Research on the Differences of Junior High School Students' English Learning Motivation from the Perspective of L2MSS Theory

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Abstract: Motivation is one of the most important factor in the process of second language learning for junior high school students, which is a critical factor determining the success and failure of second language learning. Based on Dörnyei's L2 Motivation Self System (L2MSS), this paper investigates the L2 Motivation Self System and gender differences among students in a junior high school in Deyang city, Sichuan province, China. The questionnaire was referenced by the study of Papi et al. The collected data were analyzed and curated by using SPSS. Descriptive Statistics were used to analyze the status of L2 Motivational Self System in junior high school students and independent sample T-test was used to analyze the differences in three components of the L2 Motivational Self System between male students and female students. The research results show that: (1) In the L2 Motivation Self System, junior high school students are most influenced by L2 learning experience, followed by the ought-to L2 self and the ideal L2 self. (2) There are significant differences in the ideal L2 self and language learning experience in the L2 Motivational Self System between male and female students. Female students' ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience are higher than male students, but their ought-to L2 self has no significant differences. This paper will try to explore the relationship between the L2 motivation and the gender of the middle school students, so as to provide some reference for the L2 motivation research of junior high school students.

Keywords: L2 Motivational Self System, Gender Differences, Junior High School Students

1. Introduction

English learning motivation refers to the learners 'efforts to learn English in order to achieve a certain purpose in the learning process, and shows a positive attitude in this process. It is an important emotional factor to determine the effect of students' English learning, and will also affect students' English learning performance [24]. Domestic and foreign scholars have confirmed gender differences in foreign language learning motivation by a lot of research, and women have stronger motivation for foreign language learning than men [2, 16, 19].

However, earlier parts of the studies were based on the motivational theoretical framework of social education models. The motivation theory of social education model mainly focuses on external environmental factors, and discusses the gender differences of foreign language learning motivation from the perspective of gender social status and self-identity. This study is based on Dörnyei's L2 motivation self system, to explore the effect of gender differences on foreign language learning motivation from personal factors, such as such as students shaping their ideal image, learning experience and classroom environment. Based on the above analysis, this paper discusses the overall situation of L2 motivation and whether there are significant gender differences, which provides some reference for how to improve the motivation and the level of foreign language teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Motivation and L2 Motivation

Motivation has an important role in human psychology, and

it is the spiritual pillar that drives people to accomplish something. But many theoretical studies concerning motivation are hard to explain why people have such behavior and thinking. Motivation plays an important role in the process of English learning, which provides the main motivation for learning a second foreign language, and then becomes the motivation to maintain long-term learning, but the process of English learning is often difficult and tedious. It is widely accepted that motivation is one of the most primary factors in language learning. Therefore, the second language motivation of English has aroused a lot of attention among educators and researchers. However, the definitions of motivation vary. According to Keller, motivation pays attention to why people make a decision of engaging in something, how long they would like to maintain the matters they are doing [11]. In other words, it is about the choices people make concerning what goals they want to achieve, and the degree of effort they want to invest [11]. Gardner argued that motivation is a combination of effort and expectation to reach a goal [10]. William & Robert explained that motivation is a complicated concept, which incorporates both social and psychological process, and it contains many different and overlapping factors such as interest and desire, direction, intensity and the persistence of goal-directed, voluntary actions [18].

Learning motivation is the direct motivation for learning behavior and the intrinsic reason that inspires people to act in order to achieve a certain learning goal. Williams & Robert stated that learning motivation is a state of cognitive and emotional arousal that makes learners willing to work hard to achieve their goal [18]. In a motivational context, L2 motivation, as one of the most developed areas from psychological perspective, experienced an unprecedented boom in the past decade [1]. Numerous studies have attempted to explain what is L2 motivation. Dörnyei believed that the L2 learning motivation refers to the key emotional factors that affect the learning enthusiasm of language learners, ensure the learners' learning time and energy input, and affect the success or failure of second language learning [5].

2.2. L2 Motivational Self System

Gardner & Lambert proposed the social model education with the core of integrative motivation [8, 9]. Dörnyei put forward a "L2 Motivational Self System" which based on the theory of "possible self" [6, 13], "Imagination Community" and "Imagination Recognition" [14]. It was made up of three components: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience [7]. These three components determine the strength of the learners' L2 motivation.

The ideal L2 self, according to Dörnyei, is "the L2-specific aspect of one's ideal self" [6]. It is a central component of the construct of L2 motivation within Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system. It refers to the ideal L2 language part associated with second language learning. In other words, ideal L2 self is one's L2 related image of ideal future [6]. It represents an ideal image of the kind of L2 learner that a person desires to be in the future. It is a powerful motivation to promote the learning of second language, and learners hope to bridge the gap between the real self and the ideal self.

The ought-to L2 self is the L2-specific aspect of one's ought-to self. It refers to the property that a person should possess as a result of perceived duty, obligation, or responsibility [6]. It means that second language learners think they should have certain characteristics to meet certain expectations and avoid some possible negative results.

The L2 learning experience refers to the specific learning experience of the learner. Dörnyei defined it as motivation in specific situations which was in connection with the immediate learning environment and experience [7]. It refers to the motivation related to a specific learning environment, primarily influenced by the classroom atmosphere, teacher, curriculum, group collaboration, successful experience and so on.

Although the L2 motivational self system was proposed out of the dissatisfaction with the concept of integrativeness, it did not contradict the traditional theories and concepts; instead, it presented a broader perspective for research on motivation to learn languages by including the traditional concepts in this theory [4]. In order to confirm ecological validity of Dörnyei's L2 motivational self, Kim Yoon-kyoung and Kim Tae-Young investigated 495 South Korean Secondary school students' L2 learning motivation and motivated behavior by using a questionnaire survey and found that the concept of integrativeness was replaced with the ideal L2 self [12]. In recent years, scholars have paid attention to the studies of L2 motivational self system. Studies on the L2 motivational self system mainly including: The research of the motivational self-system mainly includes: the relationship between the L2 motivational self system and CET-4, the relationship between motivation type and motivation strength, the study of motivation strategy, and the predictive effect of expected efforts [21, 23, 22, 25].

2.3. Researches Related to L2 Motivation and Gender

As early as the 1960s, issues between gender and language also received much attention due to the rapid development of sociology and psychology. Studies have shown that there are differences on psychological activities and states between male and female. Therefore, gender difference should also be an important variable in motivation research. The motivation for second language learning has an important role in foreign language research, and aiming at whether gender differences between men and women affect the second language learning process is also a topic worth discussing. Rayn's study showed that women were more motivated and tried to learn a foreign language than men [16]. According to Boyle found that English proficiency test scores were related to gender, and girls scored higher than boys [2]. He explored the situation of senior high school students' L2 motivational self system and the gender differences. The researches showed that female students possess significantly higher language learning experience and the ideal L2 self than male students, but their ought-to self have no notable differences [20]. Zhan pointed out the gender differences among non-English undergraduates from the perspective of L2 motivational self system [24]. A study by Ge

and Jin on non-English major college students confirmed that there were differences in L2 motivational self system [19].

Most of the domestic studies on L2 motivation and the gender of learners are based on undergraduate students [19, 24], but there are relatively few studies on L2 motivation and gender differences among junior high school students. This paper will try to explore the relationship between the L2 motivation and gender of the junior high school students, so as to provide some suggestions for the L2 motivation research of junior high school students.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the general situation of L2 motivational self system of the junior high school students in Deyang city, Sichuan province, China, and explore whether there is any difference between male students and female students related to L2 motivational self system. Specially, this paper tries to answer the following questions:

Whether there were significant differences in the three components of the L2 motivational self system between male and female students?

Which component of the L2 motivational self system has the most influence on male and female students?

3.2. Participants

The present study focused on junior school students. The participants were from a county town in Deyang, Sichuan province. The study adopted the method of the questionnaire survey. A total of 108 questionnaires were issued, and 108 questionnaires were recovered. Some questionnaires were regarded as discarded because of incomplete information, and the final valid questionnaires were 100. The data of 100 participants, including 49 males students and 51 female students. All the students were their native Chinese speakers.

3.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study is mainly adopted the questionnaire made by Papi et al [15, 17]. The questionnaire for this study was made up of two parts, the first part was the basic information survey for students, variables mainly included the gender. The second part was a L2 motivational self system questionnaire. Using the Likert 6 level scale, options from 1 to 6 represented "very disagree", "disagree", "not agree", "not agree", "basic agree", "agree" and "strong agree".

Considering that the students were junior school students, the questions in the scale questionnaire were selected and the scale was translated into Chinese to reduce the students' reading difficulties. First, a pre-survey was conducted, distributed and recycled using offline questionnaires, and the data was input into SPSS to test its reliability and validity, all of which met the standards. Finally, a total of 108 questionnaires were issued and 108 questionnaires were returned, of which 100 were valid. The questionnaire results

were input into SPSS for reliability and validity test. KMO was greater than 0.70 and Cronbach's Alpha Value was greater than 0.81. The questionnaire results were reliable.

Table 1. *Results of Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire.*

	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO
Ideal L2 Self	0.831	0.707
Ought-to L2 Self	0.814	0.830
L2 Learning Experience	0.888	0.733

3.4. Data Analysis

The questionnaire data results were analyzed by the SPSS. Firstly, a descriptive statistical analysis was performed for the male and female and total data, including its minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation. Then an independent sample T-test was also used to analyze whether the three variables in the L2 motivational self system.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Description Statistics of Junior School Students' L2 Motivational Self System

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of L2 Motivational Self System.*

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Ideal L2 self	100	1	6	3.228	1.532
Ought-to L2 self	100	1	6	3.357	1.552
L2 learning experience	100	1	6	3.564	1.647

As table 2 shows, the mean scores of the three components about students' L2 motivational self system are above 3. This shows that the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience may be as factors affecting students' English learning. Among the three components, the highest score for the L2 learning experience are above 3.5. It indicates that students have the highest L2 learning experience. The second is that there should be ought-to L2 self, and finally, it is the ideal L2 self.

Unlike some other research, most of the studies are the ideal L2 self is greater than the ought-to L2 self [12, 20, 24], this may be related to the research group, because the research group is junior high school students, and belongs to the countryside. Students have less time to learn English, so they have less probability of creating an ideal English image than undergraduate students and other senior students. Junior high school students will pay more attention to a process of English learning, so there will be a different point from other studies.

Table 3 mainly describes students' L2 motivational self system. As table shows, Item 1, 2, 3, 4 of the questionnaire measure the student's ideal L2 self, are similar to the traditional intrinsic motivation. We can see that the score of item 2 (I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends or colleagues) is highest. Because the subjects are students in rural areas, speak relatively poorly and have little opportunity to talk with foreigners, Students can imagine scenes where they can talk with foreign friends. As an influencing factor, the ideal L2 self enhances the students' motivation to learn English.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Students' L2 Motivational Self System.

Descriptive Statistics of Students' L2 Motivational Self System						
	N	min	max	mean	SD	Variance
Ideal L2 Self						
Item 1	100	1	6	3.13	1.440	2.074
Item2	100	1	6	3.34	1.622	2.631
Item3	100	1	6	3.21	1.445	2.087
Item4	100	1	6	3.23	1.620	2.623
Ought-to L2 Self						
Item5	100	1	6	2.72	1.400	1.961
Item6	100	1	6	2.98	1.682	2.828
Item7	100	1	6	3.65	1.623	2.634
Item8	100	1	6	3.89	1.470	2.159
Item9	100	1	6	3.46	1.500	2.251
Item10	100	1	6	3.44	1.635	2.673
L2 Learning Experience						
Item11	100	1	6	3.61	1.645	2.705
Item12	100	1	6	3.62	1.644	2.703
Item13	100	1	6	3.88	1.677	2.814
Item14	100	1	6	3.46	1.629	2.655
Item15	100	1	6	3.25	1.641	2.694
Valid Cases (in column)	100					

Item 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10, which reflect junior school students' ought-to L2 self, the item 8 (Studying English is important to me in order to gain the approval of my classmates, teachers and parents) takes the first place. Its mean score is 3.89. It reflects that in this part that should be ought-to self, the biggest learning motivation affecting students is to be recognized by students, teachers, parents and other people around them. Students think that they should learn English, and learn English well can get an affirmation or praise from the people around them, to avoid producing some negative results. Therefore, in order to get their recognition, the students will work harder to learn English, and also give the students a stronger motivation to learn. However, item 5 (I study English because close friends of mine think it is very important) has the lowest average score, only 2.72. Thus, in the cognition of junior high school students, good friends have a relatively weak influence on their English learning motivation. The reason for this, may be that junior high school students in the process of learning, or more contact with teachers, parents and surrounding students. Therefore, relatively more influenced by them, will also pay more attention to their views.

With regard to item 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15, which mirror students' L2 learning experience in the study. Among these items, the highest mean score was found in item 12 (I find learning English is really interesting). It is also the highest score among the three components of the L2 motivational self system. It reflects that the subjects think that learning English is very interesting, indicating that the students have a good experience in the process of learning English, and feel that learning English is not boring, but an interesting thing. However, item 15 has lower scores compared with the other four items. Although the students have higher total scores in their L2 learning experience, about half of the students are not very looking forward to taking more English classes in school. This may be related to the students' acceptance of knowledge. Because taking more English classes means that they have to learn more knowledge, which will enhance their learning pressure. Therefore, they are reluctant to take more English classes in school.

According to the descriptive analysis of students' L2 motivational self system, junior high school students' English learning motivation is relatively high, but the scores of each item still does not achieve the ideal effect. Of the 15 options tested, item 10 has the lowest score, and the vast majority of students believe that "learn English well and people around you will respect them more" do not well enhance their motivation to learn English. In terms of L2 learning experience, although students like the atmosphere of English class and have a high learning enthusiasm, they are not willing to take more English class.

4.2. The Differences of L2 Motivational Self System Between Male Students and Female Students

This parts intends to explore the differences in three components of L2 motivational self system between male students and female students.

Table 4. Independent-samples T test of gender difference of L2MSS.

		Gender	N	Item	Mean	SD	P
L2 Motivational Self System questionnaire	Ideal L2 self	Male	49	4	2.905	1.563	0.044
		Female	51		3.540	1.447	
	Ought-to L2 self	Male	49	6	3.292	1.594	0.632
		Female	51		3.418	1.516	
	L2 learning experience	Male	49	5	3.216	1.711	0.044
		Female	51		3.898	1.521	

The L2 motivational self system scale adopts an independent sample T-test with confidence level P=0.05, indicating significant difference. If P values are less than 0.05, indicating significant differences in the results of the sample, and no significant difference exists if P values are greater than 0.05. As can be seen from the results in the table, the difference between both the L2 learning experience for female students in junior high school and male students is 0.682 and the P value is 0.044 < 0.05, indicating a significant gender difference in L2 learning experience. The average difference of the ideal L2 self is 0.635, the P value is 0.044 < 0.05, and the gender difference is significant. However, the difference in ought-to L2 self is minimal, with 0.126 and a P value of 0.632 > 0.05, indicating that there is no obvious difference between male students and female students in the variables of ought-to L2 self. Female students' L2 learning experience and ideal L2 self's score is higher than male students, indicating that female students' English learning motivation is stronger than male students, reflecting that female students have higher levels of learning motivation.

In terms of ideal L2 self, female students' ideal L2 self is obviously stronger than male students. Female students generally have a better attitude towards English learning than male students, so female students have a more positive attitude, which strengthens their learning motivation and makes them perform more positive than male students. Moreover, female students are more likely to be internally interested in learning English, they want to speak fluent English and prefer to talk to foreign friends. In these imaginations, they will create the ideal self-image, enhance learning motivation. There is no obvious gender difference in the ought-to L2 self. This may be related to the current educational environment, where male students and female students will be subject to deep-rooted education. So the gender difference, which should not be obvious. They are all taught to study hard, and learning is the most important task at the moment. So the gender difference is not very obvious in the aspect of the ought-to L2 self.

Table 5. *Results of Independent Sample T-test for the Items in Ideal L2 Self.*

Ideal L2 Self					
	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Item 1	male	49	2.88	1.481	.212
	female	51	3.37	1.371	.192
Item 2	male	49	3.00	1.696	.242
	female	51	3.67	1.492	.209
Item 3	male	49	2.90	1.475	.211
	female	51	3.51	1.362	.191
Item4	male	49	2.84	1.599	.228
	female	51	3.61	1.563	.219

In the part of ideal L2 self, female students score higher than males. This difference may be related to the self-construal and learning attitude. Firstly, self-construal is how individuals views their relationship between the self and others, as well as the thoughts, emotions and ways of behavior that individuals show in the process of communication. It is found in two main ways, one is an independent self-construal,

and the other is a dependent self-construal. Among them, independent self-construal emphasizes self-expression and keeping in touch with others, while dependent self-construal emphasizes paying attention to others, taking maintaining a harmonious relationship of the group as an important life goal [24]. Cross & Madson found that men prefer independent self-construal, while women tend to rely on independent self-construal [3]. The ideal L2 self requires learners to imagine and communicate with others, so the dependent self-construal is more consistent, and there are great differences between male students and female students in the ideal L2 self. Secondly, female students generally have more interest in language than male students, so female students should have a more positive attitude towards language learning. In the expression of ideal L2 self, female students' ideal L2 self is better than male students. Of the four items, the largest difference is the fourth (I can imagine myself living abroad and using English effectively for communicating with the locals). It shows that female students can better imagine communicating in English scenes.

The results of independent sample T-test show that there is no difference in ought-to L2 self between male students and female students. Item 5, 7, 8 and 9 indicate that the average score for female students is greater than for male students, item 6 is the same score for male students and female students, and option 10 is that the average for male students is greater than for female students, but the overall difference is not very big. The ought-to L2 self refers to the learner in the current social environment, and believes that they should achieve a certain extent in the L2 learning to avoid some negative effects. In this current social environment, both male students and female students will be affected by their parents, external factors and the social environment and so on. Most parents will expect their children to do well, so the children will also have the idea that they should study hard, and if they do not study well, there are some negative consequences, such as disappointing their parents. Therefore, the difference between male students and female students is not obvious.

Table 6. *Results of Independent Sample T-test for the Items in Ought-to L2 Self.*

Ought-to L2 Self					
	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Item 5	male	49	2.59	1.413	.202
	female	51	2.84	1.391	.195
Item 6	male	49	2.98	1.774	.253
	female	51	2.98	1.606	.225
Item 7	male	49	3.59	1.593	.228
	female	51	3.71	1.665	.233
Item 8	male	49	3.69	1.530	.219
	female	51	4.08	1.398	.196
Item 9	male	49	3.41	1.499	.214
	female	51	3.51	1.515	.212
Item 10	male	49	3.49	1.757	.251
	female	51	3.39	1.524	.213

Table 7. *Results of Independent Sample T-test for the Items in L2 Learning Experience.*

L2 Learning Experience					
	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Item 11	male	49	3.29	1.633	.233
	female	51	3.92	1.611	.226
Item 12	male	49	3.18	1.590	.227
	female	51	4.04	1.600	.224
Item 13	male	49	3.53	1.850	.264
	female	51	4.22	1.433	.201
Item 14	male	49	3.14	1.768	.253
	female	51	3.76	1.436	.201
Item 15	male	49	2.94	1.713	.245
	female	51	3.55	1.527	.214

As is shown in the table 7 of independent sample T-test for the L2 learning experience, there were significant differences in the scores between boys and girls. Item12 had the significant difference between male students and female students, and most female students thought learning English was very interesting, while male students showed a negative phenomenon. The reason for such a difference may be related to the attitude of male and female towards language learning. Females often have a positive attitude towards language learning, while males have a relatively weak interest in language learning, so their learning enthusiasm is not high. The results of several other items suggest that the Male students do not like the atmosphere of the English class, nor are they looking forward to taking the English class, while female students show a positive attitude towards the classroom atmosphere, curriculum setting, etc. Female students' L2 learning experience is full of positive, so the learning motivation is better than male students. And male students more show a negative attitude. The result that causes such a significant difference may still be related to male students and female students attitude towards language learning. Female students believe that successful learning experience can improve their learning motivation, while male students tend to vent some negative emotions in the process of learning English, thus reducing their learning enthusiasm.

5. Conclusion

Through the comparative study of the data, both male and female junior high school students have a high enthusiasm in English learning. Among the three components of the L2 motivational self system perspective, students have the highest level of L2 learning experience, followed by the ideal L2 self, and finally, the ought-to L2 self.

For the gender difference of junior high school students, students have significant differences in their ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience, while there should be little difference in ought-to L2 self. This shows that female students are willing to pay more efforts to learn English than male students. The results show that all three scores in female L2 motivational self system are higher than in male students, indicating that differences in English learning motivation between male students and female students in junior high school may be related to the stereotype of gender roles. However, the minor difference of ought-to L2 self between male students and female students in junior high school may be related to the current social education situation.

6. Implications and Limitations

This study explored gender differences in Chinese middle school students based on Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system. The results showed that the L2 motivational self system is influenced by gender differences. In this study, the L2 learning experience was the most significant learning motivation of the students. Because learners are most influenced by the L2 learning experience, so teachers, classroom atmosphere, teaching materials and other factors will become the influential factors affecting students' learning English. Therefore, English teachers should create a good classroom atmosphere, improve students' motivation for learning English, and try to use encouraging educational methods when treating students. At the same time, study showed that there are differences in English learning between male and female students, foreign language teachers should adopt multiple motivational strategies to meet the different needs of male students and female students in English learning.

Due to the small number of samples in this study and the sample came from a rural school in a town in Sichuan, China, students in rural schools have less English contact than students in urban areas. There may be some single data that do not involve urban students. It may cause some error to the experimental data. Therefore, in subsequent studies, the sample size can be increased to make the research data more convincing.

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