Language learning contexts and their effect on the self-concept of university students

Sofía Moratinos Johnston
Universitat de les Illes Balears, Spain

Following the introduction of Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, the self and its aspirations as a potential L2 user take centre stage and act as powerful motivating images. The effect of learning experiences on these images is still a largely unexplored area. With the aim of demonstrating how particular language learning contexts (LLCs) - e.g. formal instruction (FI), content and language integrated learning (CLIL), and study abroad (SA) - influence the motivation of students to learn a foreign language, we designed the ‘Language Learning Context and L2 Self Motivation Questionnaire’. The questionnaire was administered to 1,050 Spanish undergraduates selected using stratified random sampling. On the Ought-to L2 Self scale, which measures the extent to which learning English is influenced by the opinion of others and their expectations, it is those students that have experienced all three learning contexts (3LLCs) who score higher than all the rest. As for the Ideal L2 self scale, there was no statistical difference between those 2LLC students that had experienced either FI+CLIL or FI+SA, while the score for the 3LLC students was the highest of all combinations and significantly higher than for FI-only students. This suggests that the 3LLC students have a greater capability of picturing themselves as L2 speakers. These results endorse the idea that the three contexts combined are complementary and beneficial for the language learner (Pérez-Vidal, 2011).


Keywords: L2 Motivational Self System, language learning motivation, language learning context.