
Motivating learners: The ideal L2-self and secondary learners

Webinar handout

By Sam Zurbrugg and Jessica Cheman

What is the ideal L2-self?

The ideal L2-self is part of the L2 motivational self-system (L2MSS) which was initially theorized by Zoltan Dörnyei (2005). The ideal L2-self acts as a powerful motivator as a language learner tries to address the difference between their current self and future ideal L2-self (Dörnyei, 2009). The L2MSS consists of 3 components:

Ideal L2-Self: This is the person we would like to become when we speak an L2.

Ought-to L2 Self: The attributes one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes.

L2 Learning Experience: Motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success).

What are the requirements for a motivating ideal L2-self vision?

For a learners ideal L2-self to be motivating it has to **exist**. There are 9 requirements:

1. The learner has an ideal L2-self vision.
2. The ideal L2-self vision is considerably different from their actual self.
3. The vision of their future self is elaborate and vivid.
4. The ideal L2-self self-image is seen as plausible by the learner.

5. The vision is not seen as a definite, there should be some doubt that it will not happen automatically.
6. The ideal L2-self does not clash with what is expected of them by their social circle.
7. The vision is regularly activated.
8. There is an action plan and strategies in place to help achieve the ideal L2-self vision.
9. The future vision is offset by a feared possible self.

(Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2021)

What are the stages to create a motivating vision?

Hadfield and Dörnyei (2013) provided a wonderful activity book entitled '*Motivating Learning*' on how to create a motivating ideal L2-self vision. They outline 6 key stages.

Stage	Suggested activities
1. Create the vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided visualisations to help learners create an ideal L2-self • Learners write about their future ideal L2-self
2. Substantiate the vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students reflect on their vision and analyse what is realistic and achievable. • Students review their ideal L2-self based on what is realistic.
3. Counterbalance the vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students reflect on obstacles that get in the way of their learning. • Students plan how they can overcome the obstacles in.
4. Enhance the vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can work towards making their vision more concrete through activities such as taking a picture of themselves dressed up as their ideal L2-self • Students can re-write their vision based on their work done in the previous lessons.
5. Operationalise the vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students create a list of goals they need to achieve based on their ideal L2-self

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students plan out self-study strategies and steps needed to take to reach their goals.
6. Keep the vision alive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students activate their vision again through visualisation, such as giving a presentation at university etc. • Students can write a letter to their current self saying thank you for all the hard work you have put in to achieve their goals.

Ideas and activities adapted from Hadfield and Dörnyei (2013)

References

Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The Psychology of the Language Learner: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition*. Routledge.

Dörnyei, Z. (2009). Individual differences: Interplay of learner characteristics and learning environment. In N. C. Ellis & D. Larsen-Freeman (Eds.), *Language as a complex adaptive system* (pp. 230-248). Wiley- Blackwell.

Dörnyei, Z. & Ushioda, E. (2021). *Teaching and Researching Motivation* (3rd edition). Taylor and Francis Group.

Hadfield, J. & Dörnyei, Z. (2013). *Motivating Learning*. Pearson.

You can watch a recording of Sam and Jessica's webinar here:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/motivating-our-learners-mini-event>