Research Article

EFL University Instructors' And Students' Perceptions Of International Posture, L2 Motivational Self And Imagined Communities

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ABSTRACT

In English language teaching, there are various notions that impact on learners' motivation to learn English and on teachers' motivation to teach English such as international posture, ideal L2 motivational self and imagined communities. An examination of teachers' and students' perspectives on these notions in the same EFL context is a significant research issue is as it is indispensable for both to construct a personal and professional L2 identity in relation to the current sociocultural profile of English speakers in their language education context. Therefore, this paper investigates the perceptions of university instructors working at an obligatory English preparatory program and of students who study at different departments of a state university in terms of these three constructs both psychologically and socioculturally important in the process of language speaker/ teacher identity (re)construction. An open-ended questionnaire was utilised to gain an in-depth understanding of EFL instructors' and students' experiences of English language learning/ teaching through a qualitative case study research design. The results of the content analysis revealed that the teachers pass on their experiences to the students and that the socio-economic factors that influence their motivation to teach correlate with the motivational variables that play a role in the students' desire to improve their English.

Key Words: International Posture, L2 Motivational Self, Imagined Communities

1. INTRODUCTION

English, as the predominant second language in the world, touches the life of anyone who would like to communicate, work or take an active part in the international arena. With the shifts in the contexts of language education in parallel to the changes in language users' profile world-wide as a result of the changing world and technology, a one-size-fits-all monocentric approach to language learning and teaching has been replaced by a more comprehensive one that promotes adopting an interculturally aware English learner/teacher identity rather than merely knowing language components. While cultural awareness has ever been important, as English becomes more global, there has been be a shift of emphasis more on international cultural awareness (Baker, 2012). Within the scope of this paper, there are three intertwined dimensions discussed to reveal the sociocultural and economic factors that help them become an international language user: international posture, L2 motivational self and imagined communities. It is also reasonable for a teacher that has intercultural awareness to accomplish this goal and provide students with opportunities that will raise their awareness about them as well.

English language teaching (ELT) classrooms are one of the closest communities in which students develop their L2 motivational self and identity. It is important to note that teachers are the guides in the complex process of students' developing their L2 self. Having their own motivation to adopt a language user identity on account of various factors in the specific ELT context, teachers both reflect their own vision to the language education context and shape their teaching path in consideration of the past experiences of their students. However, there is a scarcity of research in the literature relevant to the three constructs mentioned from the perspectives of both groups in the Turkish EFL context (Yashima, 2009; Aslan, 2020). In this vein, the purpose of this paper is to investigate both EFL instructors' and students' perceptions of international posture, L2 motivational self, and imagined communities in a Turkish EFL context. The following questions guided this research study:

✓ How do students' past experiences affect their perceptions of international posture, L2 motivational self and imagined communities?

✓ Do EFL instructors' opinions on these issues correlate with the students' constructions of imagined identities and communities?

2. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. International posture

Gardner's (1985) integrative motivation addressed the learner's eagerness to learn about the people who speak the language they are learning – daily life, cultural reflections, and so on. These learners are significantly motivated by the target language community, and they also have a desire to be a part of that community. Yashima (2002; 2009, p. 145) coined the notion of international posture defined as "a tendency to relate oneself to the international community rather than any specific L2 group". Although international posture is affected by integrative motivation, it differs in terms of being related to the target community at the international level. According to this posture, the learner is interested in global issues rather than local ones, and it is more important to be a global citizen. The key characteristics of international posture are described as an interest in international affairs, a willingness to travel, stay, or work abroad, and a readiness to interact with foreigners or foreign cultures (Hyun-Kong et al., 2018). Thus, learning a language means being a global learner. To be able to do that, students should "expand their self by creating new images of themselves linked to global concerns, and through the process find meaning in learning English while learning to use the language" (Yashima, 2009, p. 159).

In Tokoz-Göktepe's (2014) study conducted with 90 Turkish university students, instrumental motivation was the main source of motivation. They wanted to learn English, mainly for their future jobs. Another significant finding was that 50 % of the students wanted to become like people who speak English as their mother tongue.

2.2. L2 Motivational Self System

Early researchers discussed that Gardner's integrativeness did not fully cover the complex characteristics of L2 motivation, and there was a need for re-theorizing it. Taking heed of this need, Dörnyei (2005) reconceptualised motivation and developed the L2 motivational self-system. This was the outcome of a massive research study that lasted over 15 years. Even though the study took communication with L2 speakers, culture, linguistic self-confidence and milieu into consideration, the findings revealed that integrativeness had the biggest role in motivation (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pietrzykowska, 2011). Baker (2011) explained Dörnyei's opinions succinctly:

> He does not suggest that we completely discard the concept of integrative orientation; rather, he (along with other contributors in the book) praises the meticulous empirical and theoretical characteristics of the socio-educational model and offers a way to address some of the criticisms of that model and move research forward with the introduction of the 'possible selves' perspective (p. 201).

There are three major components of motivational self: The first one is the ideal L2 self, which is one's image of their future self – how to see themselves in the future. One's motivation here can be the image of having lots of British friends while L2 is English (Csizér and Dörnyei, 2005). The second component is ought to L2 self, which is one's image of their future self with the results of possible duties or situations (Dörnyei, 2005). As Csizér and Dörnyei, (2005, p. 617) described, ought to L2 self "concerns the more extrinsic (i.e., less internalized) types of instrumental motives". Learning English not to fail the exam so as not to disappoint parents could be an example of this type of motives. The third component is L2 learning experience or attitude. Surroundings such as the teacher, the curriculum, and peers are the factors impacting on experiences or attitudes. This could be exemplified by the unwillingness to learn English as a result of the curriculum's grammar-based instruction.

2.3. Imagined communities

It is quite commonplace for an L2 learner to think of himself/herself in an environment where English is spoken. This is a natural outcome of his/her images of the L2 motivational self-system. This environment is primarily a target language community. It is expressed as 'imagined' because there may not be any opportunity for the small units of the nation to meet the L2 people or even hear them (Yoshizawa, 2010). When students enter the classroom, they see not only a room with walls, but also a community which is beyond reality and which reaches the outside world via their imagination. Even though they keep themselves engaged in the classroom, their vision of community is extended to the imagined world (Norton, 2001). If the learner can have an opportunity to gain experience in international communication through a study abroad program, it may be less difficult for the learner to place his/her possible self in an L2 speaking community (Yashima, 2009). Aiming at developing communicative

competence and using realia in the class also help learners imagine the community. These communities can be academic, professional or international according to their use of English (Ardavani & Durrant, 2015; Aslan, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design & participants

This study's participants were made up of two groups: EFL instructors who were working at a preparatory program of a state university and students who were studying at various departments of the university. 4 instructors (% 100 female) and 11 students (% 45,5 female, % 54,5 male) took part in the study according to convenience sampling. They were both available at the time of research and willing to share their experiences of language learning and teaching. As for the general information about the participants, the instructors' ages ranged from 31 to 36, while the students' ages ranged from 20 to 23. The students' departments were computer engineering, chemistry, food engineering, electrical and electronics engineering, electronics and communications engineering, and mechanical engineering. 55 % of the students were in the fourth year, while the other 55 % were in the second or third year. In this study, an online open-ended questionnaire which was based on Aslan's (2020) protocol questions and on Yashima's (2009) questionnaire was used as the qualitative research instrument under a qualitative case study research design.

3.2 Data collection & analysis

The open-ended questions were asked to students in their native language (Turkish) to ease them and get better answers, then their responses were translated into English, whereas the instructors directly answered them in English. They gave their consents after being informed about the research objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations such as anonymity, confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The participants' responses were categorised into main themes including sub-themes according to the content analysis which was descriptive and exploratory (Creswell, 2013). Three main constructs constituted the deductive main themes, while sub-categories under these main themes inductively emerged from the responses (Silverman, 1993). Both concept-driven and data-driven approaches to coding were adopted in this sense. The quotes were re-read and re-categorised according to these themes through the constant comparison method.

4. FINDINGS

In line with the research questions, first the students' past language learning experiences will be unfolded in relation to their perceptions about three notions respectively: international posture, L2 motivational self, and imagined communities. Then, it will be followed by the instructors' perspectives on the same concepts to display whether they are correlated with the students' L2 constructions- imagined identities and communities.

4.1 Students' perceptions

The students who chose to get an undergraduate degree at various departments had English language learning experience for about ten to fifteen years. They were engaged with an English as a foreign language context in which they did not have many opportunities to communicate with L1 English speakers or speakers of English from various linguacultural backgrounds throughout their L2 learning experience in the preparatory school or different private language schools and at their department. The main resources of language input consisted of internet resources including online interactive games, discussion forums, blogs, and social media platforms. They also used some data information management systems, timetables, and online classroom sites for education-related purposes, which were all available in English. Therefore, the students' primary resources of motivation for learning English were educational concerns and future job opportunities. All the answers contained the same elements, just as participant (P) 2 expressed: *"It is very important for my education and business life"*. Besides, some of them were also aware of the importance of English at the international level. For example, P1 explained it in relation to his personal development:

> *Personal development includes not only professional areas, but also important features enhanced by getting to know different cultural settings, lifestyles and people socially. English can be used in all areas of life, which provides opportunities to surpass boundaries across places via the internet world-wide.*

To recap, the students were motivated by the goals of international communication, living abroad, and the ability to search for multiple sources. P2 expressed his motivation in such words:

> *The abundance of English resources, and the ability to obtain information from sources that are not translated into my language in the fields of business and education provide opportunities to communicate*

with people from all over the world. The fact that it offers such a wide range of opportunities makes me think that knowing English should be compulsory today.

These motivational factors were determinant in their formation of an L2 motivational self. When the students were asked about 'a world English identity', nearly all the participants indicated that they either had no opinion about it or never heard it before. Even if they were not familiar with this term, they revealed some characteristics related to international posture and concerning an L2 identity adopted for the purposes of intercultural communication worldwide. These features could be cited as a willingness to communicate with international speakers, learn more about different cultural resources, travel, work and live abroad even if they mostly did not have much experience in communicating with speakers of English as a first, second or -nth language. When it comes to their real-life experiences of communication in English, it was revealed that only 2 of the students had international experience, which they defined as *"a magnificent experience"*. Some of them used it as a contact language when coming across a tourist at a holiday site or a foreign speaker at a conference, and from time to time they had virtual experience of chatting with people from various backgrounds through online interactive platforms.

As for their ideal L2 self, though almost every participant responded to questions about international posture by considering international affairs, some student participants were under the influence of a monolithic native speakerist view of English speaker identity including monolingual speakers of English within the 'Inner-Circle' countries such as the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia and so on. There were miscellaneous responses to the question as to who a competent speaker of English is, such as *"Anyone with a British or American accent"* (P5), and *"Anyone who has developed her/his intellectual"* (P7). Also, P11 clarified her choice more frankly as follows: *"Her appearance, nationality, or accent don't matter; it's enough for me to speak fluently".* It is interesting to note that intellectual development was associated directly with being an English speaker in P7's words. P11 was also one of the exceptional participants who had an overarching understanding of the relationship between language and society, as she was aware of the international sociolinguistic profile of English speakers and emphasised comprehensibility over other speaker-related personal factors. All in all, there was a heavy emphasis on 'nativeness' in their accounts of an L2 self even if not limited to it. This was closely related to their imagined community as well.

In line with their responses to the questions about their ideal L2 self, imagined communities they associated with ideal language speakers mostly comprised a monolithic circle. However, it was not the same for every student. For example, P2 expressed his imagined community as *"an area where the common language for people from all nationalities is English. It could be the workplace of a global company, or it could be a cafe with plenty of tourists".* Their imagined community was mostly surrounded by an environment where 'native English-speaking' people live, and they associated English with only America and Britain. Especially General American English among the varieties of English were cited as the most used type of English, as they were immensely bombarded with resources including the U.S.-based contents inside and outside the class such as the textbooks, popular cultural artefacts, social media platforms etc. This was followed by British English as they generally associated genuineness, originality and ownership with the speakers of English in Britain by virtue of birthplace.

4.2 Instructors' perceptions

Instructors' motivation to learn English was initially familial. Their responses to the questions about the importance of English, on the other hand, indicated that they could find personal reasons to value English because they showed great appreciation for knowing English by explaining that: "*I think it is really crucial to study English, especially now that the world is more global than ever*" (P2); "*...It is the language of all countries*" (P4). Their L2 learning motivation was related to academic research, personal growth, and international communication. P1 clarified her reasons as follows: *"First, I feel updated and more knowledgeable. I can keep up with daily world news and read the most recent academic research..."*, and P2 summed up their overall perceptions: *"First and foremost, English allows me to do my job and also to pursue my hobbies and interests on a global scale".*

Surprisingly, none of the instructors were technically aware of terms like "English as an international language" or "global English(es)", but their guesses included global orientations to learning and teaching English. Even though they had a global vision, they did not associate English with any countries other than the UK, the USA and Ireland. The cultural images they defined were exemplified from Hollywood, Britain, postcolonial literature, "The Crown", "Long live the Queen!", Big Ben, London, and New York. This could be due to their international experiences in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe, where participants described each trip as *"a new eye-opener".*

Their imagined community was any setting surrounded by someone who speaks the language, such as a classroom and a teachers' room. On the other hand, they indicated that they were not the same person when they spoke English, although they looked like the same person. The changes they felt were in *"the tone of voice, their attitudes*

like pragmatic politeness and open-mindedness, the way of thinking and the affective state such as 'a more cheerful version of themselves'". They emphasised the existence of a clear connection between language a learning and one's identity, and their ideal L2 self was very much aligned with the L2 role-models from the "Inner-circle" countries as cited above.

Finally, one of the last thoughts on teaching English which piqued our interest belonged to P1, who stated that her teaching experience was *"more than a profession"*: *"I believe I teach very important life skills that will change the lives of my students"*. Overall, it was noted in the accounts of instructors that they had an awareness of the fundamental role of their profession in their students' educational, personal and professional lives and that they felt a sense of satisfaction with their teaching profession.

Regarding the students' and the instructors' accounts of L2 ideal motivational self including their experience in and attitudes to learning/ teaching English, international posture and imagined communities, it could be viewed that their responses are highly comparable to each other in terms of international posture and the ideal L2 self. First, both groups did not state a clear definition of a global language speaker identity or a global stance; however, the characteristics that they stated in relation to the general affairs in the international context reflected that they were interested in global issues as well local ones and felt the necessity to communicate with the world citizens with the aim of meeting like-minded people and negotiating about the grand challenges they face together with them in today's world.

As for the ideal L2 self, they both had an ideal L2 self-image of English language speakers from "the Inner-circle" countries. Their language learning experiences inside or outside the classroom was very much shaped by the resources which originated from the productions of these countries. These resources were available in their immediate environment via the internet during their daily lives or in classes at university which has promoted the use of coursebooks disseminated by certain publishers based on the UK or the US.

Concerning the imagined communities, even if the students continued to stick to the same circle as their imagined communities, the instructors' expressions suggested a more comprehensively imagined community ranging from the small cultural groups in their immediate close including their classes, or English language users, instructors and/or students in the Turkish EFL context to the larger communities speaking English as a first or additional language around the world. Therefore, their image was more encompassing compared with the students' though both groups' accounts correlated in terms of the emphasis given to the English speakers within the "Inner-circle" countries as if they were a single monolithic group of speakers having specific features of identity, such as cheerfulness, open-mindedness and politeness, which they associated with them.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has shed light on the perceptions of the two most important agents in ELT contexts, instructors and students, about three important constructs: international posture, L2 ideal self, imagined communities. Also, the interplay between instructors' imagined identities and communities and those of students was displayed in consideration of their language learning or teaching experiences. It is unquestionable that teachers influence the opinions of students because their "envisioned communities interact with the learners' imagined identities and imagined communities" (Aslan, 2020, p. 237).

There are a number of variables that impact on the use of English, such as the setting, people, and aims due to the dynamic and evolving nature of the language, and the sociocultural aspects of English are best acknowledged when a 'non-essentialist' view is embraced (Baker, 2012). Holding the 'non-essentialist' view can help teachers enrich their student's global view. In the present study, while almost every participant seemed to have an international outlook, some student participants imagined L2 speakers as 'native' while they described the British and Americans or Australia and India, where English is an official language. It is not surprising that the most influential motivation for the students is the promising job opportunities that they may have in the future. As the prevailing themes in the accounts of both groups, personal enhancement and career aspirations were outstanding, which showed that they were both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to learn English. Ardavani and Durrant (2015) similarly found that the biggest motivation of their Iranian participants to learn English was to achieve their goals for their careers. Goharimehr (2018) also realised that when L2 offers future opportunities, students are more motivated to learn the target language.

What impacted the students' imagined community were their previous experiences. Because their cultural images were relevant to a specific 'L2 culture', their imagined community mostly involved 'native speakers'. In the study that Aslan (2020) conducted, she found a link between students' personal contexts and imagined communities. In this study, for instructors, knowing English was more than knowing a language. This viewpoint appears to have

been successfully transmitted to the students. They could take an international stance as they wanted to be 'global learners'. Interestingly, this stance was not apparent in their accounts of an imagined ideal L2 self. Both groups attributed some features peculiar to the speakers of English as a monolingual language to their ideal L2 speaker identity. However, the instructors' and students' imagined communities differed in that the instructors associated their imagined communities with all speakers of English in the world, while the students mostly felt attachment to the 'native speakers'. That is to say, there is a positive correlation between instructors' visions and students' visions though the instructors' imagined communities did not match with those of students. This could result from the instructors' overt emphasis on the native speakerist norms in language teaching and assessment in practice even if their inner thoughts were aligned with the idea of an international English speaker community. Their teaching approaches and methods could have been limited to the monolithic ones based on the coursebooks they were given to follow, which could explain the gap between their beliefs and practices and the reason why the image of an international community is not evident in the students' accounts as well.

There are some studies which have dealt with these notions together or separately in the literature, and which resonate with the results of this study (Yashima, 2009; Birdsell, 2014; Ardavani & Durrant, 2015; Goharimehr, 2018; Hyun-Kong et al., 2018; Aslan, 2020). Yashima (2009) conducted a survey study with 191 high school students in the Japanese EFL context, investigating the relationships among many variables including international posture, ideal self, and an imagined international community and found that extrinsic motivation highly correlated with these constructs. Likewise, the student participants in this study were considerably motivated by such external factors including job opportunities as well as by integrative factors. The reason why international posture aligns with extrinsic motivation the most lies in the theoretical meaning of international posture which already includes "integrativeness and instrumentality" (Yashimai 2009, p. 157). The correlation between international posture and the ideal L2 self was found 0.50, which was also supported in the present study in which there was not a strong relationship between both constructs. It was also revealed that a higher frequency of communication with international people and a higher proficiency level are strongly determinant in the endorsement of an imagined ideal L2 self in an international community. Similarly, Birdsell (2014) carried out a comparative study about "gender, international posture and overseas study" with 231 first year university students and found a notable imbalance between genders regarding the construct of international posture and study abroad experiences over ten years.

Ardavani & Durrant (2015) investigated the socio-economic and political factors that affected Iranian university students' motivation to learn English through semi-structured interviews and found that carer prospects, the recognition by the members of the international community, and the development of their country were among the highlighted reasons for their willingness to learn English. The external factors that impacted on the students' English learning journey in this study resonated with some variables of extrinsic motivation in the present study. Goharimehr (2018) conducted a qualitative case study in which an open-ended questionnaire about imagined identities and communities was applied to eleven undergraduate students at a Japan university and showed the importance of feeling attachment to imagined identities and communities. She revealed that the learners whose imagined identities and imagined communities were incorporated were more willing to learn English compared to those without a desire to imagine a future identity or participate in community of practice. In the present study, the participants' imagined identities and communities did not match with each other exactly though they had confidence and imagination of their possible selves and communities, which suggests why they were all motivated to learn English instrumentally or interculturally. Moreover, as in Hyun-Kong et al.'s (2018) study, L2 learning attitude and the ideal L2 self apparently influenced their motivation to learn English, and international posture and competitiveness were also evident in their accounts of language learning experiences and future career expectations.

Aslan (2020) examined the relationship between imagined identities and L2 investments in three English learners' language learning stories in a preparatory year program in Turkey through questionnaires, interviews, and policy document reviews and found a relation between their imagined identities as L2 learners/ test-takers, L2 users, and L2 sojourners and the limited instrumental community imagined by the program. The emphasis given to grammar-based mainstream language classes in this study was also highlighted in the policies and classroom practices in Aslan's (2020) study, which showed that L2-mediated visions shaped by the learners are highly interrelated to those of teachers, program members, and other stakeholders. All in all, both the past experiences of the students and the present knowledge of the instructors (how they transmit it) affect the perceptions of students. Therefore, this study explored their views about the constructs of international posture, L2 ideal self and imagined communities and the overlapping and differing aspects in their accounts of these three notions through questionnaires for both students and instructors.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The mediation of our interaction with the people worldwide is based on how we position ourselves in addition to how we relate to the people, and the vision of L2 students could be constructed through contextual real-life situations that could be simulated inside the class or experienced outside the class via problem-solving activities or research-based tasks. Both themes in the syllabus and approaches and methods in language teaching would impinge on the process of adopting an international stance together with a (re-)construction of an ideal L2 self that relates to an international imagined community. Therefore, it is our hope that this research study into imagined identities and communities within the ELT field will open up the possibility of further investigation and add substantially to our understanding of these constructs. Further studies could be conducted with different participants in different local and international EFL settings with regards to different constructs relevant to identity construction and L2 learning and teaching experiences.

As Yashima (2009) suggested, it is important to know where to lead students while helping them improve their English skills, for which there is a need to do certain investigations about personal language learning trajectories, socio-institutional implementations, agentive actions, and power relations (Pavlenko and Blackedge, 2003). In this vein, this investigation has deepened our understanding of the relationship between instructors' views and students' L2-related visions by showing the similarities and differences, with the consideration of quality issues such as trustworthiness and transferability despite its limitation about empirical generalisability. Drawing on insights from such small-scale studies, language and teacher education programs at universities could build their visions, goals, strategies, and curricula in line with the current conceptual and methodological shifts in language teaching research encompassing socio-psychological, -educational, -cultural and -political dimensions from an interdisciplinary perspective.

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