

# The Exploring Motivative Dynamics in English Language Learning Among University Students in Thailand's Deep South through L2MSS Framework

**Abdullah Yuhannan,  
Phnita Chatranonth and Patsriyanyong Sungroong**  
Kasetsart University, Thailand  
Corresponding Author, E-mail: tonpanansatun@gmail.com

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## Abstract

This study investigates the motivational factors influencing English language learning among university students in Thailand's politically volatile southern border provinces, employing Zoltán Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). This framework encompasses three key constructs: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with students from Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani to analyze how these motivational components impact their English proficiency.

Results indicate that the Ideal L2 Self is a pivotal motivator, with students linking future success in English to career and personal life goals, often inspired by successful role models. The Ought-to L2 Self is influenced by societal and environmental expectations from family, religion, educational systems, and cultural contexts, affecting motivation variably across individuals. The L2 Learning Experience, including well-resourced classrooms, proficient teachers, modern teaching materials, and educational technology, supports motivational pathways for enhancing English skills.

This research enriches the understanding of motivational factors in English language learning and provides insights specific to the unique cultural, social, and political contexts of the southern border area. The findings offer implications for policy formulation aimed at improving English language education and motivation in this region and potentially across Thailand.

**Keywords:** Language Acquisition; Motivational Self System; Learning Strategies; Thailand's Deep South

## Introduction

English language proficiency is increasingly recognized as a crucial asset in the globalized world, offering individuals enhanced opportunities for academic and professional advancement. In Thailand's Deep South, a region distinguished by its rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity, the motivations driving university students to learn English warrant a thorough exploration. This study aims to delve into these motivations, employing Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) as a theoretical framework to comprehensively understand the complex interplay of factors influencing students' engagement with English language learning.

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The Deep South of Thailand presents unique challenges for English language learning, shaped by its distinct socio-political and cultural landscape. Existing research highlights the disconnection between educational policies and Islamic teachings, which can lead to ineffective language learning experiences (Assalihee & Boonsuk, 2022). Additionally, historical ethno-religious tensions and state-led centralization efforts add complexity to the implementation of English learning programs, necessitating culturally sensitive approaches (Takashi, 2021; Thanikun, 2021). Despite these insights, there is a notable gap in understanding how the socio-political context influences students' motivation to learn English in this region, which is crucial for developing effective and culturally relevant English learning strategies.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of motivation in English language learning among Thai university students, including self-regulated learning in online environments (Kanoksilapatham, 2023), the impact of past experiences on current motivation (Chanyoo, 2022), and the variations in motivation and learning strategies across academic disciplines (Srisopha, 2022; Patricia, 2022). However, there is a lack of research specifically focusing on university students in Thailand's Deep South, where the unique socio-political context, cultural and religious integration, linguistic diversity, and educational disruptions due to political instability present distinct challenges and opportunities for English language learning.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the motivational dynamics of English language learning among university students in Thailand's Deep South, employing the L2MSS framework to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing their motivation. By investigating these motivations, the research aims to contribute valuable insights for educators and policymakers, informing the development of language learning programs and policies that are tailored to the unique needs and motivations of students in this region.

## **Research Objectives**

1. To identify the key motivational factors influencing English language learning among university students in Thailand's Deep South, utilizing the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) framework.
2. To examine the impact of socio-political and cultural contexts on the motivation of university students in Thailand's Deep South to learn English.
3. To develop recommendations for effective and culturally relevant English language learning strategies tailored to university students in Thailand's Deep South.

## Literature Review

### The Complex Landscape of English Language Learning in Thailand's Deep South

In Thailand's Deep South, English Language Teaching (ELT) encounters unique socio-political and cultural challenges, necessitating a comprehensive exploration of the educational landscape. Assalihee and Boonsuk (2022) highlight the disconnection between ELT policies and Islamic teachings, leading to ineffective language education. Additionally, Takashi (2021) and Thanikun (2021) emphasize the historical ethno-religious tensions and state-led centralization efforts, which exacerbate challenges in ELT implementation, necessitating culturally sensitive approaches. However, a notable research gap exists regarding student motivation in this region, particularly concerning how the socio-political landscape influences internal drivers for learning English. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing effective, culturally relevant ELT strategies.

Understanding the motivation behind English learning among Thai university students requires examining academic aspirations, cultural influences, and individual learning styles. Kanoksilapatham (2023) highlights the importance of self-regulation, attention, and self-confidence in language acquisition through work on self-regulated learning in online environments. Chanyoo (2022) introduces the 'Ought-to L2 Self,' emphasizing the impact of past experiences on current motivation. Studies by Srisopha (2022) and Patricia (2022) reveal varying motivations and learning strategies across academic disciplines, while Yossatorn, Binali, Weng, and Awuor (2023) demonstrate the significant role of motivational beliefs in self-regulated learning among nursing students. These studies collectively reveal a dynamic landscape of English learning motivation among Thai university students.

A significant research gap exists regarding students in Thailand's Deep South, a region with a unique socio-political context, cultural and religious integration, linguistic diversity, and educational disruptions due to political instability. Understanding the motivations of students in this region can provide insights into enhancing engagement and creating more inclusive learning environments. Investigating the interplay between cultural, religious, and linguistic factors and English learning motivation can inform culturally sensitive ELT strategies, ensuring relevance and effectiveness for students in the Deep South. Focusing on university students in this region presents an opportunity to enrich our understanding of English learning motivation within a complex landscape, contributing to tailored educational strategies that address specific challenges and promote meaningful language acquisition experiences.

#### The L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS)

The L2MSS, proposed by Dörnyei (2005, 2009), offers a comprehensive model for understanding the complex relationship between an individual's self-concept and their motivation to learn a second language. It emphasizes the importance of components such as the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self in shaping an individual's motivation and behavior in L2 learning contexts (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

**Ideal L2 Self (IL2S):** The IL2S refers to the desired version of oneself as a proficient and successful speaker of a second language. It serves as a motivational force to engage in language learning activities. Studies have shown that the IL2S can influence motivation and effort in second language learning. Activities that support the development of the IL2S can enhance learners' motivation and performance (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009; Papi, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2014; Thorsen, Henry, & Cliffordson, 2017).

**Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S):** The OL2S is motivated by external expectations, obligations, and perceived duties to learn a second language. It represents the individual's perception of who they believe they should be in terms of L2 proficiency. The OL2S can motivate learners to meet societal expectations, but it may also lead to negative emotions such as anxiety and frustration (Taguchi et al., 2009; Liu, 2019; Zhao, Xiao, & Zhang, 2022).

**L2 Learning Experience (L2LE):** The L2LE encompasses learners' perceptions of the L2 learning process, which can either facilitate or hinder their motivation. Positive experiences, such as engaging with the target language and culture, can enhance motivation, while negative experiences may impact it adversely. Creating a supportive learning environment is essential for fostering a positive L2 learning experience (Dörnyei, 2009; Wen & Clément, 2003; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

## Research Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework integrated the three components of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) to examine the motivational dynamics in English language learning among university students in Thailand's Deep South. It aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how professional aspirations, societal expectations, and learning experiences collectively influenced students' motivation to learn English. By focusing on these components, the research identified the key motivational factors for English language learning using the L2MSS framework, analyzed the impact of socio-political and cultural contexts on students' motivation, and provided recommendations for effective and culturally relevant English language learning strategies tailored to the unique needs of students in this region. This conceptual framework sought to contribute valuable insights for educators and policymakers to enhance English language education in this unique socio-political and cultural context.

## Research Methodology

To address the research question “*How does the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) influence English language learning motivation among university students in the Three Southern Border Provinces of Thailand?*”, this study commenced with data collection, focusing on the instruments used to gather qualitative data. Semi-structured interview questions were employed to collect data from participants.

**Data Collection:** The study employed qualitative data collection through in-depth interviews with participants to explore their experiences and perspectives on motivation in second language acquisition. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 12 participants for the interviews. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data.

The semi-structured interview questions were designed to explore participants' perceptions of their ideal and ought-to L2 selves, as well as their experiences in learning English. The questions aimed to identify factors influencing their motivation in English learning, including personal goals, social support, and language learning strategies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

**Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to identify and analyze patterns and themes related to students' motivation in English learning. A word-based method was used to identify common patterns and differences in the dataset related to motivation. This approach involved reading the available data from in-depth interviews and identifying repetitive or commonly used words from each participant (Anderson, 2007). Intercoder reliability was employed to enhance the reliability of the research by having experts check the accuracy of the analysis process (Atkinson, Dianne, Murray, & Mary, 1987).

**Participant Demographics and Sampling:** Purposive sampling was chosen for participant selection, targeting individuals with specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research question. The university setting was selected for its accessibility and the researcher's pre-existing connections within the institution. The researcher's familiarity with the university and its community was instrumental in pinpointing students who could provide unique insights into the research problem (Bryman, 2016; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The semi-structured interviews included university students aged 19 - 21 from the provinces of Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat in Thailand's Southern Border.

### **Findings**

The analysis unraveled the nuanced dynamics of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), exploring how constructs such as the Ideal L2 Self and the Ought-to L2 Self shape students' motivation to learn English. It examines the influence of professional aspirations, the impact of influential role models, and the significance of cultural dynamics on students' language learning experiences.

Furthermore, the study highlights the unique language learning challenges encountered by students in both technical and general academic fields, underscoring the importance of practical application and diverse learning methodologies in achieving linguistic proficiency. Through this thorough examination, the research offers valuable insights into the motivational landscape of English language learning in Thailand's Deep South, contributing to a more profound understanding of the factors that drive language acquisition in this distinct context.

### **Motivational Dynamics in English Language Learning**

To effectively answer the qualitative research question, "*How does motivation influence English language learning among university students*", a detailed exploration of motivational dynamics as proposed in Dörnyei's L2MSS framework is essential. This inquiry involves a comparative analysis of the English language learning motivations and experiences of students within two distinct academic categories: Science and Technology, and Social Sciences and Humanities. The study will encompass a thorough examination of three key components: the Ideal L2 Self (IL2S), the Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S), and the L2 Learning Experience (L2LE), as outlined in the subsequent analysis.

#### **Ideal L2 Self**

The "Ideal L2 Self" in language learning, particularly among university students, significantly influences English language acquisition. This construct shapes learners' motivations and aligns with their professional ambitions and personal aspirations.

#### **Professional Ambitions and Language Proficiency**

A key link between professional goals and English proficiency is evident across various fields. For instance, *Somboon* in Computer Science views English as essential for global tech engagement. *Chalerm* in Business Administration sees it as crucial for international business negotiations, while *Ibrahim* in Civil Engineering emphasizes its

importance for working on international projects. *Nattapong*, studying Mathematics and Computer Science, recognizes English's value for global academic discussions. These examples highlight the strategic role of English in professional advancement and global engagement.

### **Role Models and Cultural Influence**

Role models have a significant impact on learners' "Ideal L2 Self." *Pailin* is motivated by her brother's success in Japan, *Arkhom* by his mother's English proficiency as a teacher, and *Maryam* by the global recognition of Lisa, a Thai singer in the K-pop group Blackpink. These personal influences extend beyond academic and professional needs, underscoring the importance of aligning language learning with personal experiences and cultural idols.

### **Global Engagement as a Motivator**

Global engagement is a powerful motivator for English language learning. *Ibrahim's* ambition to participate in multinational engineering projects and *Sara's* goal to contribute to global social development dialogues illustrate the transformative role of English as a tool for international collaboration. English proficiency enables communication across cultures, enhances professional opportunities, and facilitates participation in global discourses.

### **Ought-to L2 Self**

In examining the "Ought-to L2 Self" within Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) framework, it becomes apparent that English proficiency is deemed essential by university students, driven by both personal aspirations and the practical demands of their professional and academic fields.

### **Crucial Role of English in Global Professional Contexts**

The importance of English proficiency in contemporary professional settings is illustrated through the experiences of university students across diverse disciplines. For example, *Somboon*, a student in Computer Science, views English as crucial for engaging with the global tech community, highlighting its role as a gateway to technological advancements and international collaborations.

*Chalerm*, studying Business Administration, sees English proficiency as key to effective international negotiations and understanding global business cultures. In Civil Engineering, *Ibrahim* views English as essential for working on international projects, emphasizing its role as a unifying medium for communication in cross-border collaborations.

*Nattapong*, in Mathematics and Computer Science, recognizes the importance of English for participating in global academic discussions and research. For students like *Leila* in Nursing Science, English proficiency opens opportunities for better career prospects in neighboring countries like Malaysia or Singapore. *Huda*, studying Islamic Law, perceives English as crucial for her academic and professional advancement, potentially enabling further studies or career progression.

### **Discipline-Specific Language Needs – Technical vs. General Proficiency**

The study also highlights a distinction between the language needs of students in Science and Technology versus those in Social Sciences. *Ibrahim* in Civil Engineering requires technical English proficiency to comprehend complex engineering concepts and terminologies, while *Yusuf* in Islamic Studies needs general English proficiency to engage in broader cultural and intellectual dialogues. This distinction underscores that the "Ought-to L2

Self' of students is significantly influenced by the linguistic demands of their specific fields of study.

### **L2 Learning Experiences**

In examining the “L2 Learning Experiences” within Dörnyei's Second Language Motivational Self System (L2MSS) framework, practical application and diversity of learning strategies are crucial in shaping English language proficiency among university students.

#### **Practical Application and Integration**

The importance of practical application in language learning is highlighted through the experiences of students like *Chalerm* and *Nattapong*. *Chalerm*, a Business Administration student, actively participates in English debates and employs various tools, such as English podcasts and debating contests, to enhance his language skills. This practical engagement not only improves his English proficiency but also equips him with essential business skills. *Nattapong*, studying Mathematics and Computer Science, emphasizes the importance of technical English proficiency. His exposure to English-language textbooks and participation in an English camp in Malaysia have been pivotal in shaping his linguistic abilities and motivation to improve his English.

#### **Diverse Learning Strategies**

The adaptability and resourcefulness of language learners are demonstrated through the experiences of *Maryam* and *Leila*. *Maryam*, a K-pop enthusiast, uses interviews and shows conducted in English to learn the language, aligning her personal interests with her language learning goals. *Leila*, on the other hand, leverages technological tools such as YouTube and the Joox application to overcome limitations in English course materials provided by her university. Her proactive approach to learning, including attendance at English nursing workshops, showcases the effectiveness of using technology to enhance language proficiency.

These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of language learning experiences and their critical role in effective and meaningful English language acquisition. The integration of language learning with academic and professional pursuits, along with the employment of diverse and personalized learning strategies, is essential for addressing the distinct needs and motivations of learners. This approach not only enhances language proficiency but also makes the language learning journey more enjoyable and relevant. Educators and learners should recognize and embrace this diversity in strategies to foster more effective language acquisition experiences.

## **Discussions**

The discussion begins with an exploration of the “Ideal L2 Self” within a theoretical framework, comparing it with prior research and considering its wider implications. This section aims to uncover how personal aspirations, cultural icons, and global engagement influence language learning motivations. The analysis then shifts to the “Ought-to L2 Self,” highlighting the practical necessity of English proficiency in professional and academic contexts. This part seeks to expand understanding of how different academic disciplines affect language learning motivations, offering new insights into existing literature.

Subsequently, the chapter delves into “L2 Learning Experiences,” examining how diverse learning strategies and practical applications impact English language proficiency. This discussion is enriched by comparing the study's findings with previous research, emphasizing the significance of personalized learning strategies in language acquisition.

Overall, each section provides an in-depth analysis, combining theoretical perspectives with practical implications, and laying the groundwork for future research in this area.

### **Ideal L2 Self**

The concept of the “Ideal L2 Self” within Zoltán Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System is a pivotal factor in understanding the motivation behind language learning, particularly among university students. This construct revolves around the notion of envisioning oneself as a proficient speaker of a second language (L2), which is deeply intertwined with an individual's aspirations, goals, and envisioned future in the realm of language proficiency. Consistent with prior research, such as Dörnyei (2009) and Csizér & Dörnyei (2005), this study underscores the connection between language proficiency and professional aspirations, especially in fields with a global orientation.

However, this research diverges from earlier studies by delving into the interplay between cultural and personal influences on language learning. It explores how specific socio-cultural contexts, such as those in Thailand’s southern provinces, uniquely shape and influence the “Ideal L2 Self” concept. This study extends beyond previous research by examining the impact of cultural icons and familial influences on the formation of the “Ideal L2 Self.” It investigates how these factors contribute to motivational dynamics in language learning, an area that has been relatively unexplored in the field.

By integrating the insights of scholars like Ushioda (2013), who emphasized the role of personal agency and context in language learning motivation, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how the “Ideal L2 Self” is shaped and its implications for language learning motivation. This exploration provides valuable insights into the complex interplay of cultural, personal, and professional factors that drive language learning motivation among university students.

### **Ought-to L2 Self**

In discussing the “Ought-to L2 Self,” it’s crucial to integrate its theoretical context within Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) with findings from previous research. The “Ought-to L2 Self” plays a fundamental role in the L2MSS by focusing on the learner’s motivation driven by perceived duties and societal obligations. This dimension of motivation is significantly shaped by external factors, such as societal expectations and the practical necessities of language skills in various contexts. It represents the learner’s perception of the traits they should develop to fulfill these external standards.

This study’s exploration of the “Ought-to L2 Self” not only resonates with prior findings in the field of L2 motivation, which underscore the escalating importance of English in global professional and academic settings, but also extends these insights. Pioneering researchers like Jenkins (2007) and Crystal (2003) have pointed out the critical role of English proficiency in the globalized workplace. Our study builds upon this foundation by delving deeper into how specific academic disciplines influence students’ perceptions of the necessity for English proficiency.

By focusing on discipline-specific language needs, we provide a more nuanced understanding of how students shape their “Ought-to L2 Self,” bridging theoretical concepts with practical implications in the real world. This approach highlights the dynamic interplay

between individual motivation and broader societal expectations, enriching our understanding of language learning motivation in diverse academic and professional landscapes.

### **L2 Learning Experiences**

The discussion around “L2 Learning Experiences” within Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) offers a valuable perspective on how situational and contextual factors influence language learning. This dimension of the L2MSS underscores the impact of specific experiences, environments, and social interactions on shaping learners' motivation and attitudes towards acquiring a new language. Our study examines these factors with a specific focus on English language proficiency, aligning with previous research that stresses the importance of practical application in language learning.

What sets this research apart is its exploration of how individual career goals and personal interests customize these learning experiences. This approach not only aligns with but also diversifies the understanding of how learners integrate English into their professional and academic pursuits. By examining the role of diverse learning strategies, this study enhances our understanding of how students from various disciplines approach language acquisition, emphasizing the need for educational practices and language policies to embrace these varied strategies.

The practical implications of our findings are substantial, advocating for curriculum designs and educational practices that accommodate personalized and experiential learning approaches. Recognizing the importance of these tailored learning strategies can lead to more effective language policies that support varied educational and professional goals.

Looking ahead, future research could investigate the efficacy of personalized learning strategies across different cultural and contextual settings, further enriching our understanding of their impact on language proficiency. Ultimately, this study highlights the crucial role of practical application, integration, and personalized approaches in language learning, proposing significant changes in educational practices and policies to enhance English language proficiency among learners.

### **Conclusion**

This research explores the motivations behind English language learning among university students in Thailand's Deep South, employing Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) framework to examine the complex factors influencing their engagement in language acquisition. The findings indicate that English proficiency is not just a linguistic skill but a critical asset in global professional and academic environments, significantly shaping students' prospects.

The Ideal L2 Self (IL2S) emerges as a pivotal motivator, with students viewing English proficiency as essential to their professional ambitions and personal aspirations. This study extends previous research by emphasizing the influence of cultural icons and personal experiences on the IL2S, highlighting the importance of aligning language learning with individual identities and cultural contexts.

The Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S) reflects the practical necessity of English proficiency, driven by societal expectations and the demands of various academic disciplines. This study contributes to our understanding of discipline-specific language needs, showing that motivation to learn English is influenced by the linguistic requirements of different fields of study.

The L2 Learning Experiences (L2LE) highlight the importance of practical application and diverse learning strategies in language acquisition. The study underscores the need for educational practices and policies to embrace varied learning approaches, catering to the unique needs and motivations of learners.

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the complex nature of English language learning motivation among university students in Thailand's Deep South. It advocates for tailored educational strategies that acknowledge the interplay of cultural, personal, and professional factors in shaping language learning motivations. By recognizing and addressing these dynamics, educators and policymakers can facilitate more effective and meaningful language learning experiences for students in this unique context.

### **Contributions**

This study significantly advances our understanding of second language (L2) motivation by elucidating the profound impact of cultural icons and familial influences on the formation of the Ideal L2 Self. It offers deeper insights into the complex factors that drive motivation, illustrating how personal and cultural contexts shape language learning aspirations.

Moreover, the research highlights the crucial role of global engagement in shaping the Ideal L2 Self, reflecting the contemporary global landscape where linguistic skills are essential for accessing international opportunities.

The study also provides a nuanced understanding of the Ought-to L2 Self by exploring the varied perceptions of English proficiency across academic disciplines. This examination contributes to a more comprehensive view of language needs within diverse educational settings, emphasizing the importance of customizing language education to the specific requirements of different fields.

Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of employing a variety of learning strategies in L2 Learning Experiences. It advocates for adaptable, diverse, and learner-centered educational approaches that cater to the individual needs and preferences of learners, promoting more effective and engaging language acquisition.

### **Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Research**

**1. Educational Practice:** Language educators in Thailand's Deep South ought to incorporate culturally relevant materials that reflect the unique socio-cultural backgrounds of the students. This strategy involves leveraging local stories, cultural references, and specific professional jargon that resonate with students' anticipated career trajectories. By rendering the learning experience more engaging and pertinent to students' personal and professional lives, educators can substantially boost student motivation and participation in learning English.

**2. Curriculum Development:** Higher education institutions must devise English language curricula that not only comply with academic standards but also cater to the distinct needs of various faculties such as business, science, or humanities. Such specialization ensures that language instruction is directly relevant to the students' prospective professional settings, thereby enhancing their preparedness and proficiency in their chosen fields.

**3. Language Policy:** Policymakers are tasked with formulating language policies that accommodate the diverse linguistic environments of educational institutions. These policies should support bilingual or multilingual education strategies that honor and enhance

students' native languages alongside English. Moreover, policies should foster the adoption of adaptive teaching methods across schools and universities, which address varying levels of English proficiency and diverse learning styles, thus cultivating a more inclusive and effective educational atmosphere.

**4. Suggestions for Future Research:** Future research should concentrate on evaluating the impact of culturally and professionally tailored language programs on student outcomes over time. Such studies ought to investigate how these specialized approaches influence long-term language proficiency and motivation. Furthermore, comparative analyses between institutions that implement culturally responsive teaching methods and those that do not could provide valuable insights into effective practices for language education in multicultural contexts. This research is essential for refining educational practices and shaping policy recommendations, ensuring they meet the diverse needs of students in culturally varied regions.

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