge of data collection which, due to taking place during the global Covid-19 pandemic, occurred through another person at a distance.

As a result of the limitations imposed by Covid-19, this study was small scale. Only 20 students completed the motivation questionnaire. Having more questionnaire participants would have provided a more encompassing view of the L2MSS for the students at the English center. In addition, it is difficult to generalize information gathered from two interviews to the whole population of learners at the center. With more time and proximity to this group of students, a focus group might have been more effective in terms of highlighting motivating components of the English center's learning environment. Although the modified data collection process led to the limitation of a smaller group of questionnaire participants, this investigation modeled a possible way to gather data asynchronously from across the world. The next section suggests further research ideas in the area of EFL motivation through the lens of the L2MSS.

### **Areas for Further Research**

One possibility for further research would be to zoom in further on this particular English center in Mauritania. It might be interesting to investigate the relationship between Ideal L2 Self and L2 Learning Experience with this group of learners. A future investigation could focus on how the Ideal L2 Self supports the L2 Learning Experience and vice versa. It may also be meaningful to investigate the L2 Learning Experience within this English center on its own. Focus groups or group interviews about the relational aspects of the English center could provide a lot more insight into the specific

aspects of the center that support motivation. This could allow for clearer direction for the staff who plan and program the events and activities and facilitate conversations and interactions within the center. Finally, it may also be enlightening to change the perspective and include, or solely focus on, the teachers' view of student motivation.

This type of study could also be expanded to include a larger group of Mauritanian EFL learners. One possibility would be to survey Mauritanian EFL learners of all ages in public schools, international schools, public universities, private institutions, and other private English centers in the country. Including a larger number of English learners from contexts across the country would provide a more robust view of the L2MSS of Mauritanian EFL learners as a whole. In addition, the diversity of L2 Learning Experiences would hopefully highlight more obvious parts of the learning experience that are motivating.

Another option for further research could be to apply this type of investigation to another private English center in a different city or country. It would be interesting to observe any similarities or differences in the motivation of EFL learners in places like Morocco, Senegal, or even Mali. Whether expanding the study to include more Mauritanian students or to include students from neighboring countries, much insight could be gained from studying the L2 Learning Experience further.

### **Reflection**

After teaching two years in Mauritania, I returned with many more questions than answers. My students seemed to defy numerous obstacles in pursuit of English learning, and I was eager to find out how and why they did it. When I chose this topic of motivation for EFL learning, my primary goal was to provide students and staff at the

English center an opportunity for reflection and insight into students' motivation. I hoped that these reflections would reveal just how impactful students' self images and learning experiences can be to their drive to learn English. In addition, I wanted to affirm the English center's teaching staff and encourage them in their efforts to facilitate a deep sense of community for their learners. In the future, I expect this English Center, this unique learning experience, to continue to be a place where students are supported not just academically and professionally, but personally as well--for the good of themselves and their community.

## REFERENCES

- Al-Hoorie, A. (2018). The L2 motivational self system: A meta-analysis. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 8(4), 721-754.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2018.8.4.2>
- Al-Shehri, A. (2009). Motivation and vision: The relation between the ideal L2 self, imagination and visual style. In Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, D. E. (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 164-171). Multilingual Matters.
- Boo, Z., Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). L2 motivation research 2005-2014: Understanding a publication surge and a changing landscape. *System*, 55, 145-157.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2015.10.006>
- Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D.M., & Snow, M.A. (2014) *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4th ed.). National Geographic Learning.
- Clement, R., Macintyre, P., & Mackinnon, S. (2009). The baby, the bathwater, and the future of language learning motivation research. In Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, D. E. (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 43-65). Multilingual Matters.
- Csizér, K., & Kormos, J. (2009). Learning experiences, selves and motivated learning behaviour: A comparative analysis of structural models for Hungarian secondary and university learners of English. In Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, D. E. (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 98–119). Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z.(2009). The L2 motivational self system. In Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, D. E. (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp.9-42). Multilingual Matters.

- Dörnyei, Z. (2019). Towards a better understanding of the L2 learning experience, the cinderella of the L2 motivational self system (report). *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 9(1), 19-30. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2019.9.1.2>
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, D. E. (2009). Motivation, language identities and the L2 self: A theoretical overview. In Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, D. E. (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp.1-8). Multilingual Matters.
- Fryer, M., & Roger, P. (2018). Transformations in the L2 self: Changing motivation in a study abroad context. *System*, 78, 159-172.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.08.005>
- Higgins, E. T. (1987). Self-discrepancy: A theory relating self and affect. *Psychological Review*, 94(3), 319–340.  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.hamline.edu/10.1037/0033-295X.94.3.319>
- Islam, M. (2019). Learning experiences and motivation of undergraduate students in Pakistani efl classrooms: A qualitative study. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 41(1), 221-234.
- Kanno & Norton, B. (2003). Imagined communities and educational possibilities: Introduction. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 2(4), 241-249.  
[https://doi:10.1207/S15327701JLIE0204\\_1](https://doi:10.1207/S15327701JLIE0204_1).
- Kikuchi, K. (2019). Motivation and demotivation over two years: A case study of English language learners in Japan. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 9(1), 157-175. <https://dx.doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2019.9.1.7>

- Li, Q. (2014). Differences in the motivation of Chinese learners of English in a foreign and second language context. *System*, 42(1), 451-461.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SYSTEM.2014.01.011>
- Likert, R. (1932). A technique for the measurement of attitudes. *Archives of Psychology*, 140, 1-55.
- Mackey, A. & Gass, S.M. (2016) *Second language research: Methodology and design* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954-969.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954>
- Martinović, A., & Sorić, I. (2018). The L2 motivational self system, L2 interest, and L2 anxiety: A study of motivation and gender differences in the Croatian context. *Explorations in English Language and Linguistics*, 6(1), 37-56.  
<https://doi.org/10.2478/exell-2019-0005>
- Mckay, S. (2018). English as an international language: What it is and what it means for pedagogy. *RELC Journal*, 49(1), 9-23.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688217738817>
- Moskovsky, C., Assulaimani, T., Racheva, S., & Harkins, J. (2016). The L2 motivational self system and L2 achievement: A study of Saudi efl learners. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100(3), 641-654. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12340>
- Pavelescu, L. M. (2019). Motivation and emotion in the efl learning experience of Romanian adolescent students: Two contrasting cases. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 9(1), 55-82.  
<https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2019.9.1.4>

- Pavlenko, A. & Norton, B. (2007). Imagined communities, identity, and English language learning. In Cummins, J. & Davison, C. (Eds.), *International Handbook of English Language Teaching* (pp. 669-680). Springer US.
- Ryan, S. (2006). Language learning motivation within the context of globalisation: An l2 self within an imagined global community. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 3(1), 23-45. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15427595cils0301\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15427595cils0301_2)
- Ryan, S. (2009). Self and identity in l2 motivation in Japan: The ideal l2 self and Japanese learners of English. In Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, D. E. (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the l2 self* (pp. 120-143). Multilingual Matters.
- Sung, C. (2013). Learning English as an l2 in the global context: Changing English, changing motivation. *Changing English*, 20(4), 377-387.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1358684X.2013.855564>
- Taguchi, T., Magid, M., & Papi, M. (2009). The l2 motivational self system among Japanese, Chinese and Iranian learners of English: A comparative study. In Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, D. E. (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the l2 self* (pp. 66–97). Multilingual Matters.
- You, C. (2016). Language learning motivation in China: Results of a large-scale stratified survey. *Applied Linguistics*, 37(4), 495-519.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amu046>

APPENDIX A  
Questionnaire

(Note: The actual name of **the center** appeared on participants' copies.)

**Ideal L2 Self Items**

1. *I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends, classmates, or colleagues.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

2. *The things I want to do in the future require me to use English.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

3. *I imagine myself as someone who is able to speak English.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

**Ought-to L2 Self Items**

4. *It will have a negative impact on my life if I don't learn English.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

5. *Learning English is necessary because my family and friends think it is important.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

6. *Studying English is important to me because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak English.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

**L2 Learning Experience Items**

7. *I like the atmosphere of my English classes at **the center**.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

8. *I always look forward to seeing my friends and teachers at **the center**.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

9. *The activities and lessons at **the center** are interesting to me.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

### Motivation Items

10. *I am prepared to use a lot of effort to learn English.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

11. *I would like to spend lots of time studying English.*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

### Demographic Items

1. *I am*

Male	Female
------	--------

2. *What is your first language?*

3. *How long have you been studying English?*

Less than 1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	More than 6 years
------------------	--------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	-------------------

4. *I study English at another institution*

Yes	No
-----	----

## APPENDIX B

**Semi-Structured Interview Guiding Questions**

(Note: The actual name of **the center** was used during the interviews.)

1. When did you first start learning English? What was your learning like?
2. How long have you been going *to the English center*? How often do you participate in classes there?
3. Why did you choose to learn English and not another language?
4. Do you work hard to learn English? Why? Why not?
5. Do other people expect you to learn English? Who? Why?
6. What do you like about learning English at *the center*?
7. Does *the center* help you work hard to learn English? How?
8. How can you see yourself using English in the future?