

# Underprivileged Students' Second Language Motivation: Cases of Three Highly-Motivated Non-English Major Students

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Article Information	Abstract
<b>Article History:</b> Received: 25 May 2020 Accepted: 1 December 2020 Available online: 15 December 2020	<i>This article presents the main qualitative findings from a mixed-methods study which applied Zoltán Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System to explore the L2 motivation of 291 non-English major students in a regional university in Thailand. This article focuses on exploring three highly-motivated underprivileged students' English motivation to gain insights into the extent to which the students' possible L2-related selves and L2 learning experiences influence their L2 motivation. Also explored were the participants' significant others' perspectives on the participants' English learning in order to gain a more holistic picture of the phenomena under study and to ensure data triangulation. Data were collected using a range of methods including semi-structured interviews and Snake interviews with the three main participants. Unstructured interviews were conducted with the main participants' significant others. The interview transcripts were analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed that there was a balance between the hope-for and feared selves, enabling the participants' possible selves to motivate them in their English learning. The results also showed that the students' L2 learning experience provided an immediate learning environment which fostered their development and motivated them in their English learning. These findings yielded important insights into how students' L2-related selves play a crucial role in motivating them in their L2 learning as well as how policy planners, educators, administrators, teachers and parents can help create an environment which promotes L2 learning and motivation in their respective contexts.</i>
<b>Keywords:</b> L2 Motivation L2 Motivational Self System Possible selves L2 learning experience Underprivileged students	

## INTRODUCTION

Despite its status as a foreign language, English has long been a prominent foreign language and the most commonly taught in Thailand (Wongsothorn et al., 2002). Given that the 1999 National Education Act and the Amended National Education Act of 2002 mandated nine years of compulsory education, Thai students are required to study English as a foreign language for nine years from the first grade in primary school (Baker, 2008; Draper, 2012). Besides its status as a compulsory school subject, English is also a compulsory subject for entry to higher education institutions. Thai students are required to have sufficient English knowledge in order to enter Thai universities. With regard to its prominence in the Thai education system, huge amounts

of budget money are allocated to the Ministry of Education, and the education budget is considered one of the highest education budgets in the world (Kaur et al., 2016). Despite the country's huge spending on education, Thai students remain in the low proficiency category when it comes to English proficiency levels (Kaur et al., 2016). Thai students tend to have limited opportunities to use English in their daily life, especially those who live in less developed areas. The lack of opportunities to use English outside of the classrooms (Draper, 2012; Prapunta, 2017) and issues regarding access to quality English education (Atagi, 2011; Draper, 2012; Hayes, 2014; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Sanonguthai, 2014) in certain areas have contributed to problems regarding students' English proficiency and motivation in the language.

Nevertheless, there are still some motivated students who excel in English regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds, it is vital to explore what motivates these students to study English in order to be able to encourage future students to explore their abilities to study and use the language. This knowledge about motivation to learn English might help individuals who are involved in English education in Thailand develop appropriate pedagogy that is more responsive to students' diverse needs and better benefits students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

## **THEREOTICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

This study utilized the L2 Motivational Self System as a framework to understand how the components of this model motivated language learners to learn the language. Some background theories related to the L2 Motivational Self System are the concept of possible selves, the self-discrepancy concept, and the key concept of the L2 Motivational Self System which includes the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self and the learning experience. With reference to the notion of "possible selves" proposed by Markus & Nurius (1986), possible selves refer to ideas of what people might become, would like to become, and are afraid of becoming. Possible selves involve cognitive factors such as hopes, fears and goals and, hence, function as "future self-guides", showing "a dynamic, forward-pointing conception that can explain how someone is moved from the present toward the future" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 80).

Concerning the desire to achieve the future self-state of an individual, Higgins (1987) proposes the self-discrepancy theory, elaborating on the discrepancies between an individual's self states which include the actual self, ideal self and ought self. The "actual self" refers to an individual's concept about his/her present self. The "ideal self" represents the attributes that a person wishes to possess (Higgins, 1987, p.320). The "ought self" refers to what a person thinks he or she should or ought to possess, for example, an individual's sense of obligations or responsibilities (Higgins, 1987, p.321). In a nutshell, the self-discrepancy theory suggests that an individual is motivated to move in a direction where there is a match between his/her self-concept and his/her "personally relevant self-guides" (Higgins, 1987, p.321). In terms of motivation, an individual's wish to decrease the discrepancy between his/her current self and his/her ideal or ought-to selves is viewed as his/her motivation (Dörnyei, 2009).

The model draws on the principle that people's motivation is based on future images of themselves (Dörnyei, 2009). If these images are in harmony with their L2 learning, they will be motivated to learn the language. Internalized future self-images represent an Ideal L2 Self while future self-images that come from external sources (such as family, peers, teachers, or the curriculum) represent an ought-to L2 Self. Regarding the ideal L2 self, Dörnyei (2009) states that an individual would be driven to learn an L2 if his/her ideal L2 self speaks the language. This shows an individual's desire to reduce the gap between his/her actual and ideal selves. The concept is in alignment with Lamb's (2011) basic premise of future-oriented components of the self as he puts it, "the self-identity we wish for in the future can be a source of motivation to engage in self-regulated, or autonomous, learning, which will help us achieve that identity" (p. 177).

Higgins (1998, p. 15) mentions a "promotion focus" of the ideal self-guides in the sense that it involves hopes, aspirations and accomplishments, driving an individual to attempt to achieve a desired end-state. Unlike the ideal L2 self which is internalized and more intrinsic to an individual, the ought-to L2 self is related to the more extrinsic type of instrumentality (Noels, 2009). A clear example of the ought-to L2 self could be seen when an individual hopes to speak an L2 because s/he does not want to disappoint his/her loved ones, or would like to get a good grade or good job. These ought self-guides, according to Higgins (1998, p.15), have a "prevention focus" which involves obligations and responsibilities. Higgins (1998) states that people usually move towards the desired end-state (to approach something pleasant or to avoid something unpleasant), but their focus, be it promotion or prevention, varies depending on people and situations.

In case of the motivating capacity of the ideal and ought-to L2 selves, Dörnyei (2009, pp.18-22) points out that certain conditions can either enhance or hinder the motivating capacity of these selves. These conditions include: 1) an individual's ability to elaborate and visualize his/her future self-image; 2) an individual's perception of the plausibility of these future selves or what Dörnyei (2009, p.18) calls, "perceived plausibility"; 3) the congruence between the ideal and ought-to selves; 4) activation of possible future selves in the working memory through effective activation/priming methods such as imagining oneself as a successful L2 speaker; 5) an individual's clear vision of what s/he needs to do in order to translate these future selves into reality or what Dörnyei (2009, p. 18) calls, "accompanying procedural strategies"; and 6) a balance between a desired L2 self and its counteracting feared L2 self. Regarding the last condition, Hoyle & Sherrill (2006), as cited in Dörnyei (2009, p. 22), state: "the motivation conferred by balanced possible selves is additive, involving both approach and avoid tendencies, and is therefore greater than the motivation conferred by the hoped-for or feared self alone".

In addition to the future self-images, the model also includes the L2 Learning Experience dimension which refers to "the perceived quality of the learners' engagement with various aspects of the language learning process" (Dörnyei, 2019, p. 26). The L2 learning experience includes teachers, peers, social groups, the curriculum, the experience of success, etc. According to Ushioda's (1998) conception of L2 motivation from a temporal perspective, learners' engagement in their own language learning seems to be a result of their positive L2 learning and experience related to the L2. In this study, the author aimed to explore the influence of

these components on students' L2 motivation and learning and how interactions among the components impacted the development of students' L2 motivation. As motivation is "reflected in goals and directions pursued, levels of effort invested, depth of engagement, and degree of persistence in learning" (Ushioda, 2014, p. 31), the construct is linked to long-term L2 learning commitment and influences students' learning behavior. In recognition of the influence of motivation on learning and the relationship between the L2 learning experience and student engagement, this study also sought to unravel the features of the L2 learning experience that affected student engagement in their learning.

## Previous studies

Several previous studies exploring second language motivation through the lens of the L2 Motivational Self System employed quantitative methods (e.g. Brady, 2019; Cruz et al., 2019; Lai & Aksornjarung, 2018; Lathif, 2017; Roshandel, et al, 2018; Wongthong & Patanasorn, 2017). Kormos & Kiddle (2013) studied the role of socio-economic factors in English learning motivation in Chile by means of a survey questionnaire and found that social class had an effect on motivational factors. Based on the findings of the study, Kormos & Kiddle (2013, p. 19) state that:

[...] students in lower social classes in Chile might rarely need English for professional purposes. Furthermore, due to limited financial resources, they do not have access to the modern technological developments and information technology (e.g. computer games, social networking sites, etc.) that would make it seem beneficial for them to use English in the private spheres of their lives."

Along similar lines, findings from You & Dörnyei (2016)'s large-scale study which investigated English learning motivation of 10,413 students in both rural and urban China revealed that students from less developed regions displayed lower English motivation as they had less exposure to the global world and were educated in low resource contexts. According to You & Dörnyei (2016, pp. 516-517), "the more advanced or specialized one's education was, the stronger ideal language image the student entertained."

In an Indonesian academic context, Lamb (2012) found that underprivileged students who lived in rural areas struggled with visualizing themselves as competent English speakers. This is in line with Oyserman & Fryberg's (2006) hypothesis that role models are needed in order for students to be able to form possible selves in particular academic contexts. Studies which explored disadvantaged students' English learning and motivation yielded similar findings and concluded with the recommendation that future research delve further into the investigation of underprivileged English learners in less developed contexts (Prasangani, 2018; Kormos & Kiddle, 2013).

## Research purposes

Given the contributions of research in this area, this article adopted a qualitative methodology to account for the depth and complexity of the aspects under study. In addition, this article

aimed at exploring highly-motivated underprivileged students' L2 motivation in order to shed light on how these students' L2-related selves and L2 learning experience influenced their L2 motivation and learning. This knowledge will enable policy makers, educators, administrators, teachers and those involved in English education to gain insights into how they can develop pedagogical strategies which promote students' L2 motivation and learning among students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Students' L2-related possible selves and different features of students' L2 learning experience impact them to different degrees and at different points in their lives. These features could be unique to a particular student depending on how each one perceives and interprets his/her experiences. According to Ushioda (2015), contextual features are not only external to the language learner (such as the curriculum or the learning environment), but also internal to him/her (such as past experiences and identities). Therefore, with reference to their L2 learning experience, the question is answered by allowing the data to emerge from the students' accounts of their L2 learning experiences.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **The context and participants**

There are two groups of participants: 1) the main participants which include three non-English major students; and 2) the main participants' significant others, namely mother, father and teacher. The three main participants were underprivileged non-English major students who studied at a public university in the Northeast of Thailand. The author purposely selected three students who were nominated by their advisors and classmates for their enthusiasm for and active participation in English learning both inside and outside of the language classrooms. All three participated in English activities organized by different offices across the University. All three were born in Thailand in 1999 and started learning English when they were in Grade 1. They speak Thai as their mother tongue and study English as a foreign language. None of the participants' parents earned a degree from college or university. All families lived in rented properties, and the students had no bedroom of their own.

The main participants' significant others were also interviewed about their views regarding the participants' education in general and English learning in particular. The author conducted unstructured interviews with the participants' significant others after the first interviews with the main participants. The participants repeatedly mentioned these significant others and emphasized their importance in the participants' English learning. These individuals were then selected based on their role and involvement in the three main participants' English learning experience and critical incidents related to the main participants' English learning.

All participants were given details of the research project and asked for their willingness to participate in the study. All three main participants were anonymized here as Anan, Tana and Kawee. Generic terms were used when referring to the main participants' significant others. They were Anan's mother, Tana's teacher and Kawee's father. In this study, the participants did

not, as Cohen et al. (2000, p. 104) put it, “pretend to represent the wider population” of students in Thailand and so there shall not be claims as to the generalizability of these findings. Rather, the main goal of this qualitative study is “to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights in the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 126).

### **Data collection and analysis**

Data for this article were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three underprivileged Thai students, each interview lasting between 1 and 2 hours. Each student was interviewed at the outset of the qualitative part of the research project. Based on the first interviews, unstructured interviews were conducted with the participants’ significant others--Anan’s mother, Tana’s teacher and Kawee’s father. At the end of the data collection phase, Snake interviews were then used to explore factors which had motivated the participants in their learning to gain a holistic picture of how different factors influenced the participants’ motivation to study English at different times in their lives.

Snake interviews were conducted at the later stage since the author believed that the first semi-structured interviews had provided a platform for the participants to reflect on their life incidents and learning experiences which were closely related to the focus of the study. The Snake interviews, which were conducted later, would, in turn, enable the participants to focus on critical incidents in their lives which contributed to the development of their L2-related selves and played a crucial role in motivating them in their English learning as they drew, reflected on and told stories related to their self-illustrated Snakes. According to Cabaroğlu & Denicolo (2008, p. 31),

In contrast to pre-determined interview questions, the Snake interviews not only yield information concerning what a person believes but also provide clues as to what has led that individual to his/her beliefs by unravelling the consequential incidents in the personal history of the individual (Albanese, 1997). Above all, they enable “the participants to use their own worlds and to indicate issues which are personally important”, reducing interviewer bias (Pope & Denicolo, 1993, p. 541) and producing highly authentic and rich data.

Interviews were conducted in Thai as it is a mother tongue of the author, student participants and their significant others. The interviews focused on the participants’ possible L2-related selves to examine the extent to which the participants’ possible L2-related selves informed their learning behavior and influenced their motivation in English learning. Also explored were factors which had contributed to the development of possible L2-related selves in order to shed light on how different factors played a role in motivating the participants to learn English. Using diverse data collection methods ensures “triangulation” and allows the author to better understand the aspects under scrutiny (Christensen, et al., 2015).

The mode of enquiry is qualitative in nature and is focused on “understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values, etc.) within their social worlds” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 3). In this study, the author adopted a non-judgmental



stance and attempted to present the participants' voices in order that their stories and perspectives could be heard (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Flick, 2009). The interview transcripts were translated into English and then coded and analyzed using inductive content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017) with no attention paid to normal tones and normal pauses. The author specifically focused on themes that responded to the research purpose: the motivational impacts of the participants' possible L2-related selves and their L2 learning experience on their L2 learning.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Three possible L2-related selves: Ought-to, ideal and feared selves

This section discusses the main participants' possible L2-related selves with regard to factors which have contributed to the development of these selves. In addition to the participants' possible L2-related selves, this section also presents the main participants' significant others' views related to the development of the main participants' possible L2-related selves. The findings of the study revealed that the three participants who had underprivileged backgrounds had high self-esteem and were satisfied with their status quo. The participants did not express desperation or any negative expressions about themselves or family situations. All of them recognized the difficulty and disadvantages they faced in their lives, but did not perceive those as obstacles or something unpleasant or painful. Rather, they set goals in life which motivated them to pursue a better future for themselves and their loved ones. When asked to elaborate on his current situation, Kawee stated,

It's good. I think the situation is good. Despite having some difficulty like financial problems, overall, everything is fine—not so severe [...] I talk with my friends when I need encouragement, and they tell me that we all have difficulties in life and that I have to move on because the problem shall pass as long as I am positive. (Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 1)

When asked about their ought-to selves, all participants mentioned that their families imposed no pressure on them—they made no specifications as to what their expectations were of their children but encouraged their children to behave well and pay attention mainly to their studies. The participants appeared to subconsciously recognize the underlying meanings of those actions and, hence, behaved accordingly. In this regard, the participants showed their awareness of what they ought to be during the interviews, but indicated that they felt no obligation to do a certain kind of jobs or be a certain kind of person in the future. The statement made by Anan's mother confirmed the statement made earlier by her son at a different interview. She said,

I never tell Anan what I expect of him to be. I simply say something like I want him to be a good son and student. I want him to enjoy what he is doing without stressing out about it. I want him to adopt a positive outlook on life because I believe it's the most important thing that keeps us happy and optimistic. I just want him to be happy and do what he loves to do. [...] He's a good boy, and that's a gift. It will be wonderful if he succeeds in life, but I don't want him to put pressure on himself. As long as he knows what he is doing and keeps doing

something good as he always does, I believe he will have a happy life when he grows up.

(Anan's mother, Unstructured Interview, p. 2)

With reference to the participants' verbally expressed ought-to and ideal selves, there is a congruence between these two selves in each individual participant. Based on the interview data, all participants' ought-to selves were in harmony with their ideal selves in the sense that the participants aspired to at least get a bachelor's degree and a good job, which would, in turn, enable them to earn a living and be able to support their loved ones. For example, Tana inherently internalized his family's expectations for him to have a better future by getting a higher degree and finding a respectable job with decent pay. Tana said,

They don't really put pressure on me. They don't force me, but I know that I want to be something good, something that makes them proud (of me). [...] I really want to get a good job and do well financially so that I could support my family in the future. I really want them to be proud (of me). (Tana, Preliminary Interview, p. 2)

Further exploration into the families' expectations of the participants allowed the author to understand the reasons why their families imposed no pressure on the participants. Kawee's father mentioned that he never explicitly showed his expectations of Kawee because he learned from his experiences that the child would progress well in life if the parents stayed supportive and understanding (Kawee's father, Unstructured Interview, p. 2). All families seemed to view and approach this matter in the same manner with some of them mentioning their past mistakes as something from which their children could learn in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes. Although their families put no pressure on them in terms of future careers or expectations, the participants seemed to have integrated into their ought-to selves the hope and will to succeed in life and, hence, make their families proud of them that they are successful and that they can support the families. It can be stated that the participants' ought-to selves have dual functions, namely the promotion and prevention focuses, which seem to mismatch with the original concepts embedded in the framework (Chen, 2012), but these ought-to selves with their promotion focus are inherently in harmony with the participants' ideal selves.

With regard to their ideal selves, the participants mentioned that they would like to be competent English speakers so that they could work with foreigners. All three mentioned that they wished to work in a foreign country if possible. Tana wanted to work in a hotel in Switzerland (Tana, Preliminary Interview, p. 2). Kawee dreamed of becoming a flight attendant (Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 3). Anan wished to travel to different places across the globe while doing work on his laptop (Anan, Preliminary Interview, p. 3).

According to Anan, one should be able to follow his/her dream while earning enough money for him/herself and his/her family: "I know I need to work harder than others, but I am willing to sacrifice something in order to achieve this dream life" (Anan, Preliminary Interview, p. 5). The participants all dreamed of doing better financially by earning a degree and getting a decent job with good pay which would, in turn, allow them to be able to support themselves and the families. Kawee said, "It's a well-paid job as well. It ticks all the boxes. I can do the job I love while earning a lot of money so that I can support my family" (Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 6).



Interestingly, the participants mentioned their wish and willingness to be able to support their families when elaborating on their ideal selves. The results of the study appeared to support recent studies on Thai university learners' ideal L2 selves in English learning (Nongkhai, 2017; Rattanaphumma, 2016; Siridetkoon & Dewaele, 2017) in that Thai students' future self-images, especially those related to future careers, tend to incorporate English language. In this regard, with its relation to English use, these imagined self-images seemed to play a prominent role in motivating the participants in their English learning.

The findings of this study as outlined above are in line with the L2 motivation literature in that the harmony between the ideal and ought-to L2 selves provides an effective condition for an individual's L2 motivation to take place (Dörnyei, 2009; Islam, 2013). Nevertheless, an in-depth investigation into the participants' possible selves and contexts allowed for an understanding of how effective different possible selves were in motivating the participants' L2 learning. Similar to the findings of Butler's (2016) study, the findings of this study indicated that the ought-to L2 self did not play an obvious role in influencing each individual participant's learning behavior and, hence, might not be as influential as the ideal L2 self in terms of its motivational impact. The analysis yielded three possible L2-related selves: the ideal, feared and ought-to selves, the first two of which played a more prominent role in influencing the participants' learning behavior and motivation in English learning.

Referring to the influence of feared selves on L2 motivation, the findings revealed a very interesting point concerning the influence of the participant's feared self on his learning behavior, motivation in English learning and pursuit of his ideal self. Each participant stated that he learnt a lot from the mistakes made by significant others in his family. Kawee mentioned that he did not want to repeat the mistakes made earlier by some family members. They gave him meaningful life lessons from which he could learn so that he could avoid making the same mistakes and/or being in undesirable situations experienced by these significant others (Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 7). Kawee and Tana mentioned the fear of not being eligible for their dream jobs due to insufficient skills, leading them to look for other jobs and putting them and the whole family in a disadvantaged position (Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 7; Tana, Preliminary Interview, p. 6). Anan also mentioned the fear of being unable to follow his dream, and one of the factors he anticipated could lead to this undesirable situation was being unable to communicate fluently in English:

I still need to develop certain English skills, especially listening, speaking and writing. I can read, but I don't know how some words are pronounced. I can't write academic work. [...]  
I think I can actualize this dream if I keep practicing. [...] I am so scared when I think about it.  
I wouldn't be able to follow my dream if I couldn't communicate effectively in English. (Anan, Preliminary Interview, p. 7)

Based on the findings, it can be stated that the ever-present fear of being unable to achieve their future dreams and self-images boosted the effectiveness of their desired possible selves as a motivational resource to the maximum (Dörnyei, 2009; Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Given the participant's three possible L2-related selves, the congruence between the ought-to and ideal selves together with the perceived undesirable effects possibly caused by the participant's

feared self has provided a condition for the maximum motivational impact of these selves on the participant and, hence, shaped his views and informed his practice accordingly.

In addition to the aforementioned findings, one of the prominent factors which had enhanced the motivating impact of the participants' possible selves was their significant others. This was common across the three cases. The participants all mentioned that there was someone in the family that they could look up to and regard as their models in terms of successful learners who were intelligent, hard-working, and able to obtain a degree eventually. The participants themselves as well as their families tended to highly value the success of these individuals and expressed their admiration towards these individuals clearly during the interviews. In their families, these people were highly regarded as good examples. They were referred to as people who had disadvantaged backgrounds, but strived with their wisdom and determination to better themselves in every way possible (Anan, Preliminary Interview, p. 5; Tana, Preliminary Interview, p. 4; Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 5). Kawee, for example, showed his admiration of his cousin, Natee, repeatedly at different interviews. Natee got accepted to study at a good regional university in Thailand and got a job as an interpreter after graduation. According to Kawee, Natee was very intelligent and hard-working, and he inspired Kawee tremendously in terms of diligence, responsibility and self-discipline as both a person and student. At one interview, Kawee stated,

Natee is like my parent. I was not a good student when I was in Grade 3 because I didn't like one teacher. Most of my friends didn't like this class, so we all skipped the class and got punished as a result of that. [...] The school reported this behavior to my parents, and Natee was the one who took action. He always checked whether I went to classes. [...] He would do everything to make sure that I attended classes and paid attention to the teachers. [...] I didn't like him at the beginning because he was so harsh and put a lot of pressure on me, but I realized that he really wanted me to do well at school. Everything he did was to help me. (Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 5)

Closer analysis of the interview data suggested that from a range of factors which contributed to the formation of each participant's idealized identity, this significant other in the family played the most critical role in boosting the participant's confidence in actualizing his dream. This significant other helped the participant realize that he too could become successful and have a better future. The perceived plausibility, therefore, enhanced the motivational impact of the participants' L2-related selves accordingly (Dörnyei, 2009).

In addition to the participant's perceived possible L2-related selves, the participant's L2 learning experience played an important role in motivating the participant in his English learning. As a motivated learner, the participant had developed certain strategies to help him learn and become a more confident, proficient English learner. To better understand how the participant's L2 learning experience provides an immediate context for the participants to visualize and actualize his idealized identity, the following section will detail the influence of the participant's in- and out-of-class L2 learning experience and the extent to which his L2 learning experience shaped his learning behavior, promoted his self-directed learning behavior and motivated him in his English learning.

## 2. The L2 learning experience: Becoming motivated learners of English

This section presents factors which have motivated the participants in their English learning from two broad perspectives, the influence of their teachers and family and social influences. Also discussed are the participants' procedural strategies which the participants had developed as a result of their L2 learning experience both inside and outside of the classroom. These procedural strategies, hence, enabled the participants to feel more positive about their L2 learning, become more motivated to learn English, as well as become more positive about their present and future situations.

### 2.1 The influence of participants' teachers

It is accepted wisdom that teachers play quite a pivotal role in influencing students' learning motivation. This holds true in the present study since all the three participants explicitly stated that their teachers had influenced the way they viewed and approached English learning. Having studied English for over 14 years, each participant recalled an immensely powerful effect his teachers had on his English learning. In the cases of Anan and Tana, their English teachers played a crucial role in influencing their learning behavior and motivation while one of Kawee's teacher of Thai language influenced his learning behavior and motivation by showcasing a life of a successful language learner—being good at English and Thai, traveling abroad often and having a number of foreign friends (Anan, Snake Interview, p.3; Tana, Snake Interview, p.4; Kawee, Snake Interview, p.3). Kawee studied in Bangkok before coming to study at this regional public university, and this teacher was one of the teachers he had when he lived and studied in Bangkok. During the Snake interview, Kawee stated: *"[...] foreign friends. She spoke English very fluently. I remember I talked with her before I moved here. She said she was traveling to New York. She traveled with friends. [...] She was very good at English. I want to be like her"* (Kawee, Snake Interview, p.3).

Unlike Kawee, Anan and Tana attended schools in a regional province since they started schooling. Among the three participants, only Anan used to study with a foreign teacher and mentioned that this teacher made Anan like English more and feel more confident in his use and learning of English. This teacher was Anan's Grade 7 English teacher who brought games and activities to the classroom and made English learning more interactive and fun. Anan explained that he studied with one Thai teacher of English before, and the experience he had with that Thai teacher of English was not very pleasant since the teacher never gave explanations, corrections or feedback. Unlike the Thai teacher, this foreign teacher always led the students to play games, participate in activities and speak English with her. Anan mentioned that he had transformed himself from a shy English learner to a more confident one in this English class. When asked why this class facilitated his transformation, Anan further elaborated on how classrooms full of activities and interactions helped him gain more confidence and become more motivated: *"I think it's fun to play English games. [...] I better understood English and got 4 (the highest grade) from this English course. I was very proud (of myself). I was truly inspired and wanted to speak English fluently"* (Anan, Snake Interview, p.4).

Tana also detailed a story about one English teacher. This teacher taught Tana from Grades 4

to 6. His attitude shifted from negative to positive, and so was his learning behavior in Semester 2 of Grade 4. Tana was frightened by the news spread by some of his seniors about how strict and unkind this English teacher was, and developed a negative feeling about this teacher and the class she instructed. Over a semester of resistance, the teacher's attention and positive reinforcement had changed Tana's attitude and learning behavior. Tana mentioned his change in both attitude and learning behavior when asked what the teacher did to help him change from a student who was unwilling to learn or do assignments to someone who was active in his learning and who learnt a lot from the course that he outperformed other students in class:

She always asked me why I didn't turn in my assignments. She said that I was a very good student and always performed well. [...] I realized that the teacher loved her students and really wanted everyone to do well at school. I realized that she really cared about me, so I changed myself. [...] I did so well that I got 4s from all the English courses I took. If I hadn't feared the teacher at the beginning, I would have learnt much more than I did. [...] I was very proud of myself that I did well. I was lucky that the teacher didn't punish me for being inattentive in her class, otherwise I would have become demotivated and wouldn't have learnt anything.

(Tana, Snake Interview, p.5)

Besides necessary activation which took place in the past, the participants also indicated their aspiration to speak English fluently and their ability to imagine themselves as competent English users. Kawee said, *"I always practice listening and speaking at home. Sometimes, (I speak) in front of the mirror. I can picture myself communicating with foreigners. It's so exciting to become better each day"* (Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 9). When asked about their English classes and activities at the university, the participants expressed their gratitude towards the university since they were all impressed with the way their English teachers treated students inside and outside of classes. Since all three were non-English majors, some of their English classes were large classes with students of mixed abilities. The participants mentioned that these classes were not as engaging as smaller classes since there were not many interactions or opportunities to use English in the classrooms. They preferred smaller English classes; however, all three mentioned that they benefited tremendously from all English classes including those large classes because different teachers employed different techniques to teach English. Still, they realized that they had to practice English outside of the classrooms if they wished to do better in English. So, the three participants actively participated in different English activities across the university (Anan, Preliminary Interview, p. 8; Tana, Preliminary Interview, p. 10; Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 9; Anan, Snake Interview, p. 10; Tana, Snake Interview, p. 10; Kawee, Snake Interview, p.11 ). The results also support previous studies on L2 Imagery which indicate the increased motivational impact of learners' future L2 selves as a result of their ability to imagine themselves as successful L2 users (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Nongkhai, 2017; You & Chan, 2015).

## 2.2 Family and social influences

Apart from their teachers, the participants' families also played an important role in their English learning. Despite their underprivileged backgrounds, the participants were surrounded by family members whose words, thoughts, actions and stories inherently influenced the way

the participants approached their English learning and developed certain habits which enhanced their English learning and fostered the development of the participants' possible L2-related selves. Anan's mother's interest in English and self-directed learning habits had a positive impact on how Anan learnt and practiced English. Both of them read English conversation and grammar books and practiced English together in their free time. Although both of them admitted that they were not at all good at speaking English, they simply played along, pretending they knew what and how to speak. Anan's mother was a seller at a market, and sometimes she had foreign customers with whom Anan and his mother tried to communicate in English. Both Anan and his mother said that they were not afraid of making mistakes and that it was fun speaking English with foreigners (Anan, Preliminary Interview, p. 2; Anan's mother, Unstructured Interview, p. 3; Anan, Snake Interview, p.1).

In the case of Kawee, his father's favorite hobby had become Kawee's favorite hobby and English learning habit. Kawee's father liked to watch English soundtrack movies, and Kawee was always with him whenever he watched English soundtrack movies (Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 3; Kawee's father, Unstructured Interview, p. 3; Kawee, Snake Interview, p. 1). Kawee mentioned that both of them read the subtitles, but Kawee said that the more he watched English soundtrack movies, the more he understood words, phrases, sentences and conversations in the movies. Kawee started to like English soundtrack movies since he was in Grade 1, and was able to understand the movies with less attention paid to the subtitles when he was in Grade 7. He explicitly stated that he understood different accents and that his listening skills had improved tremendously as a result of this habit. He said,

These days, I watch movies alone in my room. My father says I don't hear people when I watch a movie. I just want to stay focused so I put my headset on and watch a movie. When I watch a movie with other people, I get distracted. [...] I watch different kinds of movies, but my favorite is animation. I compare what I hear with the Thai or English subtitles. I learn a lot. (Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 3)

Tana's case is different from the other two cases. He lived with his grandparents, and his mother and stepfather visited him once in a while. One of the social factors which had influenced his learning behavior and motivation was foreign artists, namely American and Korean singers. He dreamed that one day he would be able to communicate fully in English so that he could communicate with these foreign artists. He liked to listen to their music and tried to understand the lyrics. He looked up meanings in a dictionary and sang to the songs (Tana, Preliminary Interview, p. 3). In his immediate context of English use, he stated that he was willing to communicate with foreigners whom he met at different places in the city where he lived, but he was unable to communicate with them well enough to help them when they asked for help. The situation really frustrated him as he said: *"[...] No one helped him. If I had understood his need, I would have helped him. But I was not able to really communicate in English, though. [...] I really wish I could communicate in English and help him"* (Tana, Preliminary Interview, p. 4). The interview data suggested that the teachers of these three students were quite positive that their students would be able to develop themselves both academically and socially into proficient English learners who were well-prepared for intercultural communication. Tana's teacher said,

Tana is one of the best students in class. His English has improved a lot. He always participates in different English activities. He is more confident than before, and he speaks English very well. Last year, he was selected to participate in an overseas experience program. [...] He is very talented that apart from his academic strengths, he can also sing and dance very well. He always volunteers to work for the faculty. (Tana's teacher, Unstructured Interview, p. 1)

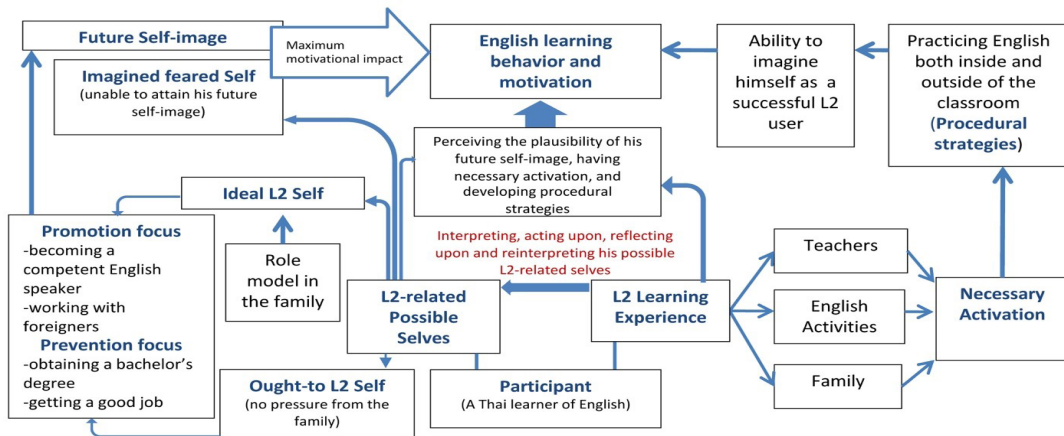
All participants participated in an English camp organized by the university when they were freshmen, and they continued participating in different English activities after that. Tana talked about an English camp he attended as a camper: *"I never thought I would be confident to speak English with foreigners. I didn't know anybody, but we had to do activities together. It was a very supportive environment. The teachers and staff were very kind and understanding"* (Tana, Preliminary Interview, p. 11). Kawee also talked about how the atmosphere, contents and people in charge of activities affected his attitudes and decisions to join certain activities. According to Kawee, for English activities to be successful in terms of engagement and positive outcomes, there were three main factors which he found very important: positive environment, interesting contents and friendly people (Kawee, Preliminary Interview, p. 10). Anan also talked about his increased confidence and English abilities after having participated in different English activities at the university for the past three years. He said, *"I needed support from other people at the beginning. I didn't know what to do to be better at English. I have known a lot of people, and they all help me. My English has improved a lot in recent years"* (Anan, Preliminary Interview, p. 8).

The students stated clearly during the interviews that they sought opportunities to strengthen their skills and abilities, especially their proficiency in English. These students were known among their teachers and classmates for their academic strengths, volunteerism and active participation in different activities. Anan stated: *"It's fun to participate in different activities. It's better than sitting in the classroom, doing nothing. I learn a lot more when I do things with other people. I'm not afraid of making mistakes"* (Anan, Preliminary Interview, p. 8). The findings in this section highlighted the extent to which the participants' L2 learning experience shaped their views of L2 learning and enhanced their L2 motivation. Interestingly, these motivated underprivileged L2 students had developed procedural strategies which fostered their language learning both inside and outside of the language classrooms and, in turn, enhanced the participants' L2 motivation (Dörnyei, 2009; Vibulphol, 2016).

Based on the findings presented in the above sections, it is evident that the participant's possible L2-related selves shape his English learning behavior and influence the way he reacts to different situations concerning English learning as well as the way he approaches English learning. At the same time, his L2 experience both inside and outside of the classroom provides an immediate context for the participant to interpret, act upon, reflect upon and reinterpret his possible L2-related selves. The three participants were viewed by their teachers as highly motivated learners who performed well both inside and outside of the classrooms. There is ample evidence in the interviews that these particular students had perceived the plausibility of their future selves, employed necessary activation methods, and developed procedural strategies which enabled them to become better in English, gain more confidence in the use and learning of English and remain motivated learners of English. Based on the findings of the



study, a summary of how the participant's L2-related selves and L2 learning experience affected his English learning and motivation is demonstrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Summary of how the participant's L2-related selves and L2 learning experience affected his English learning and motivation

## CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore how the three main participants' possible L2-related selves and L2 learning experience influenced their L2 motivation. The data were derived from multiple methods including semi-structured interviews and Snake interviews with the three main participants who were highly-motivated underprivileged students. To gain a better understanding of the aspects under scrutiny and to ensure data triangulation, unstructured interviews with the main participants' significant others were also conducted.

The results obtained in the study confirm the observation made by motivation researchers that for the motivational effectiveness to occur and for the possible selves to act as future self-guides for individuals, balance between the hoped-for and feared selves is necessary and essential (Dörnyei, 2009; Islam, 2013; Oyserman & Markus, 1990; Oyserman et al., 2006; Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). It should be noted that, in the present study, the participants' feared selves were quite vivid in their minds as these selves had been developed through the participants' lives with the participants witnessing the negative impact the feared selves had on the participants' significant others and their families as a whole. The ever-present negative outcomes of the participants' feared selves naturally fueled the avoid tendency, preventing the participants from certain behaviors which would lead them to the state of their feared selves (Higgins, 1998; Nongkhai, 2017). The findings did not only show the prominence of the participants' feared selves, but also reveal some important factors which promoted the approach tendency by highlighting the plausibility of the participants' idealized identities as perceived by the participants themselves (Dörnyei, 2009; Nongkhai, 2017). One of the key factors, which enabled the participant to visualize his hoped-for self and construe it as plausible, was the participant's

significant other who shared the same background as the participant but succeeded in bettering him/herself and his/her family through education. This significant other was perceived as a role model whose success enabled the participant to form his possible selves (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006).

More importantly, the findings of the present study also shed light on the importance of the participants' L2 learning experience as an immediate context to which the participants referred when measuring the plausibility of their ideal selves and the possibility for the participants to attain their goals. In this regard, the findings of the present study are in line with the findings of Lamb's (2012) which indicate that the L2 learning experience has the most motivational impact on the L2 learners and positively influences the learners' "willingness to invest effort in learning" (2012, p.1010). Based on the information presented above, the findings of the present study support the L2 Motivation Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2005) in that they outline the main components of the L2 Motivation Self System— ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience, as well as the conditions for the motivating capacity of the ideal and ought selves (Dörnyei, 2009, pp. 18-22)— availability of an elaborate and vivid future self-image, perceived plausibility, harmony between the ideal and ought selves, necessary activation/priming, accompanying procedural strategies and the offsetting impact of a feared self.

As mentioned earlier, there has been little research to date into the reasons why underprivileged students are motivated to study English and what factors have contributed to the development of their possible L2-related selves. Based on the findings of this study, the exploration into the participants' possible L2-related selves allows individuals involved in TESOL to reflect on their practice and examine what they can do to promote English education the way it caters to individual differences, enhances both teaching and learning and fosters individual and social development. More studies of this kind are needed to enrich our understanding of how L2 motivation works within each individual and in different local contexts. This understanding will, in turn, inform appropriate actions to be taken by TESOL professionals at different levels and in varied local contexts. Further research into how students from different backgrounds perceive and approach or avoid possible L2-related selves will also inform and promote more sustainable, appropriate approaches to English education in many and diverse local contexts.

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