

*An investigation of the relationships between students' future L2 selves and L2 performance in two secondary schools in England*

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Abstract

In England, fewer and fewer secondary-school students decide to continue studying a foreign language. Nonetheless, there is a lack of context-specific research applying the most recent theories on second language (L2) motivation to better understand students' attitudes to modern foreign languages (MFL). This article reports on the quantitative findings of a mixed methods inquiry which adopted the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) to explore the relationships between future L2 selves and L2 performance among secondary students in England. A survey was conducted on 397 students of French in the second and fourth year of secondary education from two schools in the East of England. They responded to an L2MSS questionnaire, the results of which were correlated to the students' current grades in French. The results showed that all the three perceived future L2 selves variables significantly correlated with L2 performance with different intensity, with the ideal L2 self being most strongly associated with L2 performance. Accordingly, this article recommends further research on the relationship between attitudes and performance in MFL in the form of action-research in order to devise and implement pedagogies aimed at strengthening secondary students' future L2 selves to increase L2 performance.

*Keywords:* L2 motivation; L2 performance; future L2 selves; L2 motivational self system

## 1. Introduction

In 2005, the introduction of Dörnyei's L2MSS theory commenced a new chapter in the study of L2 motivation by shifting attention from the traditional focus on attitudes towards communities of L2 speakers to the way in which learners construct their possible future L2 selves as speakers of a foreign language. The LM2SS consists of three components: the ideal self, the ought-to self and the learning experience. The *ideal self* is a representation of what we wish to become in the future. If using a particular foreign language represents a feature of this self-representation, then the ideal L2 self can act as a motivator to learn that language in order to reduce the gap between the ideal and the actual selves (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). The *ought-to self* is shaped by the L2-specific attributes that one thinks one should possess in order to meet social expectations and by the desire to avoid negative consequences in cases of failure (Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). If it is in conflict with the ideal L2 self, it can hinder motivation, whereas, if it is consistent with the ideal L2 self, it can be internalised to some extent (Dörnyei, 2009), although not enough empirical evidence exists to prove this internalisation process (Kim, 2009). According to this definition, the ought-to self can be seen as consisting of two complementary dimensions which can be labelled as "positive" and "negative." The positive dimension coincides with the wish to learn the L2 as a way of pleasing our significant others while the negative component represents the wish to learn the L2 to avoid perceived negative consequences. Finally, the *L2 learning experience* is a wider dimension that is comprised of all the factors related to the learning environment in which a student learns a foreign language.

This distinction between *positive* and *negative* ought-to selves was not made by Dörnyei, but represents my reconsideration of the notion of the ought-to self, which is applied to this study with the aim of better understanding the motivational role of the ought-to self in an attempt to start answering the call for a full re-conceptualization of the ought-to self made by Dörnyei and Chan (2013). In particular, the two researchers suggested that a way of reconsidering the dimension would be through separate scales reflecting the types of external expectations implied in the ought-to self. In line with this suggestion, the positive ought-to self is conceptualized in this study as the desire to become a speaker of an L2 because of the importance placed upon it by our significant others (e.g., parents, family, or friends), whereas the negative ought-to self reflects the desire to learn the L2 because of a fear of perceived negative consequences (e.g., failing exams or reducing career possibilities). The positive and negative aspects of the positive ought-to self should not be considered as dichotomous but, rather, as complementary elements of a dimension encompassing

all the extrinsic motivational forces that can impact learners' L2 motivation. Looking at these two dimensions separately can reveal which of the two tends to be more felt by learners at this stage of education and could pave the way to more radical re-conceptualizations of the ought-to self.

Over the last decade, many empirical studies have confirmed the robustness of the L2MSS theory by correlating its first two components (ideal L2 self and ought-to self) to learners' intended effort and motivated behaviour in a variety of contexts (e.g., Bursali & Oz, 2017; Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Khani & Amiri, 2016; Kong et al., 2018). However, it seems that certain aspects have received less attention than others.

Firstly, only a few studies have considered the impact of the future selves on learners' performance (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Moskovsky, Racheva, Assulaimani, & Harkins, 2016; Wong 2018), arguably because of the indirect relationship between attitudes and attainment (Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011). According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), the effect of the selves on performance is mediated by the students' motivated behavior. For this reason, they recommended that the researcher maintain a focus on the relationships between the L2 selves and motivated behaviour. However, now that robust data have been gathered on these relationships through a number of studies (e.g., Bursali & Oz, 2017; Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Khani & Amiri, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2011; Kong et al., 2018; Lasagabaster, 2017; Moskovsky et al., 2016; Wong, 2018; You and Dörnyei, 2014), using grade scores as a new criterion could represent a successive step in understanding the role of the selves on actual L2 performance. In line with this reflection, a growing number of studies have recently begun investigating the effect of the future selves on students' L2 performance by using as a criterion either students' school grades in the L2 or L2 proficiency scores. The initial results suggest that the ideal L2 self is an indicator of either students' grades in foreign languages (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Martinovich, 2018; Wong, 2018) or their language proficiency (Kim & Kim, 2011; Lamb, 2012). In relation to the ought-to self, the few studies that considered the variable revealed that the ought-to self did not correlate with L2 performance at all (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Lamb, 2012). The only exception seems to be Wong's study (2018), which disclosed that the ought-to self correlated with lower and average grades but not with higher results, which still led to the conclusion that the ideal L2 self represented a much stronger indicator of performance.

Secondly, although by now the L2MSS has been applied in various educational contexts (secondary schools, higher education, and adult learning) and in a variety of countries (China, Hungary, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey), it seems that no study has applied the L2MSS within the context of a British secondary school, despite the strong evidence provided by governmental

reports on the decline in the number of students deciding to study a foreign language in England. Modern foreign languages have in fact been experiencing a steady decrease in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and A-level entries since 2004, the year in which MFL teaching ceased to be a compulsory subject at Key Stage 4 (corresponding to the fourth and fifth year of secondary education). Since 2004, GCSE entries have decreased by 59%, while data for the summer of 2017 indicate a decline in the number of French, German and Spanish GCSE entries of, respectively, 10%, 12%, and 3% compared to the previous year (University Council of Modern Languages, 2017). Similarly, A-level entries for languages in 2016 were 3% less than in 2015, and 32% less than in 1996 (Tinsley & Board, 2017).

The project on which the present study is based was a mixed-method enquiry aimed to fill these research gaps by assessing the impact of the L2 selves on students' L2 performance. The current article reports the quantitative findings related to the impact of the future L2 selves on students' grades in French.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research question

This study aims to fill some of the gaps in current research by applying the L2MSS to measure the perceived future L2 selves among the Year 8 (second year of secondary education, 13 years old) and Year 10 (fourth year, 15 years old) students at two secondary schools in the East of England in order to answer the following question: *What are the relationships between students' representations of their future L2 selves and their current grades in French?* This question is answered by correlating students' perceived future L2 self with their grade levels in French and, in case of significant correlations, to reveal which future self is most strongly associated with L2 performance.

### 2.2. Context, participants and sampling

The sample of the study is comprised of all the Year 8 and Year 10 students of French at two comprehensive secondary schools in the East of England. The two schools belong to a federation of academies characterized by a strong centralization of policies. As a result, both schools adopt the same curriculum, share the same teaching resources, assess their students through the same tests, and utilize the same grade scales. Given the high comparability of the two settings, it was decided to merge the two samples into a single one in order to maximize the sample size.

All students completed a questionnaire aimed at measuring their perceived ideal L2 selves and ought-to selves. The sample consisted of a total of 16

classes: eight classes in Year 8 and eight in Year 10. In both schools, students had to study a foreign language at Key Stage 3 (Year 7 to Year 9, and the first three years of secondary education) and Key Stage 4 (Year 10 and Year 11). This surmounted a common barrier to the study of L2 motivation in the British context; given that students are generally only required to study a foreign language at Key Stage 3, those who decide to continue their languages studies at GCSE level tend to be the most motivated learners. In the few studies measuring attitudes towards foreign language in England, this has been reported as an issue affecting the accuracy of the measurement (Davies, 2004). The questionnaire responses were analyzed to assess the strength of students' perceived future L2 selves, which were correlated to their current grade in French in order to measure the relationships of the L2 selves with their school performance.

The grades were based on an end-of-term assessment (April 2018). The same assessment was administered to all the classes of the same year group, and grades were calculated using the same scales and grade boundaries. However, the assessment and the grade scales used were different between the two age groups. Therefore, in order to allow comparability between the age groups, all grades were categorized based on their distribution in percentiles, as explained in section 3.

The nature of the study required some careful consideration of ethical issues, especially in relation to data privacy. The research was authorized by the Head Teachers of both schools and by the Data Officer of the Federation. Additionally, the families of the pupils that participated in the study were informed of the research and given the possibility to opt out from it at any time. Furthermore, in order to match the questionnaire responses to each student's grades, all questionnaires had to include nominal and sensitive data, such as students' full name, age and gender. All sensitive data was safely stored for the duration of the research and successively destroyed, and the dataset anonymized.

### 2.3. Methods and data analysis

The data collection and analysis started in April 2018 and ended in July 2018. The main instrument used to answer the first research question was a questionnaire which was administered to 201 students in Year 8 and to 196 students in Year 10 after being piloted with a Year 7 and a Year 9 class. The questionnaire was composed of 24, six-point Likert scale questions measuring three variables: ideal L2 self, positive ought-to self, and negative ought-to self.

The questionnaire was administered to a total of 397 students. The number of valid entries was reduced to 382 for the second research question due to missing questionnaire answers and/or missing performance data. Three one-way ANOVAs (one for each future self variable) were conducted; the students' perceived future

selves, as previously calculated through the questionnaire responses, were compared to the students' current grades in French to assess possible correlations.

## 2.4. Reliability and validity

The questionnaire was partly designed with reference to previous studies; the questions related to the ideal L2 self were taken and adapted from Ryan's questionnaires (2009) to reinforce the reliability of the data. Regarding the positive and negative ought-to selves, it was possible to adapt only some of the items from previous studies in which the ought-to self was researched as a single variable (e.g., Lasagabaster, 2016; You & Dörnyei, 2014). Other items, therefore, had to be original. A Cronbach's alpha test was conducted for each variable to confirm the internal consistency of the instrument and increase the internal reliability of the study. The test revealed that while the items of the ideal L2 self and the positive ought-to self scales demonstrated a good level of internal consistency ( $p > .70$ ), the test score for the negative ought-to self was lower than the p value ( $p = .674$ ). This was mainly due to one item that did not correlate with the others. By removing the item, the test score exceeded the p value ( $p = .795$ ). As a consequence, six items were used to measure the students' perceived negative ought-to self instead of the original seven. The results of the Cronbach's alpha test for each variable are reported in Table 1.

Table 1 Results of the Cronbach's alpha test for each variable ( $N = 391$ )

Variable	Cronbach's alpha based on standardised items\ ( $p > .7$ )	Number of questionnaire items
Ideal L2 self	.873	10
Positive ought-to self	.850	7
Negative ought-to self (with uncorrelated item)	.674	7
Negative ought-to self (without uncorrelated item)	.795	6

## 3. Data analysis

Since the scale of students' grades was different for each year group, all grades were grouped into five categories, labelled "very low," "low," "average," "high," and "very high," according to the distribution of the grades by 20th percentiles. The results of the analyses are reported by way of each future L2 self.

### 3.1. Ideal L2 self

As the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated for the ideal L2 self variable, as assessed by Levene's test ( $p = .006$ ), a one-way Welch ANOVA was

carried out (Lix, Keselman, & Keselman, 1996) to determine whether the mean ideal L2 self score changed with the different levels of the current grades. In total, there were four significant outliers as assessed by the boxplot, and therefore the same analysis was carried out before and after the exclusion of the outliers. With the outliers, the data were normally distributed in all the subgroups except one (cell containing "high" current grades,  $p = .038$ ), as assessed by Saphiro-Wilk's test of normality; after the exclusion of the outliers, however, data were normally distributed in all subgroups ( $p > .50$ ). When outliers were included, the ideal L2 self score was statistically significantly different for different levels of current grades (Welch's  $F(4, 36.914) = 148.056, p < .0001, \omega^2 = 0.28$ ). When outliers were excluded, the ideal L2 self score was still statistically significantly different for different levels of current grades (Welch's  $F(4, 43.527) = 145.327, p < .0001, \omega^2 = 0.31$ ). These results are presented in Figure 1.

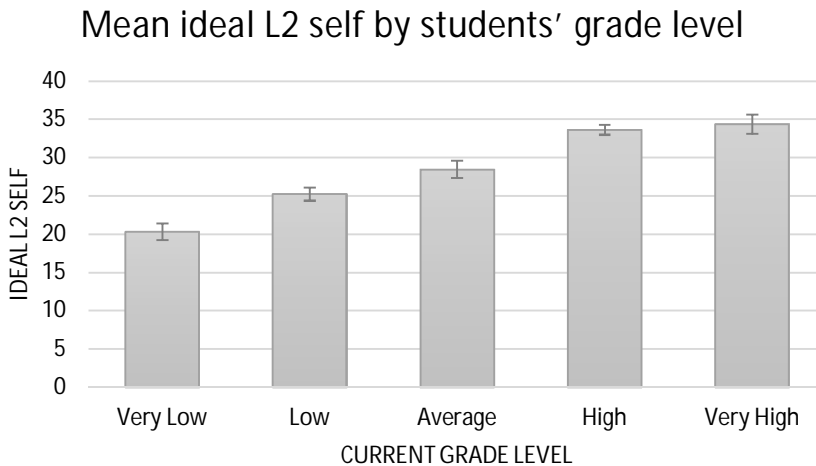


Figure 1 Students' ideal L2 self scores by current grade level (outliers included)

A Games-Howell post hoc test (outliers included) revealed a statistically significant difference in the mean grade scores between the majority of the groups, as reported in Table 2. Specifically, it was found that the mean ideal L2 self score of students with a "very high" current grade in French was almost 14/50 points higher than the mean ideal L2 self score of students with a "very low" grade, an average increase of approximately +28%. The statistically significant increase in ideal L2 self between grade levels ranged from +6.5% to +10.2% ("very low" to "low:" +10%, "low" to "average:" +6.5%, "average" to "high:" +10.2%). The only difference that was not significant was found between students with "high" and "very high" grades, with the latter group scoring, on average,

only half a point more than the former. The results suggest that the ideal L2 self tends to be directly proportional to L2 performance, and its correlation with grades seems particularly strong with lower and average grades.

Table 2 Statistically significant increases in mean ideal L2 self scores by grade levels

Ideal L2 self (outliers included)					
From grade level	To grade level	Mean difference increase	Sig.	95% confidence interval	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Very low ( $N = 85, M = 20.26, SD = 10.12$ )	Low ( $N = 92, M = 25.24, SD = 8.30$ )	5.00	.004*	1.12	8.84
Very low ( $N = 85, M = 20.26, SD = 10.12$ )	Average ( $N = 56, M = 28.52, SD = 8.57$ )	8.26	< .0001**	3.87	12.65
Very low ( $N = 85, M = 20.26, SD = 10.12$ )	High ( $N = 111, M = 33.61, SD = 6.81$ )	13.35	< .0001**	9.83	16.88
Very low ( $N = 85, M = 20.26, SD = 10.12$ )	Very high ( $N = 38, M = 34.1, SD = 7.68$ )	13.85	< .0001**	9.23	18.47
Low ( $N = 92, M = 25.24, SD = 8.30$ )	High ( $N = 111, M = 33.61, SD = 6.81$ )	8.37	< .0001**	1.42	5.34
Low ( $N = 92, M = 25.24, SD = 8.30$ )	Very high ( $N = 38, M = 34.1, SD = 7.68$ )	8.87	< 0.0001**	5.40	11.35
Average ( $N = 56, M = 28.52, SD = 8.57$ )	High ( $N = 111, M = 33.61, SD = 6.81$ )	5.09	0.002*	1.43	8.76
Average ( $N = 56, M = 28.52, SD = 8.57$ )	Very high ( $N = 38, M = 34.10, SD = 7.68$ )	5.59	0.012*	0.87	10.30

Note. \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .001$

### 3.2. Positive ought-to self

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether the students' mean positive ought-to self scores correlated with the students' grades. There was homogeneity of variances in the dataset as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ( $p = .98$ ). A total of five significant outliers were found, as assessed by the boxplot, and therefore the same analysis was carried out before and after excluding the outliers. Before the exclusion of the outliers, data were abnormally distributed among the subgroups ( $p < .50$ ), as assessed by Saphiro-Wilk's test of normality; after exclusion of the outliers, data were normally distributed in almost all the subgroups ( $p > .50$ ). Once again, the group with "high" grades was not normally distributed ( $p = .023$ ), but the ANOVA was considered robust enough against this degree of deviation from the normal distribution (Wilcox, 2012). With the outliers included, the positive ought-to self score was statistically significantly different with different levels of current grades ( $F(4, 382) = 8.8, p < .0001, \omega^2 = 0.08$ ). Similarly, with the outliers excluded, the positive ought-to self score was statistically significantly different ( $F(4, 377) = 13.08, p < .0001, \omega^2 = 0.12$ ). These results are displayed in Figure 2.



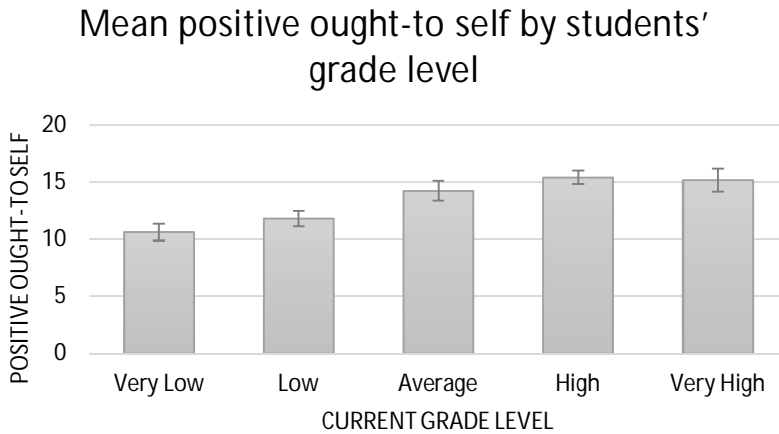


Figure 2 Students' positive ought-to self scores by current grade level (outliers included)

A post hoc Tukey HSD test (outliers included) revealed a statistically significant difference in the mean grade scores between specific groups, as reported in Table 3. The only significant differences in the positive ought-to self variable by grade levels were found between the extremes of the scale, namely between the lower grades ("very low" and "low") and the higher grades ("high" and "very high"), with a score increase between "very low" and "very high" grades of only +4.6/35 points (+13%). These results indicate that the correlation between the positive ought-to self and the students' grades in French is rather weak, given the effect size and the subgroups among which the difference in the variable was significant.

Table 3 Statistically significant increases in mean positive ought-to self scores by grade level

Positive ought-to self (outliers included)					
From grade level	To grade level	Mean difference increase	Sig.	95% confidence interval	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Very low (N = 85, M = 10.51, SD = 6.87)	Average (N = 56, M = 14.08, SD = 6.35)	3.56	.012*	0.52	6.60
Very low (N = 85, M = 10.51, SD = 6.87)	High (N = 111, M = 15.36, SD = 6.26)	4.85	< .0001**	2.30	7.40
Very low (N = 85, M = 10.51, SD = 6.87)	Very high (N = 38, M = 15.13, SD = 6.31)	4.62	.003*	1.17	8.06
Low (N = 92, M = 11.73, SD = 6.38)	High (N = 111, M = 15.36, SD = 6.26)	3.63	.001**	1.14	6.12

Note. \*p < .05; \*\*p < .001

### 3.3. Negative ought-to self

Since the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated for the negative ought-to self variable, as assessed by Levene's test ( $p = .004$ ), a one-way Welch ANOVA was conducted to determine whether the negative ought-to self score

was different with different levels of current grades. There were no significant outliers, as assessed by the boxplot. The sample was normally distributed among all the subgroups ( $p > .50$ ), as assessed by Saphiro-Wilk's test of normality. The negative ought-to self score was statistically significantly different with different levels of current grades (Welch's  $F(4, 377) = 19.17, p < 0.00001, \omega^2 = 0.16$ ). The results are displayed in Figure 3 by means of a bar chart.

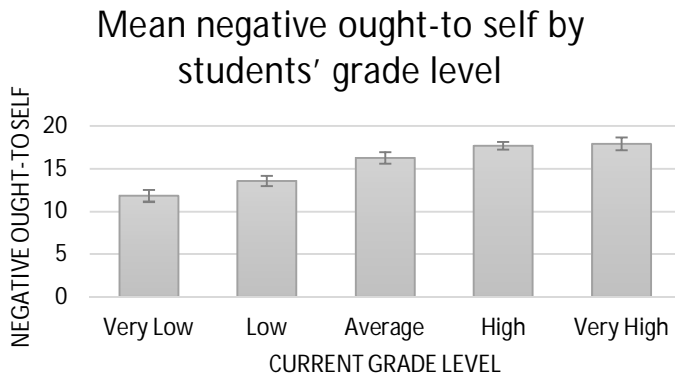


Figure 3 Students' negative ought-to self scores by current grade level (outliers included)

Table 4 Statistically significant increases in mean negative ought-to self scores by grade level

Negative ought-to self					
From grade level	To grade level	Mean difference increase	Sig.	95% confidence interval	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Very low ( $N = 85, M = 11.84, SD = 6.40$ )	Average ( $N = 56, M = 16.3, SD = 5.02$ )	4.46	< .0001**	1.90	7.01
Very low ( $N = 85, M = 11.84, SD = 6.40$ )	High ( $N = 111, M = 17.7, SD = 4.62$ )	5.87	< .0001**	3.73	8.00
Very low ( $N = 85, M = 11.84, SD = 6.40$ )	Very high ( $N = 38, M = 17.92, SD = 4.70$ )	6.08	< .0001**	3.18	8.97
Low ( $N = 92, M = 13.58, SD = 5.78$ )	Average ( $N = 56, M = 16.3, SD = 5.02$ )	2.72	.026*	0.20	5.23
Low ( $N = 92, M = 13.58, SD = 5.78$ )	High ( $N = 111, M = 17.7, SD = 4.62$ )	4.13	< .0001**	2.03	6.22
Low ( $N = 92, M = 13.58, SD = 5.78$ )	Very high ( $N = 38, M = 17.92, SD = 4.70$ )	4.34	.0003**	1.48	7.20

Note. \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .001$

In this case also, the post hoc Games-Howell test revealed statistically significant differences in the mean grade scores between specific groups, which are reported in Table 4. The mean negative ought-to self score of students with a "very high" current grade in French was 6/30 points higher than the mean score of students with a "very low" grade (+20%). This average increase was stronger than the one found for the positive ought-to self (+13%), but lower than the ideal L2 self (+28%). Additionally, compared to the results of the positive ought-to self,

the mean negative ought-to self score was significantly different between lower grades and both "average" and higher grades. The data reveal a trend similar to that of the positive ought-to self, but more marked. Once again, the dependent variable seems to correlate more strongly with lower grades than with higher grades. This suggests that although a student with a weaker negative ought-to self is more likely to also have lower grades, the opposite could not be said for students with higher grades.

#### 4. Discussion

##### 4.1. Correlations between students' future ideal L2 self and their current grades in French

Among the future L2 selves, the ideal L2 self was found to have the strongest correlations with students' grades in French. Additionally, the correlations were statistically significant across all grade levels, with the only exception being between students with "high" and "very high" grades. Although the effect size of the correlations was medium ( $\omega^2 = 0.28$  or  $0.31$ , with outliers included or excluded), this result nonetheless appears quite striking considering the indirect nature of the relationship.

These findings confirm the results from previous studies carried out in China, Croatia, Hungary, and Indonesia. They all indicated that the ideal L2 self was associated with students' grades in foreign languages (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Martynovich, 2018; Wong, 2018) or of language proficiency (Kim & Kim, 2011; Lamb, 2012), although the last two studies showed weak correlational effect sizes. This difference in results can be interpreted in the light of the possible disparity in the criterion measure, namely between school grades and proficiency levels in the L2. Therefore, the ideal L2 self appears to be the strongest future-self associated to L2 performance, a finding that confirms the need to strengthen students' ideal L2 selves to increase their L2 attitudes, motivated behaviour and performance.

##### 4.2. Correlations between students' positive and negative ought-to selves and their current grades in French

The two ought-to selves showed interesting differences. Firstly, the effect size of the statistically significant differences in mean negative ought-to self scores by grade levels was stronger than its positive counterpart ( $\omega^2 = 0.16$  for the negative ought-to self and  $\omega^2 = 0.08$  or  $0.12$  for the positive ought-to self, depending on the inclusion or exclusion of outliers), although less strong than the ideal L2 self. Secondly, the negative ought-to self was found to correlate across more grade levels than its positive counterpart. Finally, the average means of the negative

ought-to self by grade levels were consistently higher than the corresponding means of the positive ought-to self.

These results show that the positive ought-to self is weakly associated to performance in MFL in this context. This indicates a general rejection from students of working hard in the subject to please significant others. The negative dimension of the ought-to self, on the other hand, is more strongly associated with performance, especially among students with lower or “average” grades. Nonetheless, although students with higher grades still achieved, on average, a rather high score in the questionnaire for this variable, no significant differences were found between groups with “average” and higher grades that could qualify the negative ought-to self as a strong motivator for high-achieving students. This fragmented picture can be summarized and interpreted in the following way: having acknowledged the primary role of the ideal L2 self as motivator, a weak negative ought-to self and, partially, a weak positive ought-to self tend to be particularly displayed by learners with lower performance. This could suggest that a weak ought-to self may have a negative impact on students’ motivated behavior, which, in turn, would affect their performance in MFL. On the other hand, of the two dimensions of the ought-to self, only a stronger negative ought-to self is associated with higher grades, suggesting that higher performing learners, although rejecting the idea of putting efforts in their language learning in order to please others, still tend to feel a pressure to succeed in their language learning in order to avoid negative consequences in their lives. These results and reflections are clearly dependent on the context and cannot be generalised, as the societal value associated to foreign language learning, and to the learning of specific languages, can greatly vary both nationally and locally.

The results obtained correspond with those of Wong (2018), who also found that the ought-to self only correlated with lower and average grades in English, whereas the ideal L2 self was the only variable correlating with higher grades. However, other studies, such as Dörnyei and Chan (2013), produced opposite results and did not find any significant correlation with the ought-to self. Measuring the ought-to self variable through its positive and negative dimensions has therefore produced interesting insights on the nature and effect of the two elements of the ought-to self. However, the motivational effect of the ought-to self and its ability of predicting motivated behavior and performance remains problematic, especially among adolescents. Therefore, this proposed approach needs to be considered as a first step towards a more radical reconsideration of the ought-to self.

## 5. Conclusions

The key aim of the study was to better understand the motivational power of the future L2 selves on students’ L2 performance. In order to do this, the study

applied Dörnyei's L2MSS theory in order to assess the relationships between students' perceived future L2 selves and their grades in MFL. The findings of the study indicate that all three future L2 self variables correlated with L2 performance, but with different intensity. The ideal L2 self was most strongly associated with L2 performance, correlating to all grade levels. Both the positive and negative dimensions of the ought-to self, on the other hand, were weakly linked to performance, and the positive dimension seems to be the weakest of the three variables: while the negative ought-to self is still associated to lower and average grades, a weak positive ought-to self seems to only be linked with lower performance. Furthermore, all students, regardless of their grades, tended to display particularly low levels of positive ought-to self, perhaps as a form of rejection to the idea of learning a language to please significant others; on the other hand, students, and especially learners with higher grades, tended to show a greater awareness of possible negative consequences in case of not being successful in their language learning.

From an empirical perspective, the study has contributed to deepening our understanding of the future L2 selves in motivating students to work hard in their language studies. Whilst confirming the findings of past research of the strong link between the ideal L2 self and motivated behaviour and L2 performance, it has also challenged previous findings on the role of the ought-to self, which was previously found to have no significant motivational effect on learners. More specifically, the results have indicated that the association of the future ought-to selves with performance is stronger among lower and middle attainments compared to highly performing students. However, the double directionality of the relationship makes it impossible to draw any firm conclusions, as this study has not investigated how students' performance can contribute, in turn, to shape students' perception of their future L2 selves.

Conceptually, the present study has contributed to answering the call for a re-conceptualization of the ought-to self dimension by considering it in its theorized positive and negative components. The results seem to indicate that this distinction can provide useful insights on the effect of cultural and contextual influences on students' attitudes to learn a foreign language. By showing that 1) the fear of negative consequences in students' future lives and/or careers can represent a stronger motivator than the willingness to please significant others, and that 2) secondary-school learners in the sample tended to reject the idea of learning a language to please significant others, the study suggests that the unsatisfactory results associated with the ought-to self in past research could be partially explained by learners' conflicting attitudes towards these two dimensions embedded in the ought-to self. However, this finding seems to be intrinsically linked to the geographical and cultural context of the research and no generalization can thus

be made; more research is therefore needed to assess if a similar trend can be found in different settings, both in England and in other countries.

The study involved a series of conceptual, methodological and contextual limitations. In relation to the conceptual limitations, the research did not consider some aspects related to the L2MSS, such as the role of motivated behavior in mediating between future selves and L2 performance and the day-to-day dynamics of the learning experience. This was justified by the need to maintain a narrower approach to the examination of the selected variables. Methodologically, the study had to rely on a self-report questionnaire as the main research instrument, which could not guarantee an accurate picture of students' future L2 selves. The questionnaire was, nonetheless, preferred as a research instrument since it enabled access to a larger sample. In relation to the statistical analysis, not all the assumptions were respected in the dataset, as specified in the data analysis section. Although it was possible to use alternative analyses to compensate for most of these violations, one subgroup of the dataset (students with "high" grades) was not normally distributed both with and without outliers. Finally, the main contextual limitation of the study was its localized geographical context, which limits the external validity of the research and the possibility of forming generalizations. It was, nonetheless, encouraging to observe that the findings produced by the quantitative analysis in relation to the ideal L2 self generally confirmed previous studies carried out in a variety of contexts around the world, indicating the presence of common patterns in L2 motivation.

Although the study showed significant correlations between L2 selves and performance, more research is needed to confirm the findings in different contexts. Given the indirect relationship between attitudes and performance, it is recommended that future research also include motivated behaviour as a variable to better understand its role in mediating the effect of the L2 selves on performance. Additionally, considering the interesting results obtained in relation to using two different scales to measure the ought-to self dimension, the study suggests that future research should continue to challenge the original concept of ought-to self in order to more accurately understand its motivational capacity. Finally, the main pedagogical lesson drawn from this study is the need to implement pedagogies to strengthen the motivational power of the ideal L2 self in order to increase students' performance. In particular, this study points to the need of more action-research aimed at designing pedagogies to strengthen students' L2 selves in the MFL classroom and at testing their effect on students' L2 performance.

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