

Exploring the Link Between the L2 Motivational Self-System and Extensive Reading: Why Do Learners Continue to Engage?

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

extensive reading;
L2 motivational self-system;
sustained motivation;
willingness to read

Article history:

Received 2024-06-28

Revised 2024-10-02

Accepted 2024-12-06

ABSTRACT

Sustained motivation in extensive reading (ER) is essential for fostering long-term reading habits. The L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS)—comprising the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience—provides a framework for understanding motivation in second-language learning contexts. However, the specific role of L2MSS in motivating learners to persist in ER remains underexplored. This explanatory sequential mixed-method study investigated the relationship between L2MSS components and students' willingness to continue ER. Data were collected from 64 English department students at a university in Malang, Indonesia, through quantitative surveys followed by qualitative interviews to contextualize the findings. The quantitative analysis revealed that the ideal L2 self was the strongest predictor of students' willingness to engage in ER. The ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience were found to have a lesser but still notable impact. Qualitative findings indicated that students recognized the value of ER and identified supportive environments, such as positive teacher and peer interactions, as key facilitators of their engagement. The results underscore the primacy of the ideal L2 self in sustaining motivation for ER, while the acknowledgment of ER's benefits and a conducive learning environment also played supportive roles. These findings suggest that educators should emphasize the intrinsic value of ER and cultivate an encouraging environment to strengthen students' self-commitment. The study highlights the importance of fostering the ideal L2 self and promoting supportive ER environments. Educators should actively advocate the value of ER to students and their families to enhance long-term engagement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Extensive reading (ER) has long been recognized as a highly effective method for language acquisition through engaging and enjoyable reading activities. Previous studies reported that ER

improves vocabulary (Boutorwick, Macalister, & Elgort, 2019), grammar (Lee, Schallert, & Kim, 2015), cultural knowledge (Lekawael & Ferdinandus, 2021), learning autonomy (Chanthap & Wasanasomsithi, 2019), reading comprehension (Yang, Chu, & Tseng, 2021), reading fluency (Ateek, 2021), reading habit (Chen, 2018), and reading motivation (Lake, 2014). Despite its benefits in improving reading motivation, numerous studies highlighted the challenges in enhancing motivation in the EFL university context. For instance, in Arab, students had little interest in ER (Al Damen, 2018), because they believed ER was only an academic course to pass (Erguvan, 2016). The phenomena possibly have been attributed to an absence of reading culture or an unsupportive reading environment. Moreover, one study in Japan revealed the unwillingness of students to continue ER (Hagley, 2017). This disappointing phenomenon potentially emerged from the institutions' tendency to emphasize enhancing proficiency test scores (i.e., TOEIC). As a result, the students were not focusing on ER but on other objectives. Those studies indicated that sustaining reading motivation is one of the most challenging tasks (Tanaka, 2015). Furthermore, establishing an ER program does not guarantee that students have sustained motivation. Hence, to address the issue of sustained reading motivation, the L2 motivational self-system (L2MSS) can potentially be utilized (Dörnyei, 2009) to understand the justification behind the learners' actions.

The ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience are the three facets of L2MSS. The desire to learn a language is embodied by the ideal L2 self. Markus & Nurius's (1986) possible-selves theory and Higgins's (1987) self-discrepancy theory are the foundations of the ideal L2 self. The ideal L2 self explains why individuals should pursue L2 learning by envisioning themselves in the future. In the context of ER, the ideal L2 self defines why students engage in ER due to their idealism, hopes, or desires. Meanwhile, the ought-to L2 self portrays the outside forces that encourage L2 learning. Higgins's (1987) self-discrepancy theory is a further avenue of inspiration for the ought-to L2 self. The ought-to L2 self drives students' L2 learning concerning external motives such as obligations and responsibilities. In terms of ER, the ought-to L2 self stands for students engaging in ER to fulfill their responsibilities. Moreover, the L2 learning experiences reflect the language learning situation, including the impact of teachers, friends, and successful or unsuccessful experiences in L2 learning (Dörnyei, 2019).

Most studies of ER focus on the implementation (Anandari & Iswandari, 2019; Delfi & Yamat, 2017; Ferdila, 2014; Yanto, Saefullah, & Kwary, 2020; Yulia, 2018), effectiveness (Arai, 2019; Dzulfikri & Saukah, 2017; Edy, 2014), benefits (Mardiyana, Setyarini, & Amalia, 2021), and challenges (Firda, Widiati, Laksmi, & Hayati, 2018; Wulyani, Widiati, & Khoiri, 2022). Furthermore, it is necessary to expose the sustained motivation of ER beyond the classroom (Chien & Yu, 2015; Takahashi & Umino, 2020) by following the L2MSS framework since the research on L2MSS is still rare (Subekti, 2018). Therefore, given the gaps in understanding the psychological factors that sustain ER motivation, this study aims to investigate the following research questions: (1) to what extent do ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience predict sustained motivation for ER and (2) what encourages students to keep engaged in ER? The findings of this research contribute to evaluating ER programs by considering the psychological aspects. Eventually, the institution and teacher could improve the ER program not only by involving the students but also the parents to support their children since the L2MSS framework is comprised of broad influence factors.

2. METHODS

The study was conducted at a university in Malang because the university required freshmen to complete ER courses as part of their curriculum. The participants were sophomore English Language Teaching (ELT) and English Language Literature (ELL) students. The sophomore students were involved because they passed extensive reading courses in their previous semester. Hence, they had prior exposure to ER. We employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method design to collect the quantitative and qualitative data through questionnaires and interviews. To gather the quantitative data, 64 students (39 females and 29 males) filled out the online questionnaires to represent the cohort. Further, 9 students (8 females and 1 male) consented to be interviewed. Nine students who agreed to engage in interviews were

students who indicated a desire to continue ER. All of the students were aged between 18 and 21 years old.

A questionnaire consisting of four sections was employed adapted from Lee & Lee (2019), Taguchi et al (2009), Aubrey (2014), Moskovsky et al (2016), and Subekti (2018). The first questionnaire attempts to determine the extent of students' willingness to continue ER. The questionnaire utilized the Likert scale, including a statement accompanied by five response options: 1 (Definitely not willing to continue ER) to 5 (Definitely willing to continue ER). The questionnaire was adapted since the prior study (Lee & Lee, 2019) investigated L2 willingness to communicate using the L2MSS framework; nevertheless, the statement had been adjusted to be more relevant to the present study. The L2MSS components including the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience were examined in the second through fourth questionnaires. A Likert scale with 1 denoting strongly disagree and 5 denoting strongly agree was also utilized. Moreover, it was adapted since the prior study (Taguchi et al, 2009; Aubrey, 2014; Moskovsky, 2016; and Subekti, 2018) also investigated the L2MSS among students learning English in Asian countries. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview involved 9 students who expressed their rationale for engaging in ER. The interview session was conducted through face-to-face and video calls based on participants' convenience. The research ethics commission has reviewed and approved all of the instruments employed in this study. The instruments were also regarded as reliable since they had been thoroughly piloted and verified by earlier studies.

We utilized regression analysis to examine the extent of the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience in predicting students' sustained motivation for ER. The regression analysis allowed us to determine the strongest predictor among L2MSS components that influence students' sustained motivation for ER. All the gathered questionnaire data were analyzed using IBM Statistics 24 software. Furthermore, the data from the interview session were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis enabled us to analyze the qualitative data through data familiarization, initial code generation, and potential theme invention.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 To What Extent Do Ideal L2 Self, Ought to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience Predict Sustained Motivation for ER?

The first objective of this study was to measure the distinct implications of each L2MSS component on students' sustained motivation for ER. The constant value of regression analysis showed 3.194, while the regression coefficient values for L2MSS components were .661, .122, and .206. It confirmed that the L2MSS and willingness to continue ER were positively correlated. Surprisingly, among the L2MSS components, the results also indicated that students' sustained motivation for ER was considerably determined by their ideal L2 self.

Table 1. Multiple Regression Analysis Results of the L2MSS Components Predicting Willingness to Continue ER

	Unstandardized B	Coefficient Std. Error	t	Sig.
Constant	3.194	10.264	.311	.757
Ideal L2 Self	.661	.146	4.517	.000
Ought-to L2 Self	.122	.124	.989	.327
L2 Learning Experiences	.206	.187	1.104	.274

^aDependent Variable: Willingness to Continue ER

The ideal L2 self-explained 32.9% (as indicated by the adjusted R square) of the variance in sustained motivation for ER. In contrast, the ought-to L2 self contributed 2.2%. Moreover, the L2

learning experience described 12.4%. Therefore, the results indicated that the ideal L2 self had the strongest power to explain the students' sustained motivation for ER.

Table 2. The result of Coefficient of Determination

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	.583	.339	.329	8.995
2	.194	.038	.022	10.857
3	.371	.138	.124	10.276

^aPredictors: (Constant), Ideal L2 Self

^bPredictors: (Constant), Ought-to L2 Self

^cPredictors: (Constant), L2 Learning Experiences

3.2 What Encourages Students to Keep Engaged in ER?

The second objective of this study was to discover the students' rationale for sustaining their motivation to ER. The study found that the students were enthusiastic to engage in ER because they recognized the need to advance their English skills through ER, perceived the benefits of ER, and had a supportive environment. Since the participants were the students of the English Department, they were well aware that they had to improve themselves by reading a lot. As a result, their awareness as English Department students led them to maximize their greatest potential to read. In her effort to minimize the discrepancy between her idealism and actual state through ER, a student expressed:

There was no one motivated me to read outside my own desire. I believed that by continuing extensive reading, I would be able to overcome my hurdles to completely enjoy literary work. (Student T)

Besides the need for self-improvement, the students engaged in ER likewise because they believed that they perceived the advantages of ER such as increasing their grasp of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and culture. Regarding her beliefs in gaining cultural knowledge through ER, a student said:

I learned a lot of knowledge about the politics and cultures of various countries because the majority of novels I read were situated abroad. (Student M)

Parents, friends, and teachers were the role models for motivating ER engagement. Mostly, the students loved to read because they saw their parents, friends, or teachers to do so. A student acknowledged that her love of reading was rooted in her family since her parents used to give her books or read them to her. On her childhood memory, a student recalled:

Since my father was a teacher, I used to watch and listen to him reading books and newspapers every morning. I was always excited when he bought me books from the bookstore or lent me books from the library. (Student A)

The students admitted that peer group triggered their reading motivation since they love having group discussions to talk about the books. The students also joined the reading community in order to keep them engaged with ER activities. A student shared her experiences when joining reading communities:

I became part of the reading club on social media. The member club read and discussed the books together. They also were required to report their reading progress in that club. (Student N)

The students also realized that their teachers inspired them to engage in ER since their teachers had an interactive teaching style that fostered a positive reading environment. Regarding her memorable teacher, a student confessed:

I initially enjoyed ER also because of my teacher's teaching style. She was successful in designing an attractive reading atmosphere by conducting various activities such as Pecha Kucha. She also inspired us to read various interesting stories that were full of moral values. (Student K)

On the contrary, however, there were also participants in the study whose parents did not love reading. Fortunately, the students still expressed a strong desire to read. A student talked about her struggle:

Since neither my parents nor my family enjoyed reading, I tried to read Indonesian literature rather than English to instill in my love of reading. Then, fortunately, I came to love English literature gradually. (Student R)

Discussion

The findings highlighted a correlation between the L2MSS facets and sustained motivation to ER. The findings also suggested that the strongest predictor for explaining the students' sustained motivation to continue ER was the ideal L2 self instead of the ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experiences. The findings of this study further confirmed the role of the ideal L2 self as the strongest contributor to learning effort (Alshahrani, 2016) and language proficiency (By & Laohawiriyanon, 2019). The findings were potentially caused by the fact that the students are majoring in English, thus, they perceive themselves as someone who is supposed to read more English literature. This condition might be explained by the students' strong vision (Dörnyei, 2017). The vision leads the students to have sustained reading motivation. The more the students have a clear vision, the stronger reading motivation is sustained. The more the students perceive the benefits of ER, the more they maintain reading motivation.

However, the findings of this study contradict Hagley's findings (2017) since the English department students showed enthusiasm for continuing ER. This revelation was quite a relief which implied that the students had a positive attitude toward ER. It also indicated that the institution had successfully promoted and instilled a love for ER. A possible explanation for the differences might be due to the diversity of participants' majors. As students of the Department of English, they seemed to have the necessity to continue extensive reading for the sake of their self-improvement. Meanwhile, as the students majoring in engineering in Japan, they seemed to do extensive reading because of the demand of the institutional curriculum rather than because of their genuine love for reading.

The findings also confirmed that ER not only satisfied students' pleasure in reading but also helped the students to expand their linguistic abilities and facilitated self-improvement. Given all of the benefits of ER in improving vocabulary (Boutorwick et al., 2019), grammar (Sakurai, 2017), and cultural knowledge (Lekawael & Ferdinandus, 2021), it is understandable that students become addicted to ER. Hence, the findings highlighted the need to assist the students in recognizing and experiencing the beneficial impacts of ER to strengthen reading motivation.

Moreover, it was interesting to note that this study elicited the necessity of parental, peer group, and teacher support in sustaining motivation to ER. This study implied the significant role of support systems, especially parents, in tertiary education. Encouragements from friends and teachers was also a privilege for students who were not granted support from their families.

Nevertheless, the findings must be interpreted with caution since the ideal L2 self only contributed 32.9 % of the students' sustained motivation to continue ER. A possible explanation of this result might be related to other external factors underexplored in this study since motivation can fluctuate over time (Tanaka, 2017). Unmotivated or having little interest in reading (Iftanti & Shofiya, 2018) can be triggered

due to numerous external factors, including unsupportive environments (Al Aghar, Demirci, Houjeir, McMinn, & Alzaabi, 2023), excessive technology exposure (Martin, Martins, & Naqvi, 2017), limited access to reading materials (Renandya, Hidayati, & Ivone, 2021), inadequate proper ER programs (Maharani, 2023), hectic schedules (Huang, 2015), or procrastination (Abrar, Herawati, & Priyantini, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that the most influential predictor to explain why English Department students continue ER beyond the classroom was the ideal L2 self. The regression analysis revealed that the ideal L2 self, a component of the L2MSS, has a significant positive relationship with students' sustained motivation to continue ER, while the ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experiences do not. Therefore, this study suggested that students need to have strong commitment and dedicate themselves to ER in order to achieve the long-term reading goal. ER is supposed to be viewed as a pleasurable activity rather than pressure. Since sustaining motivation in ER is a challenging mission, the parents, teachers, and institutions have to support and facilitate the students in order to instill a love for reading.

Furthermore, this study had several limitations that were essential to be acknowledged. The small number of participants in this study might have influenced the statistical analyses. Hence, further investigation with a large number of students from different majors is also strongly recommended in order to gather more robust data. This study was also less generalizable since it only focused on English Department students, so it might not be applicable to different cultural or educational contexts. Moreover, the use of self-report questionnaires might introduce bias since students might overestimate or underestimate their motivation levels. Thus, longitudinal studies with the appropriate method and instruments would be suitable for conducting in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of sustained motivation and to track the evolution of students' L2MSS over time. The other external factors, such as parental role, social interaction, classroom environment, technological advancement, and so forth, also need to be addressed and explored in order to understand the possible features behind the sustained motivation for ER. Thus, it would be interesting for prospective researchers to explore the rationale of students continuing ER by providing in-depth qualitative data.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to thank to students from the English Department at one of the universities in Malang who participated in this research.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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