

**Second Language Identity of
Sri Lankan University Undergraduates:
A Study Based on Tamil Medium Students of
University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka**

K. L. Ramanan

Abstract

Students who secure admission to the universities in Sri Lanka do not pay attention on learning English as a Second Language (L2) when they sit for their qualifying examination for the universities. Once they enter the university they get different perceptions of the world including that of the importance of English. This study investigates the perceptions on the motivation levels and the bicultural identity of the freshmen at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. The perceptions of the learners are investigated under three different categories; Ideal L2 Self, Ought L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience. This endeavour studies the learners' L2 selves and the factors that impact the L2 selves. A questionnaire has been administered to gather data from the informants and the results reveal the factors contributing to the L2 identity construct of the particular Tamil medium learners. The collected data has been analyzed based on the factors for the motivating capacity of the Ideal and Ought Selves which would to hinder or enhance the motivational impacts.

Key words: L2 Identity, L2 self, Ideal L2 self, Ought L2 self, Feared-self, Tamil medium, Sri Lankan Universities

1. Introduction

Discourses on identity prove that a person does not have a single identity but multiple faceted identities. This includes the identity related to the languages one speaks or wants to use. In this manner, most of the Sri Lankans have at least a bicultural identity; one is related to their mother tongue mainly Sinhala or Tamil or Malay, the other is related to English; the L2 Sri

Lankans want to acquire. Though there are integrative motives in having these two identities, there are instrumental and executive motivations that drive the learners further in acquiring the L2.

As the presence of globalization is felt in every corner of Sri Lanka, we could assume that it provides sufficient motivation, if not enough opportunities, for the Sri Lankan learners to become fluent users of English as a second language. As adults, the learners gaining admission to the universities seem to be enthusiastic in learning English for their future. It would be useful to recognize how the students, who get admission to the universities, perceive or imagine themselves as users of English. The motivation of the students could be studied by shedding light on what makes up the L2 ‘ideal self’ and ‘ought self’. The undergraduates who enter the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna are from several districts of the country. As the course is in Tamil medium, students come from districts where Tamil speaking people are the majority; Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaithivu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trinco, Batticaloa, Ampara, Puttalam, Nuwaraeliya and other Tamil speaking areas of other districts. When they come to the university they are mostly taught by the experienced teachers of English Language Teaching Centre of the university. The learning experiences the teachers give the learners also play an important role in defining the motivation of a student towards learning the L2. Even though the desire of a student to become a fluent speaker of English (ideal L2 self) is at a very high level, poor impact that the learning experience creates may hinder the process of acquiring English as an L2.

Fernando (2005) reported a declining trend in the attendance to the English classes at Sri Lankan universities. All the students know that a better knowledge of English would guarantee them a better professional life. This instrumental motivation does not seem to make them attend all the English classes regularly. This does not mean that all the students lack motivation. The students might sustain their instrumental motives since these are the driving forces of the students’ learning, but the real learning experience (executive motives) may make them lose their interest in attending the classes.

2. Informants of the Study

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An elaborate study is required to have a clear perception of the motivation of the students who get admission to the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna. The first year students' in the first semester who gained admission to the Arts Faculty in the academic year 2015 were the informants of this study. There were thirty-three students; 19 females and 14 males in a particular mixed ability learning group. All of them are Sri Lankan Tamils except one who is an Indian Descendant Tamil. They belong to the age group of 20 - 23 years, and they are from Jaffna, Mullaithivu, Trinco, Puttalam and Nuwaraeliya. According to an information from the class teacher, all of them are first generation university students and English seems to be a foreign language for them as they never had opportunities to use it outside their school English class and some did not even have English teachers in their schools. Data for the study were collected by employing a questionnaire using questions adapted from Brander (2013) and Wijeratne (2015).

3. Literature Review on the L2 Motivational Self system

Dornyei's (2009) contribution to the L2 Motivational Research evolved from two main sources of L2 Motivation Research: Theoretical advances in Psychology and Developments within L2 Motivations research. This was due to his dissatisfaction with the concept of integrativeness or integrative motivation as proposed by Gardner (1972) (Dornyei's 2009, p.22). As the integrative model of motivation grew more problematic and since globalization started dominating the world, World English evolved as an International Language. Dornyei perceived this global context where the schools taught English as a foreign language without any direct contact with its "native/ fluent" speakers, the 'integrative' model did not have an obvious meaning. Due to this reason and other empirical findings, Gardner's integrativeness model was challenged by many scholars. In the present study at the Jaffna University also, we find that the learners show less interest in integrative motives of ideal L2 self than the instrumental motives, as there is a lack of opportunities for associating with the L2 community.

Arnett (2002) argued that people have the desire to have a bicultural identity in the new globalized world order. The bicultural identity of a person is associated with his /her local culture

as well as with the international mainstream where English is the dominant language which the learners would like to learn.

As there were demands to re-conceptualize L2 motivation due to empirical findings and theoretical considerations (Ushioda & Dornyei (2009)) re-conceptualized L2 motivation as part of the learner's self-system (p.10). Based on the empirical data they proposed that we could recognize the future self-guides, namely the ideal and ought selves, are the central concerns of the system (Ushioda & Dornyei, 2009, p.26).

Ushioda & Dornyei (2009) proposed that there should be a third dimension of the L2 self namely the 'impact of the classroom learning environment', other than the two future self-guides, Based on this stance, he proposed that the L2 Motivational self-system was made up of the following

1. Ideal L2 Self (Integrative and internalized instrumental motives)

Ideal L2 Self is an L2 specific identity of one's bicultural identity of one's ideal self. L2 ideal self is a powerful motivating factor for a person, who desires to use an L2, and to learn that L2. Traditional integrative and instrumental motives will help in reducing the discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self of the learner. Ushioda & Dornyei (2009) refer to the representation of the attributes that someone would ideally like to possess (i.e. a representation of personal hopes, aspirations or wishes)(p.4).

2. Ought L2 Self (Extrinsic types of instrumental motives)

Ought L2 self denotes the attributes one thinks one should possess in order to meet his/her expectations or to avoid the negative outcomes. Ushioda & Dornyei (2009) reported

“ought self refers to the representation of attributes that one believes one ought to possess (i.e. representation of someone else's sense of duties, obligations or moral responsibilities) and which therefore may bear little resemblance to one's own desires or wishes.”(p.13)

3. L2 Learning Experience (executive motives of learning environment)

L2 Learning experience is concerned with the ‘executive motives’ related to the immediate learning environment and experience which include the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, and etc.

In the first part of the same article Ushioda & Dornyei (2009) have identified the conditions for the motivating capacity of the ideal and ought selves which are considered to hinder or enhance the motivational impact: 1. Availability of an elaborate future image, 2. Perceived plausibility, 3. Harmony between the ideal and ought selves, 4. Necessary activation or priming, 5. Accompanying procedural strategies and 6. The offspring impact of a feared self (pp. 18-22). The current study covers only the availability of an elaborate future image, harmony between the ideal and ought selves and the offspring impact of a feared self.

04. Analysis of Data

4.1. Level of Motivation

The Line chart below (figure 1) shows the levels and different types of L2 self of each of the learners.

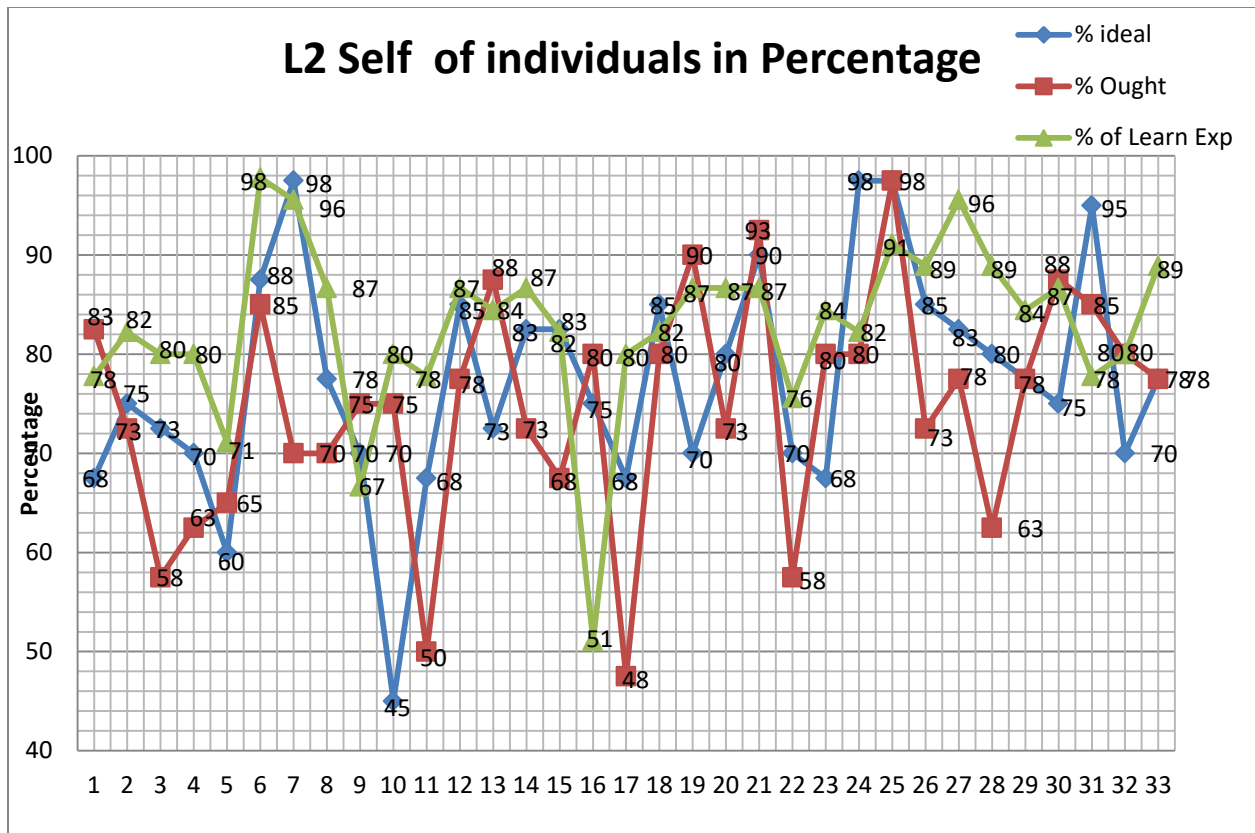


Figure 1: Types of L2 Self of Informants in Percentage

Minimum levels of motivation in the class were just below 51.1 %, with 45 % for the Ideal self, 47.5 % percent for Ought Self and the Learning Experience at 51.1 %. Similarly the maximum levels of motivation were at appreciably high levels at 97.5 % for all the three types of the L2 selves.

The average overall level of the L2 selves, which includes the Ideal, Ought Selves and Learning Experience, is shown by the below-given bar graph (figure 2). All the students displayed a satisfactory average level of above 65%. The graph shown below illustrates how each student expressed his or her L2 selves; their scores have been transformed to a value of percentage of the overall-average level made up by all three types of the L2 self.

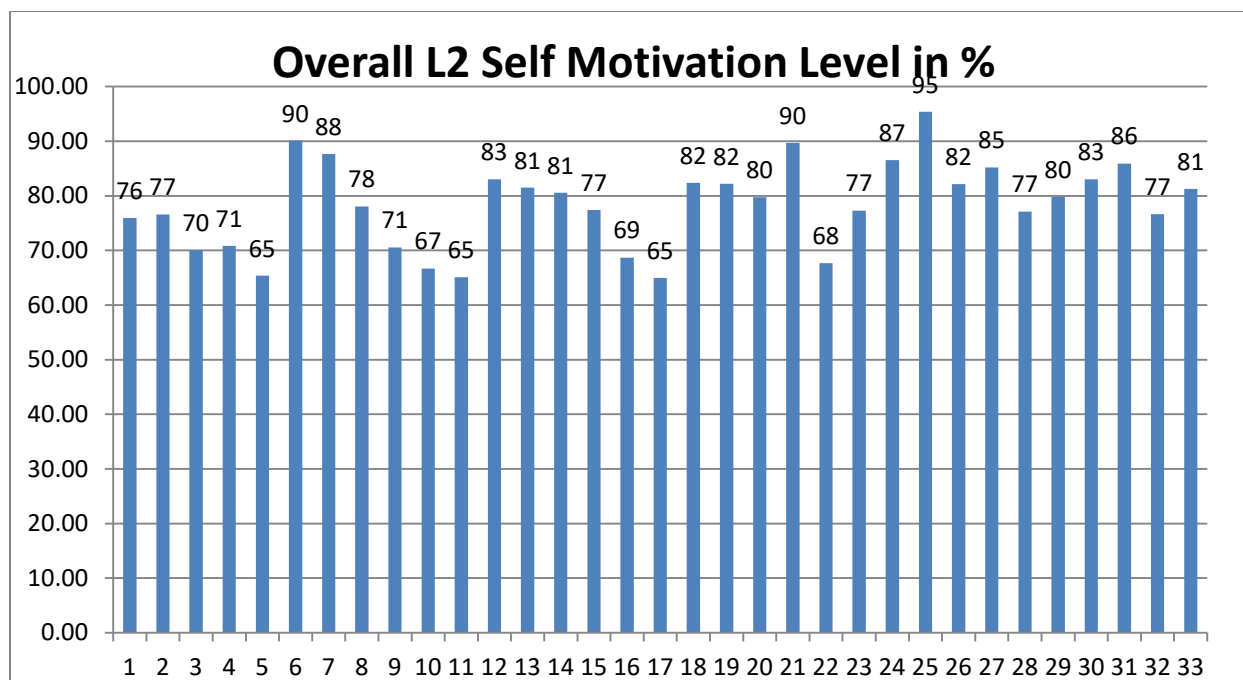


Figure 2 Overall L2 Motivation Level of each Individual in Percentage

4.2. Strength of Each Type of L2 Self

The ideal selves can be seen as the majority of the individuals' score in percentage is ranging from 45%-97.5% and the average was 77.42%. Majority of the students had an ideal-self strength ranging from 70% to 97.5%.

The strength of Ought Self of teach learner spanned from 47.5% to 97.5% and had an average of 74.73%. Majority of the students (25 persons) had the 'Ought Self' strength ranging from 70% - 97.5%

The strength of Learning Experience is much higher than the other two selves; it ranged from 51.1% to 97.78%.

Therefore, the learning experience of the students is the strongest contributor to the overall L2 self of this set of learners.

4.3. Overall Motivation Level of the Class

As shown in the bar chart below (figure 3), the majority of the students' overall motivation level ranged mainly from 71% to 91%.

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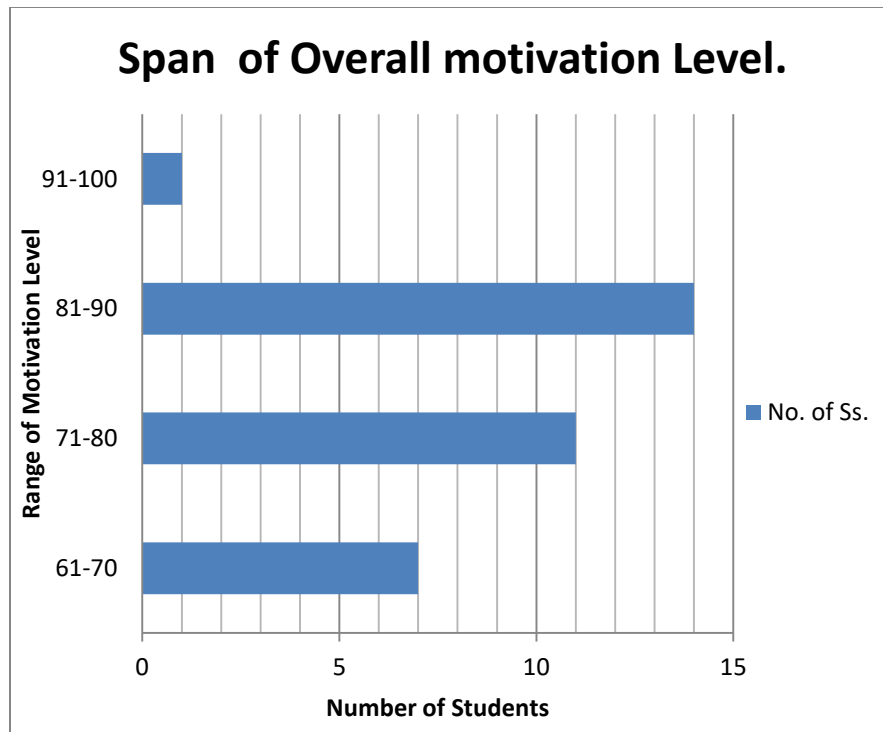


Figure 3. Span of Overall Motivation Levels

4.4. Availability of the Elaborate Future Image

The ideal self of the students is measured by three different types of questions; their imagined future association with an L2 society (integrative motive), their imagined future career's demands for L2 usage (instrumental motives) and pressure from the peers and parents.

The integrative motives seem to be at a comparatively lower level ranging from 70.9% to 72.1%. Bars numbered 1-3 in the bar chart below (Figure 4) corresponding to the questions no 6-8 of the questionnaire, represent the vividness of the mental imagery of their future (ideal self) where they could associate themselves with the L2 community. This seems comparatively less vivid than their instrumental motives which are represented by the bars numbered 4-6 in the chart corresponding to the questions numbered 9 to 11 in the questionnaire. These instrumental motives, including the students' imagination on using English for their entertainment purpose and for social requirements, are just above 80%.

Another interesting point to note is that the peer and parent- pressure is the highest influencing factor in the ideal self with 89.7%. Yet the learners are less confident to imagine that they could use English only for their Higher Education in English medium. This fear may be due to their failure or bad performance in English language learning environments in their schools days.

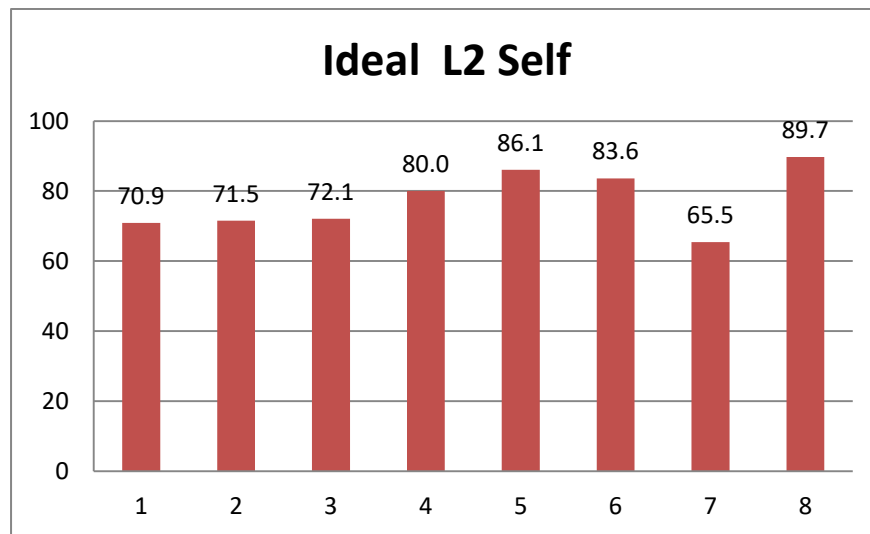


Figure 4: Ideal L2 Self

4.5. Harmony between the Ideal and Ought Selves

There are different types of pressures for a learner to learn an L2. They may have been created by peer group norms, family expectations and other normative pressures. The overall score of the whole group is given in the column chart (figure 5). Each column represents a factor of the Ought L2 Self.

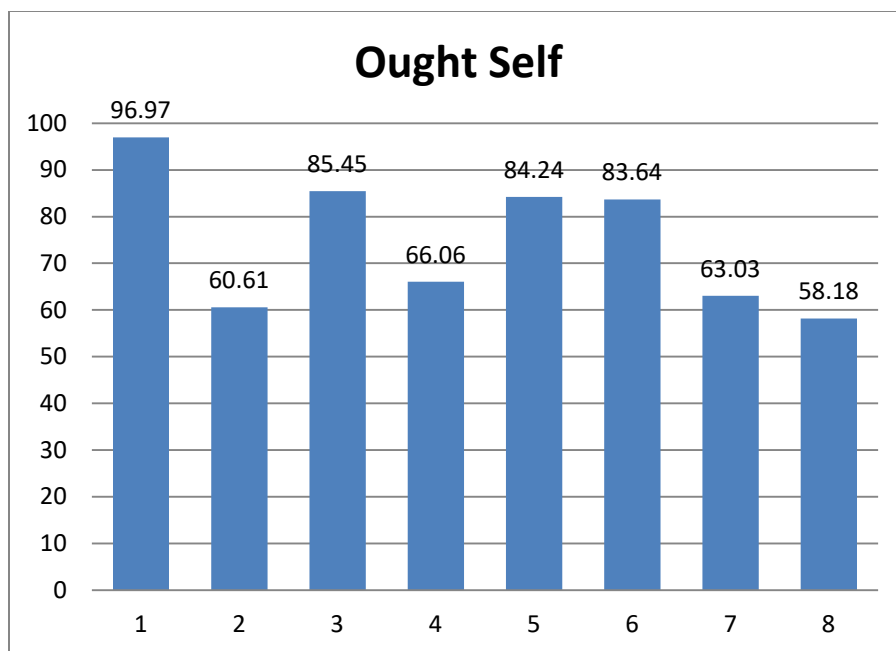


Figure 5 Ought Self

Each column in the above chart represents the eight questions asked in the sub section titled as Ought Self in the questionnaire. They relate to the themes of importance for life, people’s expectation, parents’ belief, socially respected people expecting the student to know English, approval of peers/teachers/family / boss, fear of negative impact on one’s life if he or she doesn’t learn English, respect from others, and fear of letting other people down by not knowing English respectively.

The personal stance of ideal L2 self of the particular group of students is shown by column number 1 in the above column chart. At the personal level, the students recognize that the usage of English is important. This was at the maximum level with 96.97%. But at the social level, it seems to be less.

Social pressure, depicted by columns numbered 2, 5 and 7 in the above column-chart, corresponding to the questions numbered 15, 17 and 20, reflect that these particular set of students do think that the compulsion given by certain members of the society is slightly lesser than the parents’ pressure (85.45 %) as indicated by column number 3 or the workplace pressure (at 84.24%) (as shown by column number 5).

4.6 The Offspring Impact of the Feared Self

There are two factors of the feared selves, which this particular set of learners might try to avoid. There is a significant difference shown by the students; when it comes to personal negative effects of not learning English, the students showed that they were aware of the fact (the score is 83.64%; column 6 of figure 5), and when it comes to the same feared self with regard to social aspect of letting others down, they scored just 63.03% (column number 7). From this, we could understand that the learners' ought self is more characterized by personal identity than the social identity. This set of students depicts a clash between the personal identity and the social identity.

As described in 4.4, the students show less interest in having integrative motives of associating with the society in their ideal L2 views. Similarly, they depict that their personal concerns are more powerful than the social norms in creating their Ought Self. Therefore, we could conclude that there is a harmony between the Ideal and Ought L2 selves of the learners.

5. Conclusion

Though the overall average level of motivation of the whole student group was very high, they displayed a slightly higher learning experience than their imagination for the Ideal L2 Selves and the Ought Selves; this may be due to the better English learning experiences given at the university level when compared to their learning experience at the school. This set of Tamil medium students shows a small level of resistance to the integrative motives, but shows more concerns about their instrumental and executive motives of the L2 selves. The ideal L2 integrative motives were hindered by their place of origin (all of them are from Jaffna except four) where they have had no chance of seeing or speaking to the L2 community, outside their classes.

Though the students show a very high average of overall motivation level for the whole group (78.34%), every component of the L2 self was different. The Ideal L2 Self had three types of motives: 1. the integrative motive, with the view of associating with an English speaking community, had a comparatively lower level, 2. the instrumental motives like using English for

their professional career was better among these students and 3. the personal level feared-self was the most influential factor. Therefore, we could conclude that the students have an elaborate ideal of their future self and are aware of the factors that demand their usage of English. Most importantly, there is a harmony between the Ideal and Ought L2 selves of the learners. The strongest type of the L2 self was there in relation to their executive motives as seen in their learning experiences.

The availability of elaborate imaging of the self, the harmony between the Ideal and Ought Selves and the offspring impact of a feared- self have contributed very much for the L2 selves of this set of students from the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Dear Students,

This is a survey conducted to find out English language learner beliefs and motivation. Please fill the questionnaire given below.

Remember there is no right or wrong answer, the information you give will only be used for research purposes and strict confidentiality will be maintained. Therefore please be honest in your answers and try to answer as accurately as possible.

This questionnaire is not related in any way to your grade in the class.

Thank you for very much for your help

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K.L.Ramanan.

The questions have been created based on Brander (2013) and Wijeratne (2015).

INSTRUCTIONS: Write your answers or underline the given options that best describes you.

Part I

- 1. Faculty:
- 2. Age:
- 3. Gender:
- 4. Hometown/ District:

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5. Ethnicity:

Part II

Ideal L2 self

Use the scale below to answer the questions. If you think the statement is very true of you, use the following scales

1. Strongly disagree. 2. Disagree 3. Not sure. 4. Agree. 5. Strongly agree.

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 6. I can imagine myself living abroad/ visiting a foreign country and having a discussion in English * | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. I can imagine a situation where I speak English with foreigners | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. I imagine myself as someone who is able to communicate well in English for my day to day activities. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. I can imagine that I would enjoy English movies, TV channels and other entertainment programmes. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. The things I want to do in my society in the future require me to use English . | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. I can imagine myself studying in a university where all my courses are taught in English | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. I can imagine that my parents, and friends would be proud of me for my English. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

'Ought L2 self'

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 14. I study English because I think it's important for my life. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15 Learning English is necessary because people surrounding me expect me to do so. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. My parents believe that I must study English to become an educated person. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. I consider learning English to be important because the people I respect require me to know it. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. Studying English is important to me in order to gain the approval of my peers/teachers/family / boss. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

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19. It will have a negative impact on my life if I don't learn English 1 2 3 4 5
20. Studying English is important to me because other people will respect me
if I have a knowledge of English. 1 2 3 4 5
21. If I fail to learn English I will be letting other people down 1 2 3 4 5

L2 Learning Experience

22. Getting a good grade in the English class is the most satisfying thing for me. 1 2 3 4 5
23. I am very much attracted by the contents of the English course 1 2 3 4 5
24. I like the manner of teaching of the English Teacher 1 2 3 4 5
25. My English teacher gives encouraging remarks to my works in the class 1 2 3 4 5
26. I will be able to use what I learn in the English class in other courses 1 2 3 4 5
27. If I try hard enough, then I will understand the contents of the
other course materials in English 1 2 3 4 5
28. I want to do well in this class because it is important to show my ability to
my family, friends, employer or others 1 2 3 4 5
29. My friends in the class would like to collaborate with me and
we enjoy learning together 1 2 3 4 5
30. I feel happy and proud whenever I perform better in the class 1 2 3 4 5

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