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A Qualitative Analysis of Perceived Ideal L2 Self and L2 (de)Motivation: A Case of Korean Junior College English Major Students*

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ABSTRACT

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This paper explores the L2 motivation and demotivation of English major students in a Korean junior college. The participants' L2 (de)motivation was investigated through one of the constructs of the L2 motivational self system (i.e., the ideal L2 self). Data were collected in two rounds of one-on-one interviews with 59 and 31 students across four school years respectively. A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to reveal whether the ideal L2 self existed within the learners. Also, the intensity of one's ideal L2 self was found to be pertinent to self-internalization. That is, it depends on in what way and to what extent the participants recognized their ideal L2 selves and sustained them. Even though this paper focused solely on the L2 (de)motivation and ideal L2 selves of female English majors from a single junior college, it suggests ways to enhance college L2 learners' L2 motivation by fostering their ideal L2 selves and better supporting their internalization as key pedagogical implications.

KEYWORDS

L2 (de)motivation, L2 motivational self system, ideal L2 self, college English major students, qualitative analysis

1. Introduction

One of the fundamental elements in determining success in accomplishing complex or extensive tasks is motivation. Such tasks often require individuals' effort and behavior, decision-making process, and persistence to achieve their goals. In this regard, learning a foreign language (hereafter L2) also requires motivation to ensure learners' success. Additionally, optimal L2 motivation might even "make up for considerable deficiencies both in one's language aptitude and learning conditions" (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015, p. 72).

Considering that every L2 learning context is unique, L2 motivation among Korean learners of English has been explored over the years with regard to linguistic, socio-cultural, and socio-political factors (e.g., Jung 2011, T.-Y. Kim 2006, 2011). Nevertheless, one of the most significant indicators of learning English in Korea may be the nature of prolonged L2 learning extending into one's post-college days and employment preparations (Kim et al. 2018). It has also been implied that English has become a prerequisite regardless of what individuals plan to do even though Korean L2 learners could consider themselves simply as test-takers (S. Kim 2013) or as being amotivated (Oh and Kim 2022).

Moreover, the 'self' aspect has influenced researchers in the field of more recent L2 motivation research to investigate what lacks, fluctuates, or sustains L2 motivation considering that a certain level of L2 motivation plays a crucial role (Boo et al. 2015, Dörnyei 2019). However, some research gaps still exist regarding the whole picture of 'how,' 'what,' and 'why' characteristics, especially beyond findings based on quantitative analyses (cf. Teimouri et al. 2022). For instance, the use of different scales pointing to the same measures may "inevitably overshadow the legitimacy of findings generated using these measures" (Al-Hoorie et al. 2024, p. 324). Thus, some constructs are particularly intricate and could better be understood through further in-depth analyses using qualitative approaches. That is, they could be examined qualitatively to achieve a clearer understanding of them and to avoid issues arising from overlapping concepts or potentially misleading statistics (cf. Henry and Liu 2024).

As noted in T.-Y. Kim (2018), the majority of the participants in L2 motivation research conducted in Korea were in tertiary education. Even though it was pointed out that many studies included university students as their participants, there remain some gaps to fill. This suggests that it is necessary to recognize and address the remaining shortage of research. In this case, junior college students, not university students, should be taken into consideration regarding their diverse backgrounds, purposes for pursuing education, and strategies for coping with adversities in L2 learning. Similarly, limitations or caveats might exist if junior college students' L2 motivation is interpreted as being the same as that of university students in general. Moreover, adult L2 learners, such as English majors in junior colleges, might exhibit their own versions of L2 learning since L2 motivation is unique and dynamic. Hence, based on a large set of narratives, the main goal of this paper is to present how junior college English major students perceive their L2 learning in college with regard to L2 motivation and their ideal L2 selves.

From this standpoint, the present study centers on understanding L2 motivation qualitatively and through the lens of the ideal L2 self perceived by the learners themselves. The original data were collected as part of the author's doctoral thesis, in which almost all participants either confirmed or denied having one or more ideal L2 selves. The present study also aims to explore how, what, and why college English major students' ideal L2 selves affect their L2 motivation and demotivation based on their reports of the existence of their ideal L2 selves.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 The L2 Motivational Self System

A theoretical approach to understanding L2 motivation took its turn in the early 2000s when the L2 motivational self system (hereafter L2MSS) was introduced (Dörnyei 2005, 2009a). Since its outset, the L2MSS has provided insights on L2 motivation with the 'self' aspect as a future-oriented and more contemporary framework. All in all, this reconceptualization of L2 motivation (i.e., L2MSS) is an application of psychological theories to L2 learning. In this respect, it is worth pointing out that the L2MSS originates from two existing theories in psychology, both of which center on the self.

First, Markus and Nurius (1986) elaborated on the 'self' in their possible selves theory. This theory is concerned with one's future and takes account of "individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" to build "a conceptual link between cognition and motivation" (p. 954). Although the focus lies on the self and future, individuals should not disregard what happens in the present while there still remain contrasts between now and future in terms of feelings, thoughts, or behaviors. It might be understood that different selves make room for personal growth and change, as well as ideals that are significant to one's future-orientedness (p. 957). Hence, some connections exist among possible selves, goals, and resultant behaviors (Hoyle and Sherrill 2006, Lee and Oyserman 2009).

Then, self-discrepancy theory proposed by Higgins (1987) distinguishes one's actual self (e.g., actual/own, actual/other) from desired self (e.g., ideal/own, ideal/other, ought/own, ought/other). In this manner, actual (current) selves are represented as self-concept and desired (future) selves as self-guides. Since the rationale of this theory entails discrepancies, motivation for achieving goals is accompanied by a course of action. In this process, individuals perceive their discrepancies and try to align them with the match between self-concept and self-guides (p. 321). Considering that one may have desired selves only in the ideal or ought classification, emotions vary depending on the discrepancies and their outcomes (e.g., disappointment, edginess).

It was noted that "both the quality of their L2 motivational goals and the quality of the manners they pursue those motivational goals play substantial roles in their L2 learning behaviors and achievement" (Teimouri et al. 2022, p. 634). Dörnyei (2009b) also argued that "the imagery and sensual components of possible selves approximate what people actually experience when they are engaged in motivated or goal-directed behaviour" (p. 213). In this regard, the L2MSS has been a comparatively novel framework that proposes three principal constructs—ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience (Dörnyei 2005, 2009a).

When L2 learners' hopes and desires are portrayed in the context of learning English as to what they would like to become, it is encapsulated as the ideal L2 self. An example would be an L2 learner's dream of communicating in fluent English in daily life or at work. Also, such ideal images are within the learners themselves and relevant to their goals so that they would like to make effort to ultimately become. In contrast, the ought-to L2 self is depicted as L2 learners' expectations stemming from their close relationships (e.g., family members, friends, teachers) or even society. Such duties or obligations make the learners prone to the influence of others in order to meet others' expectations or avoid negative outcomes from others. For this reason, the ought-to L2 self may be identified as a less or not fully internalized concept when compared to the ideal L2 self (Dörnyei 2009a, T.-Y. Kim 2010, 2012). Finally, the L2 learning experience completes the tripartite model as it refers to the L2 learners' direct and holistic experience in their immediate L2 learning context. Teachers, classmates, or even curricula can be some instances of such L2 learning experience for them being either situational or environmental, or both (Dörnyei 2009a).

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2.2 Previous Research on Ideal L2 Self

From psychology to L2 learning, the L2MSS soon became an established model by covering the imagery and dynamic qualities of L2 motivation (Boo et al. 2015, Dörnyei 2010). Also, the introduction of the L2MSS has proven its validity in that "specifying the role of the self-concept in behavioral regulation depends on a thorough analysis of the nature and valence of possible selves" (Markus and Nurius 1986, p. 966).

Still, whether the ideal L2 self could replace Gardner's (1985) traditional 'integrativeness' remained a question considering that the L2MSS is a way of reconceptualizing L2 motivation. While integrativeness signifies one's genuine interest in L2 learning and keeping a closer connection to a certain L2 community, it may no longer be a well-grounded concept due to blurred borders and unclear L2 communities (Lamb 2004, Ryan 2009, Ushioda 2011). In other words, the ideal L2 self might be a broader one to integrate integrativeness and instrumentality in a more contemporary context where English "is the default or 'unmarked' option of language choice" (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017, p. 462). In this regard, the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context may need other appropriate notions to comprehend and facilitate learners' L2 motivation. For example, Yashima's (2002) 'international posture' covered "interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and, one hopes, openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures" (p. 57). Moreover, the concept of international posture could prompt L2 learners to "make an imagined community visible or create one for learners, in which learning new words and sentences can be linked to an imagined international community" (Yashima 2009, p. 149).

The ideal L2 self has been probed with other variables rather than being the sole focus of a study. Papi (2010) examined the relationships between the three L2MSS constructs, English anxiety, and learners' intended effort using structural equation modeling. The study collected data through a questionnaire administered to over a thousand Iranian high school students who were required to take English as a compulsory subject. This large-scale research found "that the students are motivated through a self-internalized, inner-directed imaginary view of their future L2 self or through an other-directed, less-internalized picture visualized to fulfill others' expectations seems to make a real difference in the students' emotional propensities" such as L2 anxiety (p. 476). Also, Magid (2009) conducted large-scale research on the L2MSS of over 1,000 middle school and university students in mainland China, focusing on the relationships between instrumentality (i.e., promotion), ought-to L2 self, and ideal L2 self. After administering a questionnaire and follow-up interviews, university students had different promotional instrumentality related to their ideal L2 self compared to middle school students, due to more immediate concerns such as job seeking and career advancement. The study also supported the prevailing concept of 'face' in Chinese society, noticing that learners' ideal L2 self was shaped by their family's expectations for success in learning English.

Suzuki and Childs (2016) maintained that "learners without motivation driven by the personal value of learning English dare not reach those communities by themselves" (p. 160). Hessel (2015) administered a questionnaire to 97 upper-intermediate to advanced German university students learning English. The frequency with which a learner envisions their ideal L2 self was found to be a predictor of their engagement in L2 learning (i.e., L2 motivation). In this self-motivated manner, the level of self-motivation in achieving a specific ideal L2 self was strongly linked to how often the ideal L2 self was imagined. The level of motivation was also connected to the perceived gap between the present and future self, as well as the desire for this ideal L2 self. Saudi undergraduates of English majors were administered a questionnaire and reading and writing proficiency test in Moskovsky et al. (2016). The results of 360 participants' responses and test scores revealed that perceived learning effort had no significant relationship with L2 achievement; yet, intended learning behavior showed a negative correlation with

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L2 achievement. Nonetheless, ideal L2 self, intended learning behavior, and positive L2 learning experience were negatively associated with the proficiency test scores as well.

In more recent studies, Sak (2020) probed the relationship between ideal L2 self as a motivational factor and willingness to communicate in English (L2 WTC) both in and out of the classroom. 90 English major students in a pre-service teacher training program in Turkey completed a questionnaire, and their responses were analyzed quantitatively. The findings revealed that 81% of the participants had a high level of their ideal L2 self, whereas ideal L2 self did not quite predict L2 WTC since "the ideal L2 self as a construct does not equally correlate with the characteristics of inside-outside classroom communication settings" (p. 199). The study called for "specifically tailored vision-related activities in the class" because "visionary language learning expectations may nurture individuals' willingness to put more effort to improve their L2 proficiency" (p. 199). As a mixed-methods study, J. Kim (2022) investigated the relationship between the L2MSS and English achievement among Korean female college students. The results from correlation and hierarchical multiple regression analyses revealed that there were statistically significant relationships between various motivational variables across all students with high and low proficiency levels, and the ideal L2 self of all students and the ought-to L2 self of low-level students showed significant results. Moreover, interviews confirmed that L2 learning settings should consider different motivational factors based on one's language proficiency level because low-level students may have encountered demotivation due to conflicts between their current and ideal selves.

Additionally, Yoo and Shin (2016) also investigated Korean university students' L2 selves. In their study, a common dilemma existed in that the participants aspired to speak English fluently like native speakers; yet, they also needed to prepare for exams (e.g., TOEIC) which are burdensome in real and valuable for future opportunities (e.g., employment) (p. 108). It was revealed that significant tensions emerged between personal hopes of achieving speaking proficiency and societal demands for high test scores (p. 124). That is, students' L2 identities were in a constant state of flux, especially when they encountered internal conflicts or external negotiations. In this vein, the findings showed that students' ought-to L2 selves could contribute to weak or underdeveloped ideal L2 selves. Also, S. Kim (2015) interviewed 29 college students in a TOEIC camp program, identifying three key demotivating factors affecting their English learning. These factors were "lack of meaningful purpose, lack of improvement and success experiences, and lack of self-determination" (p. 29). Though the participants recognized the importance of English for securing desired jobs regardless of their college major, they were unlikely to use English in their future workplaces. The participants with a weaker form of ought-to L2 self and a stronger form of ideal L2 self were able to envision their ideal selves "as those who would use English for their professional career" (p. 47).

Furthermore, T.-Y. Kim (2015) conducted an in-depth study on the L2 motivation of Korean English teachers and students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels through interviews. Some students could get good grades or high scores in English despite displaying little or no motivation (i.e., demotivation or amotivation) while regarding English as valuable cultural capital necessary for securing stable employment and overall success in life. It might be due to the fact that competitive motivation specific to the Korean cultural context was widespread. It was also why teachers tended to overlook fostering students' ideal L2 self and rather prioritized college preparation (p. 170). In Hyun and Kim (2013), 232 Korean office workers' L2 motivation and demotivation were analyzed in order to discover how instrumentality (promotion) and ideal L2 self functioned. The findings revealed that competitive motivation still remained prevalent among working adults, possibly influenced by academic elitism (referred to as *hakbul*) and social stratification (pp. 177–178). Pedagogical suggestions at the corporate or societal level should be reevaluated, advocating for the development of English for specific purposes curricula through needs analysis. Those suggestions were to cultivate office workers' ideal L2 selves by fostering a more motivating

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and positive learning environment (p. 182).

2.3 Research Questions

While numerous studies have examined the L2MSS and its related components to identify significant statistical patterns or to offer classroom suggestions, the exploration of each component among specific participant groups has opened new avenues for research into its applications and validity. In this regard, several studies have centered on the ought-to L2 self (e.g., Jang 2022, Lanvers 2016), whereas research on the ideal L2 self still calls for further attention. Investigating the ideal L2 self in greater detail could be valuable, particularly in terms of whether and how it influences learners' L2 motivation and demotivation. Such an exploration could also reveal which aspects of the ideal L2 self are shared across certain participant groups and which offer unique insights (Lamb 2018).

To contribute original findings, this paper focuses on the ideal L2 self as viewed by English majors in a junior college context. Thus, this paper is guided by two research questions:

1. In what ways do the participants describe their perceived ideal L2 self?
2. To what extent do the participants explain their perceived ideal L2 self and its influence on their L2 motivation and demotivation?

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

The study was conducted in a junior college for female students in Seoul, Korea. Its English Department provided students with two four-semester (i.e., two-year) degree programs—associate (normal) and bachelor's degree (optional)—offering courses in English for communication and the workplace. In other words, the students in the research site could pursue an associate degree program for two years and then apply for a bachelor's degree program after they had graduated with an associate degree. The students were diverse in this department even though they were majoring in English at a single institution. That is, they had different levels of English proficiency and interest in English; and came from diverse backgrounds regarding the types of high schools they attended (e.g., general, vocational, or through a qualification exam equivalent to a high school diploma).

The participants of this paper were all enrolled English major students during Phase 2 of data collection. At the end of Phase 1 (i.e., the administration of an online questionnaire), the participants were invited to Phase 2 (i.e., two interviews). In the end, 59 participants volunteered for the first interview and 31 for the second. The researcher made use of the questionnaire responses to set up the first round of interviews with the participants by considering the types of high schools they attended and their GPAs from the previous semester as reported in the questionnaire. The majority of the participants were in the primary two-year program, earned a grade point average ranging from 3.00 to 3.99, and received their education from general high schools. Table 1 summarizes the details of the participants involved in the first interviews. In the second interviews, there were fewer students because most of them graduated or took a leave of absence from school after the first ones. Moreover, the third- and fourth-year students were smaller in number because the optional program was split up into two classes, one for third-year and the other for fourth-year students, each consisting of about 15 students per class. Also, only the students who graduated from the research site with an associate degree in the primary program were recruited for the study.

The participants were provided with each pseudonym in some of the selected excerpts to ensure their anonymity.

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Furthermore, most first- and third-year students in the first round of interviews gave consent to participate in the second because they naturally advanced to second- and fourth-year status, respectively. Hence, a first-year student would be specified as 'Year 1' in the first interview and 'Year 1 → Year 2' in the second.

Table 1. Details of the Participants in the First Interviews (*N* = 59)

School Year	First	Second	Third	Fourth
n	29	24	3	3
GPA	4.00 –4.50	3.00 –3.99	2.00 –2.99	1.00 –1.99
n	11	36	9	3
High School Type	General		Vocational	Qualification exam equivalent to a high school diploma
n	52		5	2

3.2 Student Interviews

The adopted method for two-part interview process was a one-on-one semi-structured interview between the researcher and each of the student participants. The study attempted to have the participants under less pressure during data collection in order to secure their time and preparation for school transfer or employment in their remaining college days. The final participants stayed in school and progressed from the first interviews in November 2018 (Fall semester) to the second ones in May 2019 (Spring semester). Table 2 specifies the timeline.

Semi-structured interviews were prepared to gain participants' experiences and views on their L2 motivation as junior college English major students. As the interview process did not call for already-made or pre-prepared responses from the participants (Dörnyei 2007, Mann 2016), prompts for each interview were prepared to provide structure. The structure was based on the questionnaire items about L2 motivation used in Phase 1, which comprised the three L2MSS constituents—ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience—along with intended effort and instrumentality (promotion). Questions related to the ideal L2 self scale in each interview are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Timeline of the Interviews

Interviews	First Interview				Second Interview			
Time	November 2018 (Fall Semester)				May 2019 (Spring Semester)			
The Number of Participants	59 Students				31 Students			
School Year	First	Second	Third	Fourth	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Details of the Process	Second Semester	Final Semester	Second Semester	Final Semester	First Semester as Second-years	Graduated; First Semester as Third-years	First Semester as Fourth-years	Graduated

Table 3. Interview Questions on Ideal L2 Self

First Interview	Second Interview
What do you plan to do after you graduate from college?	Do you still have the ideal L2 self you mentioned six months ago, or have the selves changed over a semester?
Where do you see yourself in five years as a junior college English major?	
How much do you believe you could become what you want to?	
How vividly can you imagine yourself as someone you'd like to become?	

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3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

In early and mid-September 2018, the pilot study and the main study's questionnaire administration respectively took place after the researcher was granted ethical approval. The researcher individually contacted those who agreed to participate in the interviews after their midterm exam week had ended each semester. It was to minimize the students' level of anxiety that could have affected the interview. It was also to allow the researcher the time to finalize the interview prompts based on the questionnaire responses prior to each interview. Student interviews were administered in Korean within the research site which generally lasted about 25 to 30 minutes. The researcher began transcribing each interview immediately afterward to ensure a thorough understanding given that the interviews comprised approximately 144,438 Korean words. All transcriptions were read repeatedly before being translated into English. Considering the amount of verbal data, ATLAS.ti 8 was opted for the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.

This paper aims to understand the participants' experiences and views on their L2 motivation through an exploratory process and data-led analysis. Hence, qualitative thematic analysis was adopted to identify key themes on the 'ideal L2 self' within the data. In this data-driven process, first and second cycle coding generated codes from initial to significant ones (Miles et al. 2014). Initial patterns were grasped to acquire "intimate, interpretive familiarity with every datum in the corpus" (p. 73). The codes that were pertinent to the ideal L2 self were revealed as "prompts or triggers for deeper reflection on the data's meanings" since coding "enables you to retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily analyzable units" (p. 73). With these patterns, followed by was subcoding "for nuanced qualitative data analysis" for it is "employed after an initial yet general coding scheme has been applied and the researcher realizes that the classification scheme may have been too broad, or it can be added to primary codes if particular qualities or interrelationships emerge" (p. 80). In this respect, an example of coding results is provided in Table 4. Subsequently, the researcher, along with two applied linguists as second coders, analyzed all the codes to achieve a suitable level of inter-coder reliability (Creswell 2009). The inter-coder reliability reached 100% once subtle differences, caused by the uniqueness of the context, were resolved. As shown in Table 4, the prevailing 'pressure for future' initially emerged as a collective phenomenon among the participants during the early stages of coding. However, it was later condensed into 'weak ideal L2 self' through multiple layers of coding in collaboration with the researcher's colleagues. Additionally, instrumentality (promotion) was ultimately captured under the 'experienced' categorization, revealing that the codes for the ideal L2 selves were classified into two settings—work and teaching.

Table 4. Codes for Ideal L2 Self

Pressure for Future	Experienced Instrumentality (Promotion)
Employment / Graduation	Essential / Useful
Uncertain Future for English Major Students	Ideal L2 Self
Weak Ideal L2 Self	**Worker / Teacher**

4. Findings

The following section reports on how Korean junior college English major students describe their perceived ideal L2 self and how these ideal L2 selves affect their L2 motivation and demotivation. Their views on their ideal L2 self were categorized into two key aspects—whether within the learners themselves or not. Also, the researcher's interventions during the interviews, such as questions or clarifications, are described in parentheses

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as several excerpts are provided in the following section.

4.1 Weak(er) Forms of Ideal L2 Self

To start with, the following excerpts illustrate the absence of an ideal L2 self and why the students thought in such manner.

4.1.1 I don't think I have an ideal L2 self.

Firstly, it was due to some unbalanced relationship between their goals in life and learning English in their current school context. In Excerpts 1 and 2, English learning felt distant from the respondents themselves even though they were English majors.

> **Excerpt 1 (Jin, Year 1, Interview 1)**
> I thought I'm off the hook when I finally decided to become a flight attendant and go to college. I knew I could do anything, but I'm starting to lose faith since everyone's talking about getting a job. It's all I hear, and the clock is ticking. … I'm not sure of anything about myself. English is a huge burden to me. I envy people who like English and are also good at it. I tried to like it, but I couldn't. It's impossible. … I really want to become a flight attendant. The funny thing is that people around me were surprised at me for majoring in English at first because they knew I hate English.

> **Excerpt 2 (Hee, Year 1 → Year 2, Interview 2)**
> I think it would be nice to learn English, but I just don't try. … When I think about the future, I just graduate, save money from a part-time job for a year to get married, and work with my boyfriend. So, basically there is no reason I need to stay in school. I'm like, 'Why am I getting up this early to go to school?' … No one really has any expectations for my grades or future, but people tell me to graduate at least.

Jin in Excerpt 1 and Hee in Excerpt 2 were the opposites in that the former needed to learn English to become a flight attendant while the latter did not really have such necessity. They understood that learning English would be desirable, verbalized as 'I envy people who like English and are also good at it' or 'It would be nice to learn English.' Yet, there were only the end-goals as Jin and Hee maintained somewhat negative emotions and attitudes towards learning English over the course of the interviews.

Secondly, some students had neither space nor time to think about their ideal L2 selves because they were preoccupied at the time of the interviews with preparing for their post-college plans. Those plans were mostly about seeking a job or transferring to a four-year university.

> **Excerpt 3 (Eun, Year 2, Interview 1)**
> It's really vague. I don't really imagine at all. It's all about getting a job right now. So, it's like, 'I need to get a job,' but not like, I mean, I don't think about things after that.

> **Excerpt 4 (Young, Year 1 → Year 2, Interview 2)**
> I don't think much about myself, I mean, I don't know what to do at this point. I have this

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idea of transferring to a four-year university to major in English, but I'm not sure what I should do with that after.

It seemed that the clock was ticking for Eun in Excerpt 3 and Young in Excerpt 4 as they neared graduation soon. In this regard, they had already planned what to do after their two years in college. Yet, their plans did not develop any further; rather, they remained vague as there was merely an idea of plans, not to mention there was not any ideal L2 self in operation. Similarly, Gina had almost the same idea as Eun and Young did.

> **Excerpt 5 (Gina, Year 2, Interview 1)**
> … It was just me talking to some buyers in fragments, [but] it wasn't vivid at all. I could at
> least think like that because I was taking Trade English back then. I can talk on the phone or
> send emails, merely in fragments, I think.
> (Is there a reason why you talk about this in past tense?)
> Right now, I can't really think about my future because I don't have enough time to do so. I
> haven't really thought about it recently [because I've been working on being transferred].

Gina added that she did not have time to think about her ideal L2 self seriously because her reality to focus on the school transfer was imminent and more critical. Nevertheless, she had been able to at least imagine herself using English in the past when she could afford time and have appropriate class content before things got too busy.

Lastly, students did not generally have anything planned for their future, making it difficult to foster an ideal L2 self.

> **Excerpt 6 (Yejin, Year 1, Interview 1)**
> It's like watching TV without me in it. … I'm not sure if I can do anything, so I haven't
> decided or planned anything specific yet.
> Excerpt 7 (Yesol, Year 2, Interview 1)
> It's merely like watching TV. I can't really imagine other things at all.
> (Do you mean you aren't in it?)
> Not at all.
> (Why?)
> Because I'm not sure of anything in terms of work and my ability, so I haven't really pictured
> anything specific yet.

Both Yejin (Excerpt 6) and Yesol (Excerpt 7) came up with a metaphor for watching TV without themselves in it. From their statements, both students could not picture themselves using English primarily because everything about their future was unclear or not particular. Additionally, both responses linked their inability to imagine their future to doubts about their own abilities.

4.1.2 I think I may be using English at work.

When some students could imagine themselves using English, although it might be done faintly or quite weakly, the situations were relevant to some possible work environment. Still, the students who seemed to understand their ideal L2 selves in the following excerpts were having a reality check instead of having a concrete ideal L2 self.

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Excerpt 8 (Hae, Year 2, Interview 1)

I don't think I have the ability to work with foreigners. I'm just doing it with Koreans, but I think I can help them whose proficiency is a little lower than mine. I make calls and send documents to foreigners who speak English. Still, I don't think I can work in an English-only environment.

Excerpt 9 (Yun, Year 2, Interview 1)

Just write simple documents in English or email. I think I'll be using English when foreigners come to the office. I think I can play it, like a video in my head, but it's not cool as in a movie. I'm fumbling for words.

(Do you often imagine yourself?)

So, there are two occasions. I have a desire to be good at English, but I don't try, anyway, there are times when I imagine what I just said. Or when I imagine something more realistically considering the level of my English at the moment.

Hae in Excerpt 8 and Yun in Excerpt 9 might have had an ideal L2 self on their own. Both students' ideal L2 selves were carrying out a comparatively simple or easy job in an office environment while speaking or writing English with their perceived levels of proficiency at the time of the interview. Also, another metaphor was made by Yun in that her imagination was not cool as in a movie because she would fumble for words.

4.2 Existing Ideal L2 Self

Similar to Hae (Excerpt 8) and Yun (Excerpt 9), some students could imagine themselves using English in their desired workplaces. In this case, their ideal L2 selves became more specific and were portrayed in relation to their wants, hopes, and dreams.

4.2.1 I can imagine myself using English at work.

When it comes to the existing and a bit more concrete ideal L2 self, the students accordingly had detailed plans and career paths. Also, their responses to the concept of the ideal L2 self were linked to their intended effort and mindset, such as 'regular exposure to English' or 'be ready and able to speak English.'

Excerpt 10 (Jee, Year 2, Interview 1)

I'm talking to the buyers [at a trading firm]. But it's really just an imagination. Anyway, I'm holding some documents, all dressed up. … I regularly imagine myself when I'm exposed to some content in English. It's not how frequently I imagine. [Rather,] I want to be this much in terms of English fluency.

Excerpt 11 (Sora, Year 1, Interview 1)

It's not always about doing in-office work as play-by-play [sports] announcers, but sometimes they also go to ballpark. For having interviews with the players after the game. That's the situation I imagine the most. And I often go see [baseball] games myself and can see the announcers having interviews with the MVP every time. I'm like, 'I want to be like that,' or 'I could be like that.' … There're quite a lot of foreign players in Korean baseball

teams. So, I might have to interview them unexpectedly. And I know there are interpreters,
but it would be much easier if I'm ready and able to speak English.

When the researcher interviewed them, Jee (Excerpt 10) and Sora (Excerpt 11) had already decided on their career paths. Jee demonstrated her ideal L2 self working in a trading firm. She made connections to her repeatedly appearing L2 self and its imagination by associating it to the English content she received in the hopes of becoming a more fluent English speaker. Sora's ideal L2 self was related to her dream of becoming a sports announcer, which became more vivid as she regularly exposed herself to possible environments she might be situated in.

Moreover, one fourth-year student was quite noticeable in that she could further develop her current use of English and current situation into her ideal L2 self.

> **Excerpt 12 (Bona, Year 4, Interview 1)**
> I know what offices look like in general. So, I imagine the office full of people with the faces
> I'm working with now. But I still don't really know about the office culture. I haven't really
> thought about how to handle things or how to deal with complaints in different cultures yet.
> But I can definitely imagine myself using English and working in general [in other countries].

Bona hoped to work overseas at the time of the interview. Also, she could advantageously establish her current work environment to elaborate on her ideal L2 self. Although she was not sure of other office cultures yet, she still showed confidence in strategically fostering and preserving her ideal L2 self wherever she would be.

4.2.2 I want to become an English teacher, and I know I will.

In this paper, the concept of the ideal L2 self was most vivid among two students who wished to become teachers. The first example is Won. She had not studied English for a few years until she started college. She graduated from a vocational high school with little exposure to English, which made her learning English again in college quite tricky at first.

> **Excerpt 13 (Won, Year 2, Interview 1)**
> I first started learning English in middle school. I wasn't interested in it at all, but I started
> going to an English hagwon. It was for my grades at first, but then I got interested in English.
> Also, I adore kids and wanted to become an English kindergarten teacher. However, my tutor
> at the time told me that I need at least an associate degree. So, I was like, 'Do I need to go to
> college?' And I came here to study English. To become an English teacher. … I had a really
> hard time studying here at first, but my friends are a little bit better than I am. They told me
> what to do when things get difficult for me in class. I couldn't understand anything at all
> when I first had class with the foreign professor. I didn't know anything except for 'Hello.'
> … I didn't know how to study English at all because I had this long term of not studying
> English before I came here. … I ask for a lot of counseling sessions offered by the school if
> I think I need one. And they would tell me that my GPA isn't quite good enough compared
> to my concrete dream, which has already been set. So, I worked really hard thinking this was
> my last chance. … I think I'll be working as an English teacher, like five years from now.

Won had believed a college degree was not necessary; however, she realized she needed one to accomplish her

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goal of becoming an English teacher. Although she was discouraged and had difficulties in learning English as a college student at first due to her perceived low proficiency, her goal remained solid, unchanging, and existing. Moreover, she made continuous effort to be one step closer to becoming an English teacher.

The other example is Hana. She talked about her plan in a more hopeful and positive manner.

Excerpt 14 (Hana, Year 2, Interview 1)

I want to study for two more years here right after I graduate … In five years? It's so exciting. So exciting.

(Exciting?)

I can think whatever I want because you never know what's gonna happen. I'm really excited. I wonder what I'll be like. Or what I'll do. I hope I teach Korean to foreigners. [In my imagination,] I'm actually teaching in a classroom. I even imagine what I should say in class. My own teacher talks. … I have a plan in teaching Korean to foreigners. We've studied English so far in school for college admission, and literally, that was all about it. But I wanted to study English again as a language if I decided to become a college major. And if I teach Korean in the future, people will be learning from me. So, I wanted an opportunity for myself to find what it's required to become a teacher. To figure things out when you learn English as a language for my future.

Excerpt 15 (Hana, Year 2 → Year 3, Interview 2)

I get the feeling of accomplishment as I keep studying. I've got a more specific purpose in studying English. I think that's what keeps me going.

(When do you usually feel accomplished?)

When I see myself a bit different than before. Like, when I understand a lot more of what's said in the videos in English. It feels really great.

(Then, what is it about this more specific purpose?)

My goal is, did I tell you about this last time [in November 2018]? I want to teach Korean. If I want to become a person who teaches a language, then I need to understand, for example, what's difficult in learning a foreign language in my student's shoes. To understand my future students better.

Hana kept her dream of becoming a teacher who teaches the Korean language to foreigners. It was why she believed she needed to learn and use English. In this process, she also succeeded in integrating her dream with learning English, her plans, and even the teacher's responsibilities into a solid ideal L2 self. As revealed in two interviews, Hana continued studying English to become one step closer to her dream to the level of imagining herself in a classroom and giving her own teacher talks.

5. Discussion

It was revealed that the participants of this paper recognized the need to study English in their current school context. All in all, their views of English, whether as essential or useful, varied. Still, students from all four school years similarly acknowledged the instrumentality of English, regardless of how strong their L2 motivation was or whether or not they depicted ideal L2 selves, not to mention their perceived L2 proficiency. In this regard, English

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was considered a skill that students wanted to have or felt they needed to have (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017). However, there was conceptual needs and an unexperienced reality that made them stay in education and learn English in their college years. They also shaped the students' worldviews on English learning that were individually different, which could result in creating and sustaining the L2 learners' ideal L2 selves and their influence on their L2 motivation (Markus and Nurius 1986).

The participants' L2 motivation was relevant to how they viewed their reality and future. Those who demonstrated none to even weaker forms of the ideal L2 self indicated that there was some distance between the reality they faced and the future they expected, which led them to believe that they did not have any ideal L2 selves. Nonetheless, some participants were not even able to create any forms of the ideal L2 self possibly due to the fact that they had not gone through self-internalization. In other words, the L2 learners' reality and goals did not match enough for the ideal L2 selves to be conceived, envisioned, and generated (cf. Higgins 1987, Hoyle and Sherrill 2006, Lee and Oyserman 2009). For instance, it was about having no relationship between future goals and current learning of English (Excerpts 1 and 2); and nothing specific in terms of goals and plans (Excerpts 6 and 7). For Excerpts 3 through 5, it was about not being able to spare sufficient time or room for the ideal L2 self. Especially for Young (Excerpt 4) and Gina (Excerpt 5), their plans to transfer to a respectable university in their view so they could measure up to what society may expect of them. That is, both of their ideal L2 selves were not fully internalized and resembled the other L2MSS construct (i.e., ought-to L2 self). Also, they could be affected by the concept of *hakbul* in Korea (Hyun and Kim 2013) which may seem akin to the Chinese notion of 'face' to some degree (Magid 2009). Otherwise, their ideal L2 selves may have yielded their role and place to the matters at hand even in the classroom settings (T.-Y. Kim 2015, Yoo and Shin 2016). Also, some students' ideal L2 selves would highlight the fact that there was also a huge gap between what they were able to do and what they wanted to do. Similarly, they also seemed to have lacked all three factors in S. Kim (2015) as well as L2 motivation. In this sense, it was in contrast to the following argument that "the perceived present-future self-discrepancy emerged as a significant predictor of the students' levels of self-motivated engagement in L2 learning" (Hessel 2015, p. 111).

On the other hand, those who had their ideal L2 selves in the immediate vicinity showed somewhat different L2 motivation than those with less internalized or none to much weaker forms. It could be explained that the vividness of their ideal L2 self, rather than the frequency of imagination, was in concordance with their intended L2 effort which was a bit dissimilar to Hessel (2015). As Yashima (2002) maintained, their effort also supported their plans that were more specific than merely job seeking. In this manner, their determination and vision relevant to the ideal L2 selves were also in operation because they knew they could expect certain situations in their desired workplaces (e.g., trading firm, ballpark) in which they would have to speak English willingly or unexpectedly. In addition to this, their ideal L2 selves were able to be facilitative because there was a match between the reality they faced and hopes of meeting their goals (cf. Yoo and Shin 2016). Moreover, it seemed worth noticing that it would have been tricky for comparatively younger students with less work or life experience to plan and prepare for what to do in the near future. For example, Bona in Excerpt 12 could picture her desired future by using her current office as the reference and could at least see how things worked. That is, even the confidence of a senior student could be the product of her time and effort invested into her future. Hence, the participants' future plans, concrete and existing (as in fully internalized) ideal L2 selves, and L2 motivation would go hand in hand (Teimouri et al. 2022).

Secondly, some ideal L2 selves, though still weak, were about actually doing something in the participants' imagination. It was mainly because they might not have experienced or actualized any specific process that would come with the initiation and operation of an ideal L2 self. In addition to this, it could explain that they were somewhat on the verge of facilitating their ideal L2 self, which needed some push such as appropriate support or

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intervention (Suzuki and Childs 2016). Also, it was interesting to note that their ideal L2 selves were related to their capabilities in L2 skills and the probabilities of possible future work settings (Yashima 2009). In other words, Hae (Excerpt 8) and Yun (Excerpt 9) suggested some imagined situations where they could perform based on their current and perceived English levels. Nevertheless, these students' ideal L2 selves would become more tangible if they were interwoven with personally driven purposes along with potentially satisfactory L2 proficiency. Hence, their imaginations should make a substantial difference and become what they desired if they decided to put in a great deal of intended effort, which could also be a part or process of self-internalization (Papi 2010).

By contrast, there were aspiring teachers (i.e., Won and Hana) who had committed to a moderately longer period of setting goals and making effort in actualizing them. In these cases, there was self-realization, self-reflection, and self-improvement. For Won, becoming an English teacher was more important for her than facing and giving in to adversities during her English learning journey (cf. J. Kim 2022). She also mentioned her continuous effort and pictured herself as an English teacher in the near future, which was her solid, existing, and sustaining ideal L2 self (cf. Moskovsky et al. 2016). Moreover, it may have been true for Won that "displaying an encouraging attitude towards learners and leading them to set new goals may prove valuable even if they currently suffer from a lack of proficiency or willingness" (Sak 2020, p. 199). For Hana, positive emotions and a sense of accomplishment accompanied her as she developed her ideal L2 self and devoted conscious effort. Plus, Hana's desire to become a teacher had persisted as her concrete and unchanging as well as entirely internalized ideal L2 self. It might be understood that the ideal L2 selves of the two aspiring teachers in this paper should be considered more determined ones. Ultimately, it should be accentuated that Won actually became an English teacher in a private institution after she graduated from college with an associate degree; and Hana stayed in education to pursue a career in teaching Korean as a foreign language (Teimouri et al. 2022). Furthermore, Hana's case was also a proper example of showing "the importance of having a positive self-image in the study of an L2" (Sak 2020, p. 198).

6. Conclusion

The present study endeavored to figure out in what way and to what extent the participants' perceived and internalized ideal L2 selves influenced their L2 motivation and demotivation. The intensity of one's ideal L2 self was distinct in its association with the individuals' effort and behavior. In this regard, educational settings should back up the L2 learners' needs in order for them to match or align the learning agents' reality and future. That is, their L2 learning would be more meaningful if their conceptual needs and the unexperienced reality, rather than either of them, are incorporated since the participants in this paper were Korean junior college English majors and adult L2 learners simultaneously.

Yet, the current study has its limitations. It exclusively recruited adult L2 learners who were female college and junior college students majoring in English. In light of the participants' experiences and perspectives, future studies could include a more homogeneous or diverse group to enhance the generalizability and observe the distinctness of the findings. Additionally, the original data were collected before the pandemic. Given the substantial changes in English education worldwide in recent years, the responses on the perceived ideal L2 selves might differ if gathered today. This difference could open up more opportunities for future studies to compare the notions of the ideal L2 self before and after the pandemic, offering more contemporary insights.

As noted in previous sections, the participants in this study were drawn from a single institution. Their shared experiences and understandings reflected similar trajectories for their L2 learning as adult L2 learners. In this regard, one key implication from this paper would be encouraging L2 learning environments to develop L2 skills for individuals' target professions or industries according to their future jobs and plans. Then, their ideal L2 selves

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could align with what the L2 learners plan for themselves. Another implication would be some practical assistance to enable the L2 learners to create one or more ideal L2 selves and sustain them consistently within the college or university settings. As it was also recommended in Hyun and Kim (2013), college students could gain more confidence by preparing for their future as the time for job seeking approaches, which sums up most of one's college years. Then, L2 learners would encounter what they can do and what they believe they can do, enabling them to distinguish among what they actually need, what they are capable of, and what they might lack. In a similar vein, individually tailored intervention sessions for adult L2 learners in college contexts, designed to foster or boost self-internalization, may also prove effective.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Level: Tertiary