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The Impact of Synchronous Online Communication on Ideal L2 Self

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the extent to which synchronous online communication with native and nonnative speakers of English improves English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' ideal L2 self. The study was based on a quasi-experimental research design and comprised the contact of Turkish EFL learners with foreign English speakers (native or nonnative speakers of English) by means of online communication tools, Google Hangouts and Eliademy. The data collection and analysis encompass the use of qualitative methods. Findings designate that engaging EFL learners in synchronous online communication with people from discrete cultures improves learners' self-images using English in the future. As a result, the study calls for integrating synchronous online communication means into language learning programs to ameliorate learners' ideal L2 self.

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Keywords: Ideal L2 self; motivation; synchronous communication; technology

Introduction

Expecting learners to be successful in a language learning process without sufficient motivation would be impossible since they, otherwise, would lack the primary stimulant to start and pursue language learning (Dörnyei, 1998). Hence, motivation stands as one of the essential factors affecting one's success in language learning. Motivation research in language learning

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dates back to Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert's studies in 1959. Since then, the effects of motivation on human behavior have been analyzed under many theories.

One recent model of motivation is the L2 Motivational Self System, proposed by Dörnyei (2009). In this model, Dörnyei (2009) explains that self-systems are essential to foster learners' motivation along with language learning. The L2 motivational self-system is based on the belief that when a learner discerns a discrepancy between his/her present state and future self-guide, such perceived distinction is likely to work as a motive or force to make the distinction smaller and achieve the desired result (Al-Hoorie, 2018). The L2 motivational self-system comprises three components: the ideal L2 self, the ought to self, and the L2 learning experience (Dörnyei, 2009). Dörnyei (2009) defines that "the ideal L2 self is the L2-specific facet of one's ideal self"; the ought-to L2 self is "the attributes that one believes she/he ought to possess (i.e. various duties, obligations, or responsibilities) to avoid possible outcomes," and the L2 learning experience indicates "situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (p.29).

L2 motivational self-system has received significant attention in the literature. It has been investigated in distinct settings (Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009) and found as effective in developing linguistic competence (Magid & Chan, 2012), enhancing motivation to learn a foreign language (Ueki & Takeuchi, 2013), and alleviating language learning anxiety (Papi, 2010). Its interaction with other elements affecting motivation has also been researched. For instance, Kormos, Kiddle, and Csizer (2011) investigated the interaction of "cognitive, affective and social factors" with each other (p. 495), and the results from Kormos et al.'s study (2011) demonstrated a relationship between the ideal L2 self and motivated behaviors. Ueki and Takeuchi (2013) specify that Dörnyei's L2 motivational system is likely to be developed into an 'integrative framework' to account for the effects of many different 'affective variables' (p. 239).

Dörnyei (2009) emphasizes that an ideal L2 self comes to prominence in language learning as an essential factor because learners who lack a clear self-image while learning a language do not have sufficient motivation, which is vital in language learning. Magid (2014) states that the most substantial phase of L2 motivation in the L2 Motivational self-system is the ideal L2 self. Garberoglio (2012) explains that the ideal L2 self uses the effect of visualization effectively to help a language learner conjure up himself/ herself as an L2 learner

who is fluent, and it helps to perceive and decrease the discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal L2 self which refers to one's imagined self-image. The ideal L2 self can be easily controlled and bolstered when the learners are exposed to the target language and engaged with it interactively (Hsieh, 2009).

The use of technology has great potential to engage language learners in communication with people who speak diverse languages than their own and who have different cultural backgrounds, and ultimately to generate motivation to become a speaker of the target language. The motivational impact of technology has been examined explicitly as an internal variability in many studies (Anikina, Sobinova, & Petrova, 2015; Garberoglio, 2012; Jauregi, 2015) and also proposed as an element affecting language learning in other investigations depending on the researchers' inferences based on observation (Bueno-Alastuey & Kleban, 2016). The studies have concluded that learners embraced in (a)synchronous communication are more enthusiastic about participating in language activities and communicating with educators and other learners (Abdorrezza et al., 2015; Warschauer, 1996). Unlike traditional learning/ teaching environments that encapsulate face-to-face interaction, the settings that apply (a)synchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) offer the learners a more comfortable and friendly atmosphere, making learners more motivated in the learning process (Abdorrezza et al., 2015).

The motivational effect of technology in learning settings has been widely noted in previous studies (Bueno-Alastuey & Kleban, 2016). However, the effect of (a)synchronous online communication on participants' ideal L2 self was examined in solely a small number of studies (Garberoglio, 2012; Gleason & Suvorov 2012) involving different participant groups at different education levels. Garberoglio (2012) aimed to unveil the extent to which synchronous computer-mediated communication affects deaf English as a second language learners' L2 motivational self-system. Gleason and Suvorov's research (2012) was generated to investigate ten non-native English speakers' opinions about Wimba Voice, an asynchronous communication CMC tool, which the learners used to improve their L2 speaking proficiency and its effects on their future L2 selves. Findings from Gleason and Suvorov's research (2012) indicated that students had varied opinions about the use of the tasks they did using asynchronous oral communication tool, and there was not a direct relation to learners' future self-vision of themselves whilst using English, which might have arisen as a result of short exposure to the tasks.

Despite the fact that there are studies to display how CMC affects learners' future vision as a language learner, the present study is differentiated from them with its design and sample group. Namely, unlike the previous research, the present study contributes to the field revealing the effect of (basically) synchronous online communication on the learners' ideal L2 self in education at the tertiary level, and it adopts a quasi-experimental research design in order to designate the effect of CMC with a clear picture. As a result, the study intends to display the difference between a traditional classroom setting and CMC in generating language learners' ideal L2 self.

In EFL settings, the language learners rarely have an opportunity to interact with international speakers of English. However, CMC provides the language learners with a chance to contact the other speakers of English and practice speaking to them. Simpson (2002) mentions the potential of CMC for renovating the limited feature of social contact in face-to-face classroom environment. Learners become more active in communication, autonomous, and more motivated (Simpson, 2002). According to Dörnyei (2001a), motivation is related to success, which means people are motivated only when they hope to be successful. The way people construe their achievements and failures in the past has a considerable effect on how they behave in the future (Dörnyei, 2001a). With reference to the notion reflecting what people expect to do or to be in the future and what they experienced in the past are highly likely to influence their future image (Dörnyei, 2001a), the present study aimed to reveal how the language learners' communication experiences with international students through CMC tools could reflect on their perception of ideal L2 self as a user of English in the future.

L2 Motivational Self System

L2 motivational self system was proposed as a basis from the self-theory in psychology (Dörnyei, 2009). This new model of motivation was based on Higgins' theory of self-discrepancy and Markus and Nurius' possible selves. The possible selves refer to an individual's constant process, which embraces changing from the present self to the future self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Marcus and Nurius (1989) elucidate that one's dreams about their future image have crucial importance in the theory of possible selves, and imagining essentially affects motivation to achieve something.

The theory of self-discrepancy depends on the distance between the actual self, which refers to the state that individuals have, and the ideal self, which refers to individuals' future

self-image that they wish to be in the future (Higgins, 1987). The extent to which one's actual self is different from the self that one wants to be in the future has a negative effect on their motivation (Higgins, 1987; Munezane, 2013). When the distinction between an individual's actual self and ideal self correctly matches one another, the individual feels more motivated to pursue a goal.

Dörnyei (2009) remarks that the L2 motivational self-system involves three parts: the ideal L2 self, ought-to-self, and the L2 learning experience. The ideal L2 self simply refers to a person's ideal image as having L2 competencies, which a person might want to have in the future (Dörnyei, 2009; Muzane, 2013). The ought-to-self encompasses what a person considers she/he requires to avoid an unwanted outcome such as sadness or disappointment before it happens (Dörnyei, 2009). The L2 learning experience comprises elements with regard to the learning setting and involvement, such as the effect of the teacher, the learning program, the presence of the other students, and the sense of achievement (Dörnyei, 2009).

In the L2 motivational self-system, Dörnyei (2009) underscores the importance of the ideal L2 self, which embodies the L2 competencies one wants to have in the future, expressing that it leads individuals to bring their goals into action with a crucial value to strengthen motivation as a language learner. When individuals have a clear future image of themselves, they are likely to be more motivated to realize their goals. Thus, it is substantial to help learners develop an evident ideal L2 self in language learning. Dörnyei (2009) articulates that learners' ideal L2 self is likely to increase when learners are made aware of what they aspire to do in the future. This is possible with the help of potent role models, many classroom activities such as listening to music or engaging learners in some cultural activities which are specific in a culture different from one's own culture (Dörnyei, 2009). Dörnyei (2009) suggests that having a clearer ideal L2 self is significant in language learning since it heightens motivation to learn the target language. Hence, the learners ought to be made aware of what they aspire to achieve in the future (Dörnyei, 2009).

Ideal L2 Self

Of the three components of the L2 motivational self-system, Dörnyei (2009) declares that the ideal L2 self is the most significant. Dörnyei (2009) continues that an individual's ideal L2 self may not be vivid or preeminent enough to be noticed. Then mental imagery, which is a term used in psychology and can be simply defined as the images a person might have in

her/his mind as a consequence of the experiences with senses such as smelling, seeing, tasting, hearing, or touching (Csizer & Magid 2014), is effective to broaden one's ideal L2 self and subsequently his/her motivation. Csizer and Magid (2014) explain that mental imagery may boost a person's confidence, reduce the feeling of being very worried, and in turn expand performance when employed, for instance, for 'the preparation, repetition, elaboration, intensification, or modification of behaviors' (p.15).

The attitudes towards the target language community are closely related to the ideal language self-image one has (Dörnyei, 2009). This means that when an individual's feelings and thoughts are positive towards the people who speak the target language, she/he can possess a clear ideal L2 self (Dörnyei, 2009). Due to the fact that English is a global language spoken for international communication in today's world, Yasmiha (2009) states that the integrativeness as proposed by Gardner (1985), -which refers to the interest in a language to be a part of the native community of the target language, - does not respond to the motivation that EFL learners have to learn and use English. Yasmiha (2009) denotes that rather than contact the native English community, EFL learners have an aspiration to contact people speaking English regardless of the differences in their cultures and native languages. Pertaining to her findings, Yasmiha (2009) proposed 'international posture', which involves one's image of herself/ himself in accordance with the international community and eagerness for speaking to people from various cultures (p.3). When a language learner can envision herself/ himself as a part of that international community, she/ he can have a vivid and attractive ideal L2 self (Yasmiha, 2009). In addition, Dörnyei (2009) indicates that instrumental drives (to get a promotion in a workplace, to make a career) to learn a language are closely related to a learner's ideal self-image. Kim (2009) elucidates that language learners with an instrumental reason such as being promoted can envision themselves developing their ideal L2 self internalizing such extrinsic motivations.

The influence of the L2 motivational self-system on education has been examined in a number of studies. Findings from those studies suggest that motivation and learning are reconciled and that learners with a clearer ideal self-image are more motivated to learn a foreign language (Ueki & Takeuchi, 2013). Papi (2010) explains how a clear ideal self upgrades motivation exemplifying a language learner that wishes to be a good speaker in the target language and communicate with friends from other countries. Given that a language learner

could develop an image of herself/ himself as a fluent speaker, this image would give a solid drive to achieve her/ his goal, decreasing the discrepancy between the real self and the ideal self (Papi, 2010). Previous studies indicate that having a clear ideal L2 self specifically has a positive effect on language learning, thereby increasing learners' confidence (Li, 2014; Magid & Chan, 2012; Magid, 2014; Papi, 2010), helping learners establish clear goals as language learners (Takahashi, 2013); and influencing intercultural communicative competence positively (Oz, 2015). A few investigations (e.g.: Garberoglio, 2012; Gleason & Suvorov, 2012) of technology integration into language learning programs to foster motivation in connection with the ideal L2 self have been carried out. They suggested that the use of computer-mediated communication (synchronous or asynchronous) has helped learners to imagine themselves as proficient language learners as a result of the interactions in which they are engaged through the computer-mediated communication programs (Garberoglio, 2012; Gleason & Suvorov, 2012).

Method

The present study primarily investigated the effects of synchronous online communication on Turkish EFL learners' ideal L2 self. The study was established on a quasi-experimental study design, and the data were collected and analyzed employing qualitative methods. With regard to the experiments based on qualitative methods, Robinson and Mendelson (2012) elucidate that qualitative work enables researchers to reveal participants' reactions in a particular study "in a more contextual and reflexive manner that unveil the processing of meaning construction in a unique manner" (p. 344). With this respect, the researchers underscore the significance of the qualitative experiments and their contribution to the field, by indicating that they fulfill the role in unveiling the obscure cognitive processing with a more interpretative perspective.

The following research question was addressed in the study.

- To what extent does synchronous online communication impact on the Turkish EFL learners' ideal L2 self?

Participants and Setting

In total, 22 Turkish participants were involved in the study. The participants were selected by means of convenience sampling. Then they were divided into two groups as

experimental and control. Students were placed in the groups on a volunteer basis. In the control group, there were seven Turkish learners who studied English as a foreign language at a university in Turkey, while in the experimental group, 15 Turkish EFL learners who were at the same English proficiency level and university as the participants in the control group were placed and engaged in tasks that they could communicate with nine foreign participants. The foreign participants studied at a university in the United States of America (the USA) and were from different departments, such as computer engineering ($n= 1$), anthropology ($n= 1$), interior architecture ($n= 1$), international relations and political science ($n= 1$), communications ($n= 1$), English studies ($n= 2$), and psychology ($n= 2$). Seven out of nine foreign participants were American, while the others were international students in the USA from discrete countries such as India and Spain.

All the participants were recruited into the study after they approved a consent form that informed them about all the study details. The foreign participants were recruited into the study with the collaboration of a contact person, who was a researcher at the same university as the foreign participants and was familiar with the participants' school culture. This enabled efficient contact with the foreign participants and allowed arranging the sessions in which the participants were embraced in communication via synchronous online means considering the time-zone differences of the countries where Turkish and foreign participants took part in the study.

Treatment Process

The treatment was founded on the participants' discussion of the topics given to them, sharing their ideas, exploring others' thoughts about the same topic, which varied each week throughout the two months of research. The treatment was independent of the program which the participants were studying in their classes at university. It was planned and arranged as an extensive program that the participants joined after class. The sessions aimed to help the participants gain multiple perspectives, develop empathy and understanding towards cultural diversities and explore other cultures and their own cultures. To this end, in the control group, the participants came together with the researcher in a discussion room physically and carried out the tasks assigned to them each week. In the experimental group, the participants performed the same tasks as those given to the control group participants in online settings.

The online synchronous communication tool that was basically selected to be used in the experimental group was Google Hangouts. The choice of this tool was grounded on reasons such as its being cost-free, having easy access, and ensuring effective control of confidentiality of the students' privacy. The participants all in the experimental group were invited to join the sessions arranged on Google Hangouts via the email accounts they provided. Without any boundaries of place, the participants could participate in the sessions using their computers or smartphones. Each session on Google hangouts allowed 10 participants at most. Since the total number of participants in the experimental group was 24 (Turkish participants, $n= 15$; Foreign participants, $n= 9$), three different groups of participants up to 10 people (at most) (including the researcher) were formed each week. Careful consideration was given so that each group involved the foreign and Turkish participants together. So as to arrange the meetings, the participants were offered to choose a time slot they were available to join the meetings. Each session lasted for 45-55 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent.

The researcher attended all the sessions (in the control group and the experimental group) and was active at each research step as a discussion initiator, observer, and arranger of the sessions. Namely, the researcher started the meeting, introduced the week's topic to the participants, monitored the dialogues between/ among participants, and closed the sessions. In addition, the researcher was present in the sessions to attempt to tackle a misunderstanding about a comment or not clearly understood topic, word, or event in the sessions between the participants (predominantly Turkish and foreign participants in the experimental group).

Data Collection

Data were collected using the participants' reflection papers that they wrote at the end of each session and through semi-structured interviews held individually after the research ended. Details regarding the reflection papers and the interviews were shared below.

Reflection Papers

After each session, all participants were requested to write a reflection paper regarding their experiences before the following session. The participants were reflected a few questions to explore their thoughts about the most vital points of the session, the challenges they had during the session and requested to answer the questions by writing a paragraph with at least 50 words. Hence, it was aimed to collect the participants' immediate feedback on the session.

To help the participants to express their perceptions and feelings more comfortably, they were asked to write the reflection papers in either language they wanted: Turkish or English. After each session, all the participants in the experimental and control groups submitted their papers without exception. The participants in the control group wrote their reflection papers on a piece of paper and handed them in before the following session. The participants in the experimental group posted their reflection papers through an online educational platform, Eliademy, which was also employed to get in touch with the participants and inform them of the following sessions' requirements.

Semi-Structured Interviews

At the end of the last sessions, a schedule was planned to hold semi-structured interviews with each participant individually. The participants in the control group were interviewed in the classroom setting one by one. In contrast, the participants' interviews in the experimental group were generated individually via video calls on Google Hangouts. All of the interviews lasted at least 20 minutes and were recorded for further analysis by the researcher with the participants' consent. The interviews were held in the mother tongue of the participants.

The interview questions aimed to reveal whether the study had an effect on the participants' thoughts in terms of the importance of English; whether the participants could imagine themselves communicating with people who were from different cultures; studying at a university where the instruction was taught in English; using English in their future career; having international friends; living abroad or not.

The interview questions addressed to the participants were purposefully employed to discover whether there was a change in the participants' self vision as a language learner in the future after their engagement in the project or not and whether the participants differed from each other depending on the groups (experimental or control) in which they were. Questions in the interview aimed to encourage learners to envision themselves as a language user in the future and were based on the ideal L2 self questionnaire items originally developed by Taguchi et al. (2009) and formed in aligned with the research purposes of the present study. To illustrate, in the interview sessions, each participant was read some scenarios in which she/ he was asked to imagine herself/ himself speaking a foreign language. To exemplify, the participants were asked whether they could imagine themselves doing Master's abroad at a university where the

medium of instruction is totally English. In parallel to this, the participants were addressed some other related questions such as which country they were studying in, whether they had any friends or not, (if any) whether those friends were from different cultures or the same culture as their, whether the participants were eager to communicate with them or not, and whether the participants were tolerant to the cultural differences between one another, etc. In the same manner, the participants were shared another scenario in which they were asked to imagine themselves working in a workplace where they spoke to international friends. During the interview, in a friendly manner, the participants were requested to envision themselves in that workplace giving details about their position there, whether the work-mates were from the same culture or other cultures, how they approached the international colleagues, how they dealt with a problem (if any) because of cultural differences, etc.

The analysis of the data incorporated qualitative methods. Initially, the recordings of the interviews were listened to carefully before they were transcribed verbatim. Thus, the data could be organized, and certain notes could be taken from the recordings (Maxwell, 2013). This followed transcribing the tapes of the interviews, which involved a literal transcription of all the session videos on a Word document. Saldana (2011) underscores the importance of the coding process, stating that organization of the data, creativity, ethical, and privacy issues are essential for the coders. The transcribed documents were analyzed meticulously once again to avoid any missing concerns. After the transcriptions were ready, the data started to be coded.

Initially, preliminary procedures were applied to the transcribed data. To better apprehend the data, a paper-pen coding method was carried out first, which involved circling, highlighting, or making the essential points bold on the printed copy of the transcribed data (Saldana, 2011). When the preliminary analysis was completed, all the data were imported onto the qualitative data analysis software, MaxQDA 10. Then the data were analyzed on the software using coding methods, such as double (also named as simultaneous) coding, descriptive coding, which refers to the description of the data to be analyzed with a few words to describe, and an *in vivo* (also known as literal) coding method (Saldana, 2011).

Similar to the analysis of the interview recordings, the reflection papers that the participants wrote after each session were imported onto the qualitative data software after careful examination of the papers and analyzed employing the same coding methods as the interview recordings.

The preliminary analysis, which involved, for instance, watching the interview videos, reading the transcriptions, enabled us to discover some other codes, such as the degree to which the tasks in the project were practical to renovate the participants' ideal L2 self. The figure below indicates the principal codes used in the study:

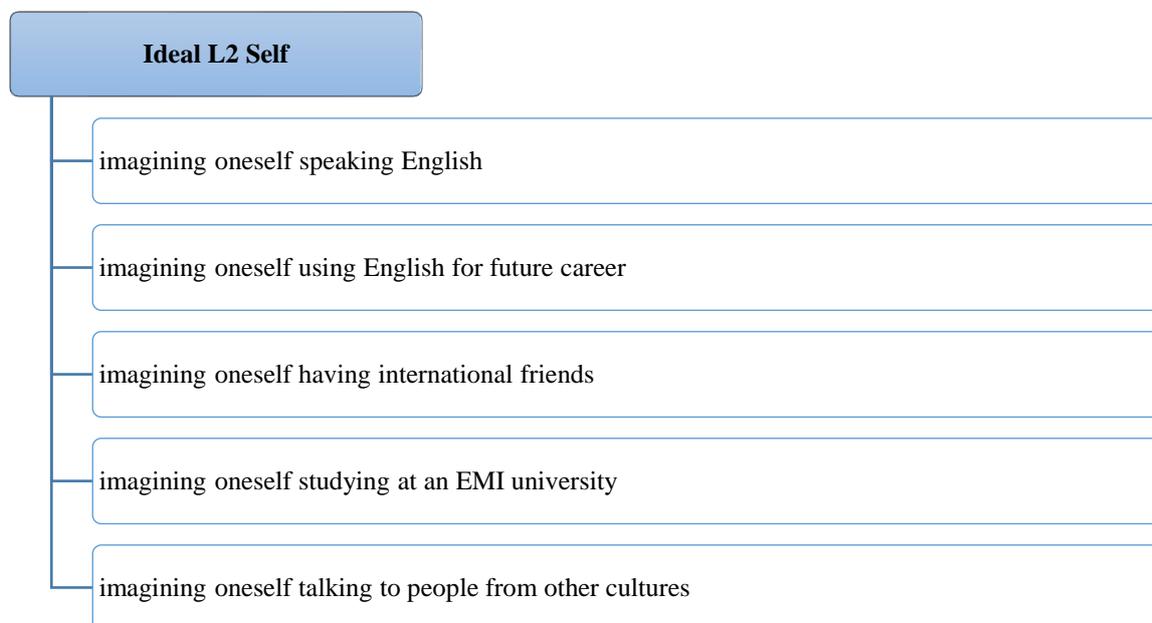


Figure 1. *Ideal L2 self codes*

The data were mainly coded depending on the five codes shown in Figure 1. Besides the codes indicated in the figure, learners' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language and their confidence in speaking foreign languages are the other codes that emerged while analyzing the data. The present study particularly aimed to reflect the degree to which the experimental group participants who communicated with non-Turkish speakers using CMC tools differed in terms of the vividness of their future self-image using English from the participants in the control group who carried out the same tasks as the experimental group participants (except that there were no non-Turkish speakers and no use of CMC tools in the control group, but face to face communication).

Inter-coder Agreement

Neuendorf (2017) explains that incorporating more coders in the coding process is crucial to indicate that the coding does not rely on a subjective analysis of the researcher and provides more valid and effective research. For this purpose, two coders who were familiar

with the field and the qualitative data analysis software were involved in the coding process in the current study.

For the inter-coder agreement, the coders each worked on different computers. They analyzed the same piece of data independently of one another with the agreed-upon codes (as given in Figure 1). Subsequent to this phase, two sets of data coded by two different coders individually were compared on the software, MaxQDA. The software provides the users with the Inter-Coder Agreement function. As an analysis criterion, segment agreement in percent, -the reason why particularly this method was selected is that it is the most common one used in qualitative research (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020), was selected to run so that each coded segment could be ascertained. The Segment Agreement with the default value of 90 % was calculated, and the results showed an 87.5 % agreement, which was sufficient to continue analyzing the total data (Hartmann, 1977; Stemler, 2004). Even though O'Connor and Joffe (2020) explain that there is no undisputed level at which reliability is agreed, Hartmann (1977) and Stemler (2004) state that an agreement of at least 75 % would be acceptable for the agreement, and the percentage requires to be close to 90 % for an exact agreement.

Findings

The data relating to the impact of the treatment on the participants' ideal L2 self were analyzed under the titles to investigate whether the treatment affected the participants' views in connection with the importance of English, future self-image as studying at a university in English, future self-image as using English in a future career and having international friends.

Table 1. *Participants' views of the importance of English*

Groups	Sample Quotes
Experimental	<p>"In my opinion, English is important. I understood its importance in our sessions once again because there were some foreign friends whose native language is not English. However, we communicated with them all using English."</p> <p>"English is certainly significant. It is a language spoken worldwide, and as we experienced in the project, the more you know English, the easier it becomes to receive information and share what you know with others. It is a mutual channel which everybody can connect to."</p>
Control	<p>"English is a world language, which is necessary to learn. I mean, as we know, English has become important everywhere as it is spoken by everybody in the world",</p>

“In my opinion, English is an important language, which is known and used everywhere in the world. Therefore, it is quite important for communication.”

The primary question aimed to explore whether the respondents found English essential to learn or not. According to the respondents in both of the treatment groups (experimental and control), English has a substantial value to communicate with people from different cultures. Regardless of their groups (experimental or control), the comments of all the respondents revealed a nuanced view on whether English is considered a world language, a mutual channel, a bridge, or a lingua franca (as defined by the respondents). However, the analyses of the interviews revealed a difference between the respondents in the treatment groups. The analyses indicated that the respondents in the experimental group commented on how their experience with foreign participants reflected on their perceived recognition of the importance of English (Please see Table 1): *“In my opinion, English is important. I understood its importance in our sessions once again because there were some foreign friends whose native language is not English. However, we communicated with them all using English.”*; *“English is certainly significant. It is a language spoken worldwide, and as we experienced in the project, the more you know English, the easier it becomes to receive information and share what you know with others. It is a mutual channel which everybody can connect to.”* On the other hand, the respondents in the control group did not mention the effect of the treatment on their thoughts regarding the importance of English. They commented with more general statements such as *“English is a world language, which is necessary to learn. I mean, as we know, English has become important everywhere as it is spoken by everybody in the world”*, or *“In my opinion, English is an important language, which is known and used everywhere in the world. Therefore, it is quite important for communication.”*

In the interviews, the next question addressed whether the participants could imagine themselves studying abroad or in their home country at a university where English was used as the medium of instruction. According to almost all of the respondents in the experimental group, their experience in the current study helped them have a more evident self-image of themselves studying abroad or at a university where the medium of instruction would be English.

Table 2. *Participants' self-images as studying at an EMI university*

Groups	Sample Quotes
Experimental	<p>"I can imagine me in a university abroad where the medium of instruction is English for a Master's Degree. I wish it would be possible. I want it very much. In this study, for example, we had difficulties initially, but later we got used to each other. Similarly, it becomes straightforward to adapt to living in a new country in a few months. Therefore, I can imagine myself very easily. I would be very comfortable."</p> <p>"I can imagine and I think I would be a very successful student there. I would be a student who everybody loves. I would have both foreign and Turkish friends there and communicate with all of them easily. You know I was also very confident in the sessions and could make friends easily."</p>
Control	<p>"Yes, I can imagine myself. This is mostly because of my university. I will study my department in English. Hadn't I come to this university to study, I wouldn't imagine."</p>

The analyses suggested that the respondents' online communication with the foreign participants provided the learners with the understanding that even though there would be some problems in the beginning, those problems would be likely to be overcome after some time as can be seen in the quote of one respondent (as given in Table 2): *"I can imagine me in a university abroad where the medium of instruction is English for a Master's Degree. I wish it would be possible. I want it very much. In this study, for example, we had difficulties initially, but later we got used to each other. Similarly, it becomes straightforward to adapt to living in a new country in a few months. Therefore, I can imagine myself very easily. I would be very comfortable."* The participants' responses demonstrated that they gained confidence in using English as one participant indicated, saying: *"I can imagine and I think I would be a very successful student there. I would be a student who everybody loves. I would have both foreign and Turkish friends there and communicate with all of them easily. You know I was also very confident in the sessions and could make friends easily."* On the other hand, very few participants in the control group explained that they could imagine themselves at a university where English medium instruction would be used. One of the respondents clearly stated that the motivation to study was not a consequence of the treatment, but because of the university education they were currently getting and would get in the following years in their department: *"Yes, I can imagine myself. This is mostly because of my university. I will study my department in English. Hadn't I come to this university to study, I wouldn't imagine."*

The interview additionally comprised questions revealing the impact of the treatment on the respondents' future careers. Depending on this, participants were addressed whether they could imagine themselves working abroad or in a workplace where English would be used; whether they could imagine having any friends from different cultures and they would require speaking English with them and how their attitudes would be towards them. Table 3 below indicates some sample quotes from the participants' interviews.

Table 3. *Participants' self-images as studying in a workplace where English is used*

Groups	Sample Quotes
Experimental	<p>“Well, most probably my future career plans will require using English. I think I will have a position in managing a company and working with both Turkish and foreign colleagues. I would comfortably communicate with colleagues from different nationalities.”</p>
	<p>“Yes, I can imagine. I will work abroad, maybe in the USA or in Canada. I believe I will have many colleagues from other nations. I can have a few Turkish colleagues, as well.”</p>
	<p>“Yes, I can. I would have colleagues from my own culture and other cultures in my workplace. I would rather communicate with foreign ones more to learn new cultures”</p>
	<p>“I can imagine myself using English in my future career. I will be a successful employee. I believe I will work with people from other cultures, and I will communicate with them a lot since I know they will contribute to my development.”</p>
Control	<p>“I can imagine myself using English in my future career. I will have foreign and Turkish colleagues in the workplace. Then I would prefer to communicate more with my Turkish colleagues because I think I can communicate with them more easily”</p>
	<p>“I can imagine myself working in a job which requires me to speak English. I will have colleagues from different cultures and my own culture there. I would make friends with the Turkish ones better because I believe when a problem arises, I can compromise with Turkish colleagues more easily.”</p>

Respondents in the experimental group commented positively on the effect of the treatment on their self-images in connection to their future careers. Findings indicated that the participants could envision themselves working abroad with foreign work-mates comfortably and confidently, as shown in the quote of one respondent: *“Well, most probably my future career plans will require using English. I think I will have a position in managing a company and working with both Turkish and foreign colleagues. I would comfortably communicate with colleagues from different nationalities.”* Additionally, the respondents indicated that they had

plans to work abroad, as can be seen in one respondent's quote: *"Yes, I can imagine. I will work abroad, maybe in the USA or in Canada. I believe I will have many colleagues from other nations. I can have a few Turkish colleagues, as well."* In their comments, it was also clear that the respondents had a clear image of working with foreign work-mates and confidence to speak to them in English: *"Yes, I can. I would have colleagues from my own culture and other cultures in my workplace. I would rather communicate with foreign ones more to learn new cultures"* and similarly another participant stated: *"I can imagine myself using English in my future career. I will be a successful employee. I believe I will work with people from other cultures, and I will communicate with them a lot since I know they will contribute to my development."* In contrast, the participants in the control group did not mention a future image of working abroad. Still, they explained that they could imagine themselves working in a workplace where utilizing English would be necessary, and where foreign work-mates and native ones would work together. Nevertheless, the respondents denoted that their preference would be communicating with the work-mates sharing the same native language with them since they believed it would be more comfortable to express their ideas in that way as can be seen in the quotes: *"I can imagine myself using English in my future career. I will have foreign and Turkish colleagues in the workplace. Then I would prefer to communicate more with my Turkish colleagues because I think I can communicate with them more easily"* or *"I can imagine myself working in a job which requires me to speak English. I will have colleagues from different cultures and my own culture there. I would make friends with the Turkish ones better because I believe when a problem arises, I can compromise with Turkish colleagues more easily."*

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the impact of synchronous online communication with foreign participants on Turkish EFL learners' ideal L2 self, which is the main part of the L2 motivational self system and involves an individual's plans to achieve and self-image speaking English successfully to the other speakers of English (Dörnyei, 2009). The findings hint that engaging learners in authentic communication via technology with people speaking languages apart from their language positively affected their ideal L2 self in parallel to (a) increase in their confidence not only in speaking English but also interacting with people from other cultures and (b) positive attitudes towards people from other cultures. The findings derived from the current study revealed that as consistent with the prior studies investigating the effects

of CMC integration into language learning on learners' ideal L2 self (Garberoglio, 2012; Gleason & Suvorov, 2012), the use of CMC is potentially effective to help learners' ideal L2 self. The insights drawn from the present study help better understand how online contact with native and second language (SL) speakers of English could affect EFL learners' future vision of themselves while using English in different contexts. With this respect, the current study builds on the previous research which investigated the use of CMC in a context in which deaf language learners interacted with each other using the target language (Garberoglio, 2012) and in a different setting in which some non-native language learners at secondary school used asynchronous CMC tools in their language learning process (Gleason & Suvorov, 2012).

Findings confirm that the EFL learners' ideal L2 self is likely to be fostered in the classroom without any contact with foreign people. Still, the study clearly illustrates bringing EFL learners together with foreign people from different cultures and who speak other languages with the help of technology definitely has certain advantages over classroom instruction. With reference to this, the positive effect found in the current study on the participants who were engaged in online communication with SL or native speakers of English was that the participants had a clearer or more vivid image of themselves as a user of English in their future career, education or relations with international friends. In this respect, the current study is consistent with Li (2014), whose study unveiled the positive impact of contact to the native speakers in English on learners' ideal L2 self and showed that the learners are more enthusiastic about learning the target culture. In the present study, the participants' (who communicated with each other in a classroom setting or who communicated using online communication means in groups where both Turkish and SL or native speakers of English gather) views about the importance of learning English were found to be on the same line since all the participants expressed they found English crucial to learn and know by stating that it is a world language, a lingua franca and a means to understand people living in the other parts of the world. Similarly, in both of the groups, it was found that the participants had a future image of themselves using English in their future education. However, one difference between the control group and the experimental group arose at this point. The detailed analysis reflected that the participants in the experimental group clearly expressed the impact of their online communication with foreign participants on their academic life. Therefore, it is likely to assume that the treatment affected their ideal L2 self, making their thoughts clearer about themselves using English in their education in the following years of university education. Such a result

might have arisen since the learners could express their opinions without any flaws while talking to non-Turkish speakers of English during the sessions. Even if they experienced some problems (glitches, anxiety, fear of speaking) initially, they were able to overcome them and gained some confidence in speaking English talking to people from other cultures. This result designates consistency with the prior research (eg. Ghasemi, 2018). It suggests that depending on the increase in confidence based on experience, the students had clearer self-images as language users in the future. Ghasemi (2018) reveals that when learners are clearer about the distinction between their actual and future self-images (ideal L2 self), they are more likely to try harder to make the difference smaller and feel more competent to perform a piece of work.

It was also explored in the present study that when the Turkish participants in the experimental group contacted some foreign people who did not know Turkish, they had no chance but to explain their thoughts in English. Even though the participants had some hesitations or worries in accordance with this in the beginning, they overcame them since they explored that they could communicate well in such a circumstance. The communication between the Turkish participants and the foreign ones became much better as the sessions progressed, and the participants became more confident to speak to them. Thus, findings suggested that the participants could envision themselves speaking English confidently to prospective colleagues from other cultures in their future careers. Li (2014) investigated the language motivation in foreign language settings where learners are rarely exposed to the speakers of target language outside the classroom and second language contexts where the learners have an ample opportunity to contact the speakers of the target language and found a difference between the participants from two different contexts. Li (2014) explains that this finding is predictable since contact with the native speakers of the target language may enable the learners to imagine themselves as competent users with skills, experience, or qualities to use the target language and be more motivated to learn about the culture. On the other hand, the learners in foreign language contexts have a fear of speaking due to the lack of contact and experience. Fillmore (1991) remarks that for effective language learning, the availability of the speakers of the target language is crucial on condition that they are prepared and amenable to communicate with other language learners in a way that will positively support their language development. Fillmore (1991) enumerates success in language learning depends on the motivation of the learner to learn it, the speakers of the target language who have a positive influence on language learning, and the contact with the target language speakers and also learners frequently.

Because the participants in the control group did not have any foreign participants in the sessions, they were observed to switch from English to Turkish (they were supposed to speak English during the sessions, though) often and used it to express their ideas more clearly. Because all the participants in the group were Turkish, no communication problems occurred. In the interview sessions, when the participants in the control group were asked to envision themselves in a workplace where they worked with international colleagues, the participants in the control group asserted to be hesitant about communicating with foreign people, but apt to be engaged in a conversation with work-mates who share the same culture and language as themselves. As a consequence, it might be suggested that the lack of contact with the foreign participants in the classes caused the participants in the control group to have less vivid images of themselves working in a place with foreign colleagues and speaking to them in English when compared to the participants in the experimental group.

In previous research, it had already been revealed that face-to-face contact with people who speak other languages positively affects individuals' ideal L2 self and increases motivation to learn the language (Li, 2014). With this respect, findings from the present study verified that synchronous online communication compensates for the lack of exposure to the target language in countries where English is spoken and taught as a foreign language. The findings exhibited that the participants found their communication with people from different cultures fruitful as they could understand each other and express themselves in English to people who did not know their mother tongue. Consequently, they could develop a clear image of themselves as English speakers in their education or career in the future, which in turn potentially affects their overall motivation to learn English. Thus, the study draws attention to the importance of exposure to the target language in authentic terms. In this regard, in countries where English is spoken as a foreign language and EFL learners may not find an opportunity to contact people speaking English easily, technology integration into learning settings and language programs seems to gain key importance to help learners develop their motivation to language learning and have them envision themselves speaking English in their future education and careers.

Dörnyei (2009) exposes that the first condition of a motivational treatment is to help language learners to create vision (ideal L2 self) in self approach because a learners' lack of motivation in language might arise from the lack of ideal self. Dörnyei (2009) underscores that

expecting a language learner to develop an ideal L2 self with a motivational treatment is unrealistic, though. A realistic process to generate an ideal L2 self entails ‘awareness-raising and guided selection from the multiple aspirations dreams, desires, etc. that the students have already entertained in the past’ (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 33). Thus, despite the fact that increasing motivation with treatment is not simple but a complicated process, motivation is likely to be fostered by making the learners aware of what they would like to achieve in the future and getting the learners to engage in cultural activities that bring some true models into the classroom (Dörnyei, 2009). In the context of the present study, considering the students’ self-reports, it might be concluded that the participants’ successful experience of online communication with foreign participants seems to have enabled them to perceive their potential to be able to use English with people who speak languages other than theirs in international settings, which might also have flourished their motivation to learn English (Gleason & Suvorov, 2012).

Implications of the Study

The present study investigated how synchronous online communication affected the EFL learners’ ideal L2 self with a quasi-experimental research design. Due to the scarcity of empirical studies which were based on the use of technology and the ideal L2 self, the significant practical contribution of the current study is that it provides more empirical evidence about the effect of synchronous online communication with native or nonnative speakers of English. The study sheds light on the fact that the integration of technology into foreign language education brings positive effects on the participants’ ideal L2 self and their motivation in general. The positive findings suggest that educators and policymakers, and school administrators require thinking of the necessity of bringing authentic communication experience into language learning classes via technology integration.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

The present study has several limitations to be borne in mind while interpreting the findings in this study carefully and performing further research. Primarily, the study has a small sample size, which prevents the findings from being generalized as representative of all foreign language learners. Therefore, further research with a larger sample size might yield more reliable results. The following limitation of the study derives from the research design. The participants’ thoughts about their motivation regarding the experience were basically explored

through the interviews held shortly after the treatment. This may have misleading consequences as motivation is likely to change or end suddenly depending on specific reasons. Therefore, in further studies, the participants' motivation may be revealed weekly after each session. Thus, the factors that foster motivation could be explored better. Furthermore, as an ultimate outcome of the research design followed in the current research, the participants in the control group submitted their reflection papers in hand. In contrast, the experimental group wrote and submitted online. Likewise, the interviews were held with the control group participants in an actual classroom environment; on the other hand, the experimental group participants were interviewed online. Such factors might have yielded different results in terms of the quality of the data from both groups. Therefore, were the quality of the data collection instruments and methods to be controlled and validated better in future studies, more reliable results would be obtained.

All in all, the purpose of this present research was to reveal the extent to which synchronous online communication could have an impact on EFL learners' ideal L2 self. The study sheds light on the fact that engaging in learners in communication with speakers of English using technology for educational purposes fosters EFL learners' ideal L2 self in comparison to classroom instruction without technology integration and online communication with foreign participants via synchronous means. The study substantiated that technology helped learners be involved in authentic communication with people from different cultures who did not share the same native language. Hence, the study reveals the potential benefits of such activities to help EFL learners to imagine themselves using English in their future career and education, giving them real-life experience and motivation to achieve their goals in the future.

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