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Willingness to Communicate and the Ideal L2 Self Inside and Outside the EFL Classroom: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This literature review investigates why EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students are reluctant to speak the target language in the classroom. As this is a complex question with complex answers, this review focuses on how the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), specifically the ideal L2 self, affects willingness to communicate (WTC). The L2MSS is a motivational model based on the psychological theories of the self with the ideal L2 self denoting a future L2 speaking self the student wants to become. WTC in turn specifies how willing a person is to speak in an L2 at a specific time and place. Furthermore, this study also reviews studies conducted on extramural English (EE) and how it affects WTC as it is highly prevalent in Swedish teenagers' lives and it has to be taken into consideration. EE encapsulates all English activities a student participates in outside formal educational contexts. Results showed that WTC was positively affected by a strong and vivid ideal L2 self. Little research on how EE affects the L2MSS and WTC has been made, which makes the results less conclusive, but there are tendencies that show a positive correlation. What this review can conclude is that it is difficult to analyze simply how one variable of the L2MSS affects another, they are all intertwined and impact each other constantly. The pedagogical implications are manifold, but the main finding is for teachers to help students create an ideal L2 self which will enhance WTC and make use of EE as a language learning resource.

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1 Introduction

The linguistic skills of Swedish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students are generally of a high standard compared to other European countries (Erickson, 2002). However, within the context of English classrooms in Sweden, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2011) stated the fact that many classes were lacking in communication in the *target language* (TL), both from students and teachers. This inspection was carried out on grades 6-9, but our own experiences at the upper secondary level have also shown similar tendencies. During placement training, we as teacher trainees have seen how students refuse to speak English in the classroom, answering their teachers in Swedish when they are perfectly capable of producing well-constructed and grammatically correct sentences. Swedish students encounter English daily in various forms and engage with it unprompted, but something changes inside the classroom. The dichotomy between the students' advanced oral proficiency and their general unwillingness to communicate in the TL in the classroom is as puzzling as it is concerning.

In the context of global EFL education, this phenomenon is not new, and research points to the fact that there is a combination of factors contributing to why students shy away from communicating in English (MacIntyre et al., 1998). These factors include language anxiety, teaching methods, social situations, motivation, and students' perception of linguistic skills (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Some factors are interpersonal, such as teaching methods and social setting, while others are intrapersonal, such as language anxiety, motivation, and perception of linguistic skills. This review will focus on one of the intrapersonal factors, specifically how the student's vision of their future L2 self influences their *willingness to communicate* (WTC) in the EFL classroom. WTC is a concept that specifies when and where students choose to speak in an L2, taking intrapersonal and interpersonal factors into consideration. Research on how students' language learning motivation affects their language learning is not a new field of study either. Many theories have been used to conceptualize this phenomenon, one being Dörnyei's (2005; 2009) *L2 Motivational Self System* (L2MSS). The L2MSS is a model which proposes that motivation to learn an L2 stems from imagined selves within the learner that they envision themselves to become. *The ideal L2 self*, which makes up one part of this system, details how a student's aspirations for their ideal future selves impact their drive to study and their drive to *communicate* in the L2. It encapsulates many of the intrapersonal factors and makes it relevant and useful for our question. Thus, the aim of

this literature review is to see how students' ideal L2 selves correlate with their WTC in the EFL classroom.

However, a student's ideal L2 self might not have anything to do with the small world inside classroom walls as L2 motivations and interests might not be reflected during class, they might rather be generated in an *extramural English* (EE) setting, which is a big part of young adults' everyday life (Henry, 2013). EE entails all English the students encounter outside of a formal educational context. They interact in English online and even use English outside the classrooms in the school corridors, and the motivation to do so might give a clue as to how to bring said motivation into the classrooms. Therefore, this literature review will also examine research regarding whether a student's ideal L2 self affects the student's WTC in an EE setting. Attention will also be given to what pedagogical implications can be drawn from the findings and how they can be helpful for teachers in Swedish upper secondary schools.

Our research questions are formulated as follows:

- How is student WTC affected by the ideal L2 self?
- How does EE correlate with EFL students' WTC and ideal L2 selves?

The next section presents the theoretical framework of the literature review, defining the three main terms constituting the basis for the research and providing sufficient background knowledge for the reader. The method is explained in section 3, detailing our scope and limitations. The findings are shown in section 4 where the articles are sorted into subsections based on a thematic structure which is presented in the method, section 3. The last section includes the conclusion, which summarizes the findings, presents the pedagogical implications, and makes suggestions for future research.

2 Theoretical Framework

This section of the literature review presents three areas of research which constitute the theoretical framework of our paper. First, the term WTC is explained in section 2.1, followed by the theory behind the ideal L2 self and its place in L2MSS in section 2.2. Lastly, the interplay between EE and classroom English is problematized and expanded upon in the final subsection 2.3.

2.1 Willingness to Communicate

In foreign language classrooms around the world, teachers experience the challenge of getting students to speak the TL (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Researchers have been looking for different explanations as to why some students happily speak the TL whereas others either remain silent or communicate in their first language. The concept of WTC was first conceptualized in L1 research and later broadened by MacIntyre et al. (1998), who used the concept of WTC in second language acquisition research. They define WTC as "the readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons using an L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). The idea is to find out what possible factors contribute to students' communication or non-communication in the TL in the classroom.

To get an understanding of possible factors explaining a student's WTC, MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) pyramid model is helpful. The pyramid (Fig. 1) is divided into sections portraying different underlying factors that could explain why a student chooses to speak in the TL or not, with WTC being the second to last stage. These factors can in turn be sectioned into two categories, the first being the bottom layers, which reflect more long-term trait-like factors such as personality. The second category of the upper layers represents the situational factors that occur in the moment (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Yashima et al., 2018). The main takeaway from the model is the complexity of factors that lead up to WTC.

An extension to this research looks to the situational factor and adds volition as a topic of future research and asks what makes the student choose to communicate in the TL at a specific moment in time. According to MacIntyre (2007), language anxiety, motivation, and volition are three arguably significant factors that determine the student's WTC.

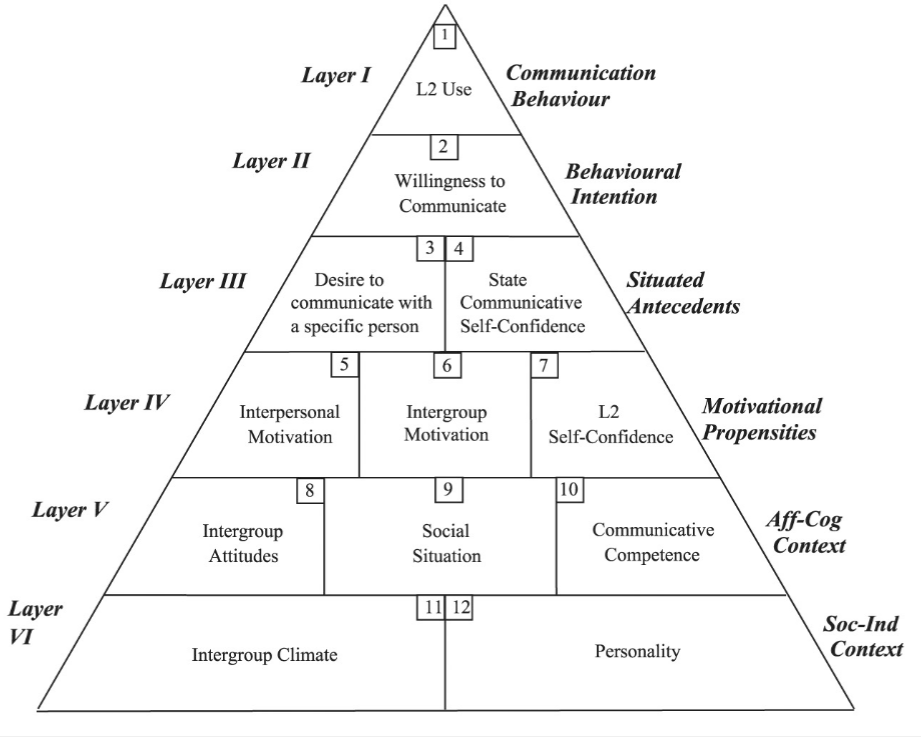

Figure 1. Pyramid willingness to communicate (WTC) model (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547).

2.2 The Ideal L2 Self

A different field of research that has been given more attention these past years is that of motivation in language learning. In the years 2005 and 2009, Dörnyei (2005; 2009) conceptualized and presented the L2MSS, and within it, the ideal L2 self, to answer the question: what motivates a person to learn a language? For a long time, this was explained by the concept of *integrativeness* first proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1959). Integrativeness in the socio-educational model of second language acquisition is explained as a language learner's desire to be a part of a language-speaking community or culture and be seen as a competent member of it (Gardner & Lambert, 1959, p. 271). This desire can range from general openness to the other culture to complete identification (Gardner, 2001, p. 5). While this concept satisfies some parts of the complex question of motivation, there was some dissatisfaction with the term. English today, as a lingua franca, does not have a clearly defined culture nor community attached to it, and in our digital age geographical boundaries mean even less: what becomes of integrativeness then (Ushioda, 2011, p. 199)? Thus, the good but insufficient concept of integrative motivation combined with the psychological concept of possible selves and future selves gave way to the construct of the L2MSS (Dörnyei, 2005; 2009).

The L2MSS is composed of three components of the learner: the ideal L2 self, *the ought-to L2* self, and *the L2 learning experience* (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29; Dörnyei, 2005, pp. 105-106). The ideal L2 self denotes the imagined future L2 speaking self the learner envisions themselves to become. Motivation then stems from the learner's wish to achieve their ideal L2 self or reduce the difference between their actual self and their ideal one. The stronger and more vivid the ideal L2 self is, the greater the motivational pull. In comparison, the ought-to L2 self denotes the imagined self which is based on characteristics and skills the learner thinks they *ought* to possess. While the ideal L2 self drives the learner towards achievement, the ought-to L2 self distances the learner from failure or failing to meet expectations (Dörnyei, 2005; 2009). The ought-to L2 self is consequently less internalized than the ideal L2 self and is often based on external pressure or opinions. The allure of the ideal L2 self for the learner is that it is self-created, based on the learner's own experiences, confidence, milieu, and thoughts on instrumentality, making it personal and relevant to them. Finally, the L2 learning experience concerns the 'situational' aspects in language learning and motivational factors in the immediate vicinity that might affect the learner such as the teacher, curriculum, peer group, etc. (Dörnyei, 2005; 2009). It is situated on a different level than the L2 selves in this system as it is not based on a self-guide within the learner.

The practical implications of the ideal L2 self are clearly rewarding if the language learner has a clear and strong ideal L2 self envisioned for themselves. For teachers, this would imply that spending effort on cultivating the ideal L2 selves of their students could generate more engagement and participation in any language course. What is important to note however, according to Ushioda (2011, p. 204), is that teachers should strive to appeal to the true self of the students, not only their students' L2 roles. A second language is not only a skill in school but also a tool for self-expression and identity which is what will fuel student motivation. Focusing on the person will then yield the most effect. If the students feel internal motivation by having a strong ideal L2 self, the hypothesis is that it should generate higher WTC. Students want to remove the discrepancy between their current L2 self and their ideal L2 self, and will then apply strategies and effort to succeed in their endeavor. By talking more and interacting with other speakers of the TL, i.e., showing higher WTC, they will be able to achieve their ideal L2 self. WTC has the potential to become the tool the student reaches for.

2.3 Extramural English vs. Classroom English

Students' self-development does not begin and end in the classroom, but extends beyond it, just like their interaction and use of English. The notion of EE or extracurricular English, defined by Sundqvist (2009, p. 190) as "linguistic activities in English that learners do or are involved in outside the classroom in their spare time" has grown rapidly alongside media. Schurz and Sundqvist (2022) explain that in Western countries where English is used as a foreign language, a large portion of their cultural intake arrives from English-speaking countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom through film, TV, and computer games. Many countries have a dubbing culture, which means that the amount of language input is limited, but the countries that do not dub their material, like Sweden, where input is nearly constant, show more advanced English skills. These skills translate mostly to vocabulary and informal communication according to Schurz and Sundqvist (2022), but other studies (Olsson, 2012; Sundqvist, 2009; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012) also show a positive correlation between EE and writing, reading, and listening proficiency as well as oral production and communication.

Given the fact that EE has a positive impact on Swedish teenagers' linguistic skills, another problem has arisen in English classrooms in Swedish upper secondary schools. Henry (2013) states that English students in Sweden seem bored in class and at times overly confident in their linguistic abilities, which sometimes means that they see English as a time during their schoolday in which they can relax. This could be explained by students not feeling motivated and therefore at times failing to communicate in English as they do not see the purpose. The lack of motivation is according to Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller (2013) pointing to the fact that authentic activities are lacking in the classroom, where students are not given the opportunity to use their English skills authentically.

According to Henry (2013), two separate Englishes are being learned simultaneously by Swedish teenagers, EE and classroom English. While EE English is practiced in an authentic context, classroom English is practiced in a constructed context with different styles and registers. Henry states that the gap between the two Englishes is too big. The pedagogical challenges this comes with are not to be taken lightly, as teachers need to consider both individual differences and motivational forces among learners. However, Schurz and Sundqvist (2022) claim the importance of creating EE-friendly classrooms, and it seems that connecting the two Englishes is of utmost importance if we want to create a rewarding learning environment for students both inside and outside of the classroom.

3 Method

In this section, we account for the method used to identify and select research in this literature review. Scope and limitations are stated and expanded upon as well as problematized in relation to the aim of this paper.

The article search was conducted through the Gothenburg University library search engine using different combinations of the following search terms: EFL/English as a foreign language, WTC/Willingness to communicate, ideal L2 self, EE, Extramural English, and Extracurricular English. Another search engine used was Google Scholar where the same search terms were applied. Several articles were also found through the *snowballing technique* where the bibliography of certain articles was consulted to find related articles on the subject (Ridley, 2012, p. 56). Though the overview gleaned from the snowballing technique, certain researchers were identified as notable contributors to the field and merited explicit exploration of their history of research, instead of only using search terms and articles as points of departure.

WTC is a vast area of focus; thus, the scope was limited to WTC research that was a) conducted in an EFL context and b) examined the relation between WTC and the concept of the learner's ideal L2 self or EE. WTC research which did not take the aspect of EFL into account was disregarded accordingly. One choice making this explicit was the choice to not include research using the term ESL instead of EFL. While ESL is a term that can be synonymous with EFL in some perspectives, ESL carries with it the possible meaning of English being formally taught as a second language in a native English-speaking context. As this literature review wishes to acquire an insight into Swedish students and their WTC and their ideal L2 self, the context for the research used must be non-native, which the term EFL ensures. Thus, ESL was excluded as a search term. Similarly, the term ideal L2 self was chosen instead of the more general term motivation to limit the scope of the literature review and make it more precise. The research conducted on motivation within this field is vast and too large to take into account for a review of this size. Therefore, articles which did not explicitly use terms related to the L2MSS and the concept of the ideal L2 self were discarded when looking for motivation research intersecting with WTC and EE. This limitation generates an appropriate amount of research, as well as relevant, for our literature review, namely 15 articles, presented through a diagram at the end of this section (Fig. 2).

Research conducted in Sweden, or even Scandinavia, within this scope is scant. There

is similarly a lack of research conducted in the preferred age range (Swedish upper secondary school, ages 16-19). Consequently, the scope was broadened in the face of this problem, and research conducted elsewhere was included as well as research with participants outside of the desired age range. In the selection of articles, the scope of ages was widened to the ages 12-63, and preference was given to the articles that appeared the most similar to the Swedish upper secondary EFL classroom context. However, within this field, research from Asia and the Middle East makes up most of the available data which is reflected in this literature review. Implications of this will be expanded upon in the conclusion.

Due to the surge of new research in the field, the selection was limited to research conducted after 2010. However, due to the dearth of research within the Swedish context, one article published one year earlier, in 2009, was nonetheless included due to its significance for teachers in Sweden. Thus, the earliest article in the literature review was published in 2009 and the latest in 2023, making for 14 years of progression in the field.

To illustrate the scope of our literature review and how the different fields of research intersect, all articles used are placed in a Venn diagram (Fig. 2). This shows the relation between the different fields and also highlights the difficulty of finding research that treats all three aspects of our question.

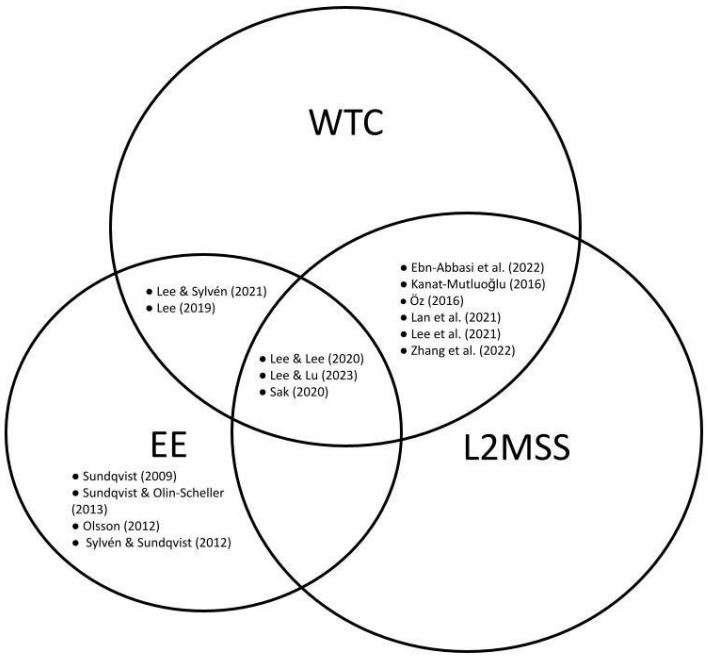

Figure 2. Venn diagram.

4 Findings

The 15 studies in this review are organized according to the Venn diagram (Fig. 2). Section 4.1 reviews studies at the intersection of WTC and L2MSS, which is where most research was found. Secondly, section 4.2 presents the studies that explored the relationship between all three concepts: WTC, EE, and L2MSS. The final section, 4.3 touches upon studies that feature the L2 learning experience, or situational factors, as it became apparent that they greatly impacted students' WTC.

4.1 WTC & the ideal L2 self

Two early research articles examining this correlation are Öz (2016) and Kanat-Mutluoğlu (2016), who both conducted quantitative surveys on university students detailing their WTC and ideal L2 self in Turkey. Öz's (2016, p. 170) student cohort consisted of 96 students majoring in English, aged 19-23, taking part in a teacher program. The students were asked to answer the survey divided into two parts: one used to assess their perception of their WTC and one to measure their ideal L2 self. Results showed that the ideal L2 self was a significant predictor of all facets of L2 WTC. Therefore, Öz (2016, p. 176) concludes that a strong ideal L2 self is indicative of higher WTC, or enhancement of WTC, and can subsequently influence a student's language learning. Kanat-Mutluoğlu's (2016) result mirrors these findings. Her cohort consisted of 173 university students who had all been enrolled in intensive English courses. Similarly to Öz's (2016), Kanat-Mutluoğlu's survey also detailed students' ideal L2 self and WTC; however, the students were also asked to answer two additional sets of questions regarding other types of motivational units. These motivational units will not be accounted for in this literature review, but what is worth noting is that out of all motivational units, the ideal L2 self was shown to have the strongest correlation to L2 WTC and was, in fact, the only significant predictor of L2 WTC (Kanat-Mutluoğlu, 2016, p. 41). These two studies conclude that a strong ideal L2 self will facilitate higher levels of WTC within EFL learners.

While the studies by Öz (2016) and Kanat-Mutluoğlu (2016) established a strong connection between the ideal L2 self and L2 WTC, other studies have explored what other traits could potentially mediate these two elements. Lan et al. (2021) proposed two mediator traits between the ideal L2 self and WTC, namely shyness and grit. Grit denotes the perseverance and determination a student possesses to work towards their goal, which in this

study is mastery of an additional language. While grit is assumed to be a driving force, shyness is regarded as a hindrance for students to overcome. The level of grit and shyness within a student could then be what bridges their ideal L2 self and WTC. In their study of 842 Chinese EFL university students, Lan et al. (2023, p. 6) first replicated the result of Öz (2016) and Kanat-Mutluoğlu (2016), identifying the ideal L2 self as a positive predictor of L2 WTC and then looked to the other intrapersonal factors at play within the students. They found that students with a strong ideal L2 self also manifested a lot more grit in working towards their goal, i.e., realizing their ideal L2 self (Lan et al., 2021, p. 8). Shyness, they found, worked as a mediator between the ideal L2 self and grit. Shy students did not consider the effort of overcoming their shyness to be a big enough reward, leading them to apply themselves less and showcase less grit. Less grit then leads to less L2 WTC as shown by Lan et al.'s (2021) results.

Another considered mediating factor is student interest. A student might show more WTC if the subject they are communicating about is of interest to them and one can deduct, a priori, that when a student lacks interest, they will become bored. What boredom does to a student's ideal L2 self and WTC is what Zhang et al. (2022) examined in their study of Iranian university students. 437 students volunteered to answer an online survey about four aspects of their learning, e.g., their ideal L2 self, WTC, boredom, and growth mindset (Zhang et al., 2022, pp. 6-7). The latter was proposed as the mediating trait between boredom and the ideal L2 self, similar to how Lan et al. (2021) proposed shyness as a mediator between the ideal L2 self and grit. Growth mindset can be summarized as the belief the student has that they can improve and develop themselves in time with hard work (Zhang et al., 2022, p. 2). Zhang et al.'s data yielded the ideal L2 self as a significant positive predictor of L2 WTC, in line with the previously presented research. The ideal L2 self had a negative impact on boredom, i.e., students with a strong ideal L2 self were less inclined to feel bored, and boredom predictably had a negative impact on WTC. Growth mindset did not affect any variable significantly.

What can be understood from Lan et al. (2021) and Zhang et al. (2022) is that other intrapersonal factors, such as grit and boredom, which are results of the ideal L2 self, can in themselves mediate a student's ideal L2 self as well as their WTC. However, these factors do not contravene the direct positive link between the ideal L2 self and WTC, which has been noted in each study above as significant.

Some researchers, though, have compared different groups of students to see if the results between them differ. Lee et al. (2021) and Ebn-Abbasi et al. (2022) conducted

comparative studies of student groups in opposing classroom cultures, one practicing a more communicative approach and the other a more form-focused approach. The question to be answered was whether the link between the L2MSS and WTC changed due to these factors. The results determined that for all students the ideal L2 self was positively linked to L2 WTC showing that this correlation is independent of situational factors. Lee et al. (2021) compared Swedish and Korean upper secondary students in a quantitative study where they all answered a questionnaire regarding their L2MSS and WTC. The results from the 382 Korean students and the 144 Swedish students confirmed that the ideal L2 self is positively linked to L2 WTC. Some differences were nonetheless accounted for: Swedish students showed higher L2 WTC and their ought-to L2 selves were not a predictor of L2 WTC. Their Korean peers generally showed a lower WTC, and their ought-to selves were a positive predictor of L2 WTC. Sweden and South Korea have very different classroom cultures and teaching methods, and while that is partly displayed through the results, the link between the ideal L2 self and L2 WTC remains positive. In Ebn-Abbasi et al.'s (2022) study, they compared public and private school students through an online survey. Answers from 308 students showed that the ideal L2 self and WTC were positively linked for all students, but the link was stronger for private schools. Again, the differences in teaching methods were named as possible reasons for the variance between the groups.

When comparing student groups, differences will always be found but the ideal L2 self is consistently shown to be a positive and significant predictor of L2 WTC. Differences between individual students, e.g., intrapersonal factors, as in Lan et al.'s (2021) and Zhang et al.'s (2022) research, can mediate the relationship but will not render it void. Similarly, even in different parts of the world, the same result is presented, no matter if the research is conducted in Turkey, China, Iran, Sweden, or South Korea.

4.2 WTC, the ideal L2 self & EE

This section presents research that examines how EE affects the relationship between the ideal L2 self and WTC and vice versa. All articles mentioned in this section found a positive correlation between the ideal L2 self and L2 WTC, thus these results are not expanded upon for each article. These articles expand upon how EE becomes a venue for students to develop their ideal L2 selves and the subsequent effects of this relationship on their levels of WTC.

If a student's level of WTC is seen as an inherent trait, then one can presume that it does not differ when a student is inside a classroom compared to outside of one. Lee and

Lee's (2020) study was conducted by asking 105 Korean university students and 112 Korean upper-secondary students to answer a questionnaire concerning their L2MSS and WTC. The WTC section of the questionnaire was split, where five items detailed WTC inside the classroom and four items detailed their WTC outside of the classroom (Lee & Lee, 2020, p. 151). Their results showed that both groups' ideal L2 selves were positively linked to their WTC inside the classroom and their WTC outside of the classroom. Upper secondary students' ought-to L2 selves, however, were also much stronger and impacted their WTC more positively than the university students' ought-to selves. The university students not only had a weaker ought-to L2 self, but it also negatively impacted their L2 WTC (Lee & Lee, 2020, p. 154). Lee and Lee (2020) also conducted interviews with nine students, six upper secondary students, and three university students, to get complimentary qualitative data. One of the upper secondary school students explained that by watching Korean celebrity interviews, she imagined herself in their place, which motivated her to learn English (Lee & Lee, 2020, p. 155). For her, taking part in EE, such as watching interviews online, her ideal L2 self became realized. Another upper secondary student stated that she willingly spoke English outside of class since she wanted to study Medicine in the United States when she graduated. In this context, the ideal L2 self facilitates more EE, and also more WTC. The university students give similar reasons for how both influence their ideal L2 self which motivates them to study and "to speak more English whenever is possible" (Lee & Lee, 2020, p. 156).

Younger EFL learners aged 12 to 14 also expressed how EE has affected them. One student in Lee and Lu's (2023) study described how his interest in the NBA leads him to imagine himself discussing the NBA on American radio shows. He went on to explain that since he has these dreams or strong ideal L2 self, he is not only willing to speak English to his classmates in class, but also with his foreign friends on social media, as well as leaving comments in English on YouTube videos (Lee & Lu, 2023, p. 137). This student was a part of Lee and Lu's (2023) study conducted on 417 Chinese EFL learners. Though the main part of the study was quantitative, a small group of four students consented to participate in semi-structured interviews, one of which was the said student. The quantitative results showcased a positive correlation between the ideal L2 self and WTC both inside and outside of the classroom. Lee and Lu (2023) theorize that the reason for the ideal L2 self significantly predicting L2 WTC in EE could be the freedom of choice presented to the student, as well as the chance to develop their ideal L2 self further, yielding more L2 WTC in the process. An interesting piece of data was how Lee and Lu (2023) found that the ought-to L2 self did not

predict L2 WTC in EE settings. The ought-to self is often found to predict L2 WTC to some degree (e.g., Lee & Lee, 2020; Lee et al., 2021) but in EE settings no correlation was found. This strengthens the claim that the ideal L2 self is more strongly linked to EE, and positively so, as not all units of the L2MSS are equally affected inside and outside of the classroom. In other words, the ought-to self specifically relates to duties and obligations the students feel from themselves and others which is more naturally related to school work rather than free-time.

The ideal L2 self is a predictor of L2 WTC, which implies that in spaces where the ideal L2 self can be developed, levels of WTC will rise equally inside and outside the classroom. Sak (2020) found this to be untrue, in his study of 90 Turkish university students, aged 18 to 24. The students were asked to fill out a questionnaire in two parts, one concerning WTC split into two sections for inside and outside the classroom, and the other concerning the ideal L2 self. His data showed that 28% of the students had high L2 WTC outside of the classroom, while 24% had high L2 WTC inside of the classroom (Sak, 2020, p. 196). Additionally, the ideal L2 self was reported to positively and significantly correlate with L2 WTC outside of the classroom as well as inside the classroom. Though the difference is slight between the percentages, it displays how students might show more WTC, if capable, in an atmosphere which gives their ideal L2 self space to evolve and develop.

These three articles confirm the link between the ideal L2 self and WTC established in section 4.1. EE has a positive impact on the ideal L2 self which then furthers the student's WTC. The student's WTC in an EE setting is also driven by the ideal L2 self, which leads to a mutually beneficial, or at least, indirectly beneficial relationship for all three factors involved in the L2 learning process.

4.3 The Situational Factors or the L2 Learning Experience

By understanding the concept and theory of the L2MSS it has become apparent that handpicking the ideal L2 self as a single factor affecting the WTC is impossible. The ideal L2 self is part of a bigger system including the ought-to-self and the L2 learning experience. The research and results of this literature review have shed light on multiple aspects that point to situational factors as variables also affecting students' WTC. Four variables, namely classroom practices, student interest, familiarity, and EE as a communicative space are explored in this section.

4.3.1 Classroom Practices

“I have become long accustomed to a passive English learner and user in the classroom, thereby rarely using English online unless L2 communication is initiated by my interlocutor”, said Ji-eun (Lee, 2019, p. 699), a Korean university student. For many students, the classroom is the first time they encounter formal language instruction, and therefore the classroom practices and teaching methods used will be a significant influence on their learning from that point on. Through a series of semi-structured interviews with 98 Korean university students enrolled in 15 different EFL classes, Lee (2019, p. 697) found several variables that impact L2 WTC in extramural contexts. In one of these interviews, Korean student Ji-eun identified the teacher-centric classrooms in South Korea as the reason she does not interact with people in EE contexts as passivity is all she knows. She does not feel inclined to exercise her autonomy in any language-learning context. Another student, Yoon-chul, echoed Ji-eun’s words, “I was trained to become a passive learner in the classroom during over 10 years of formal language learning...I am still a passive English learner in the classroom and digital settings” (Lee, 2019, p. 699). There is a similar phenomenon in Iranian public schools where they also “suffer a strict teacher-dominated atmosphere which can discourage students’ communicative participation” (Ebn-Abbasi et al., 2022, p. 8). If the classroom practices place the student in the center of the learning instead, the students will at least gain experience in communicating in the TL and slowly come to understand how to exert themselves in similar situations. To succeed with this, the teacher and their teaching methods play a critical role – especially when employing communicative tasks. Why a teacher might avoid or have difficulty with constructing such communicative TL tasks, Ebn-Abbasi et al. (2022, p. 9) reasons, could be due to crowded classes, inappropriate coursebooks, excessive workload, limited classroom time, or a centralized curriculum. Some countries have very test-orientated classroom cultures (Ebn-Abbasi et al., 2022; Lee, 2019) which also affects how the teacher structures their lessons and courses, often focusing more on form than effective communication. All of these aspects will certainly affect a student’s approach to language learning both inside and outside the classroom in EE contexts. Sky, a Korean student, mentioned her teacher, Mr. Cha, in her interview, saying: “Mr. Cha [English teacher] offers several performance-based tasks, so we need to actively speak English in the classroom to obtain good grades…He also asks us questions in English which we must answer back in English” (Lee & Lee, 2020, p. 139). To her, the tasks elicit her WTC and she is directly steered by the teaching methods to communicate in the TL. What

Lee (2019) notes however is that practices like these activate Sky's ought-to self, even if they are part of the L2 learning experience.

4.3.2 Student Interest and Familiarity

While getting the students to speak in the TL is important, the topic they speak about is just as important to foster language learning interest and drive. Having an interest in the topic of communication could bring a sense of familiarity to the student, which makes the challenge of speaking in the TL less daunting. Student boredom is also mitigated by tailoring the communication to relevant interests which will raise the students' WTC (Zhang et al., 2022). Sammi, a Korean student in Lee and Lee's study (2020, p. 155), describes how she watches English interviews with Korean celebrities which then motivates her to speak more English. This practice strengthens her ideal L2 self and also opens up a great venue for casual conversation between her and her classmates if a teacher could make use of it in a communicative exercise. It could positively influence the students to bring their interests and ideal L2 selves to the forefront of discussions and classroom exercises. "I imagine myself talking about NBA in American radio programs. So I frequently talk to my foreign friends about NBA via social media..." Michel explained (Lee & Lu, 2023, p. 137) when describing his WTC in EE settings. Were Michel allowed to talk to his classmates about NBA inside the classroom, one can imagine that his high level of WTC would be transported into the classroom too.

Familiarity with the topic is not always enough, however. Familiarity with the interlocutor is also a factor which further plays into student WTC. WTC will be higher with people the students know and feel comfortable with. As Lan et al. (2021) discovered, shyness has a negative impact on student WTC. "I use Facebook to connect with my friends back in Chicago. Sometimes, we talk to one another via Facebook video call. I feel comfortable talking to them in English," (Lee, 2019, p. 700) is a comment from Korean student Ji-su which illustrates this. The interlocutor does not need to be someone the student personally knows, but someone part of a community the student is familiar with. Tae-hyung comments, "I played Diablo and Lineage online games, and I often talked with other game players in English during the gameplay" (Lee, 2019, p. 701) which shows how familiarity with a community at large will facilitate WTC. These are factors which are difficult for a teacher to access or affect, but nonetheless dictate a certain level of their students' WTC.

4.3.3 EE as a Communicative Space

Finally, another situational factor which affects the students is their access to EE. As proven by research presented in this literature review, EE raises WTC, be it by itself or through strengthening the ideal L2 self. Lee and Sylvén (2021) show how Swedish students compared to their Korean peers have more time for EE, scoring higher in frequency of EE, and show more WTC partly due to it. They had students answer a questionnaire with three parts, detailing L2 WTC, IDLE (Informal Digital Learning of English), and demographic data respectively. The IDLE set of items was further split into three categories: receptive IDLE (consuming English content), productive IDLE (producing English), and frequency of IDLE (how much time they spend interacting with IDLE). For all students, L2 WTC positively correlated with receptive, productive, and frequency of IDLE (Lee & Sylvén, 2021, pp. 1288-1289). However, the Korean cohort, making up 388 students of the 532 participating in the research, differed from their Swedish counterparts in time spent on EE and strength of ideal L2 selves. Firstly, they had less IDLE experience, with 226 Korean students (58,2%) reporting spending less than 1 hour per day compared to 24 Swedish students (22,3%) who answered the same (Lee & Sylvén, 2021, p. 1287). Secondly, Korean students generally also showed less L2 WTC (Lee & Sylvén, 2021, p. 1287).

As exemplified above, EE is an important arena for students to try their skills and exercise their autonomy which strengthens their ideal L2 self and then subsequently raises their L2 WTC. Sak (2020) presented results which would suggest that students might have a higher WTC in EE contexts than inside the classroom, and if one reasons that WTC in EE begets more WTC everywhere, then facilitating this resource is key.

WTC is not the only thing positively impacted by EE, but language proficiency in general has also been proved to enhance EE. Sundqvist (2009, p. 86) examined whether EE had an impact on vocabulary and oral skills through what she refers to as a mixture of a qualitative and quantitative study, gathering answers from diaries, questionnaires, and interviews. This longitudinal study was carried out over a school year, where 74 students in ninth grade, from three different schools with different backgrounds, ended up finishing the project (Sundqvist, 2009, pp. 79-84). Results showed that the correlation between high EE activities and oral proficiency was considerable, and vocabulary was shown to have an even greater correlation. Greater oral proficiency could be grounds to assume it would also lead to higher WTC as the students' L2 confidence would be raised too. Furthermore, Sundqvist (2009, p. 204) could confirm that productive EE activities had a greater impact than receptive

ones. Olsson (2012) further sought to examine if EE had any impact on students' writing abilities. This study was qualitative, through specific text examples produced by 37 students in ninth grade, as well as information regarding their EE activities through a language diary. Results did show that students' high writing proficiency correlated with their large intake of English outside of school. What Olsson (2012) furthermore concludes is that this natural intake of English is volitional and must therefore be deeply motivational as well as providing students with high autonomy. These findings are positive as we want the students to learn English in the end, but according to Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller (2013), students are not showing the same motivation for English in class as they do outside of class. According to them it is not the students who are to blame but rather the teachers, who fail to bridge the gap between EE and classroom English.

Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) also had Swedish students write language diaries to see what types of EE resulted in better language proficiency. The students self-reported their EE usage and also what type of EE they participated in this language diary during a week's time as well as filling out a questionnaire. 86 fifth graders participated in this study (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 308) and results showed that gaming led to improved vocabulary, reading, and listening. Boys who enjoyed playing multiplayer games in particular outperformed other students, which Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) theorize is due to the engagement and opportunities for communication these types of games provide, mirroring Lee's (2019) conclusion about familiarity with communities.

5 Conclusion

This concluding section summarizes the findings in section 4 by bringing together all research and the common deduction from it in section 5.1. Then follows section 5.2. which discusses the pedagogical implications. Finally, section 5.3. proposes suggestions for further research and states limitations that bring a close to this literature review.

5.1 Summary

In regard to our first research question, there is a great collection of research which shows that the ideal L2 self positively influences L2 WTC (Ebn-Abbasi et al., 2022; Kanat-Mutluoğlu, 2016; Lan et al., 2021; Lee & Lee, 2020; Lee & Lu, 2023; Lee et al., 2021;

Sak, 2020; Zhang et al., 2022; Öz, 2016). Students want to bridge the gap between their current L2 self and their ideal L2 self, and this motivation drives them to speak more, showcasing more WTC. Different intrapersonal aspects may mediate the relationship between the two, such as grit (Lan et al., 2023) or boredom (Zhang et al., 2022), but the link persists. Variances may occur between different student groups based on classroom culture or teaching methods (Ebn-Abbasi, 2022; Lee et al., 2021), where the ought-to L2 self and the L2 learning experience affect the students somewhat; however, compared to other motivational units, part of the L2MSS or not, the ideal L2 self is shown to be the strongest predictor of L2 WTC, making it of particular interest (Kanat-Mutluoğlu, 2016; Lee & Lee, 2020; Lee et al., 2021).

In EE settings, the link remains and is seemingly strengthened, which begins to answer our second research question. The research found that students engaging in EE showed more WTC and also a more vivid ideal L2 self (Lee & Lee, 2020; Lee & Lu, 2023; Sak, 2020). Some research even pointed to students having more WTC outside of the classroom than inside (Sak, 2020), which could be due to the freedom of choice in EE and the possibility to develop or engage with their ideal L2 self through their EE use. The autonomy students experience is a vital aspect of EE and is highly motivating. This could in part be due to the direct impact their communication has in an EE setting but also the authenticity of it (Olsson, 2012; Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller, 2013). EE also indirectly influences WTC through language proficiency. Research conducted in Sweden has shown that EE improves vocabulary, reading, and listening (Sundqvist, 2009; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012) as well as writing (Olsson, 2012). With better language skills one can infer that it would lead to easier access to EE, both receptive and productive, and so lead to more WTC.

However, it is difficult to completely separate the ideal L2 self from the rest of the L2MSS, especially the L2 learning experience, as we have come to understand. One cannot completely remove a student from their context or previous experiences in language learning. Students themselves identify both intrapersonal as well as interpersonal, or external, factors which affect their WTC (Lee, 2019). Teaching materials, teacher presence, test-oriented teaching, and familiarity with interlocutors and communities, to mention a few, are factors that affect the student (Ebn-Abbasi et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2021). Countries with different teaching methods and approaches to language learning or access to EE, such as South Korea, evidently also showcase students with different levels of WTC and unequally developed ideal L2 selves (Lee & Sylvén, 2021; Lee et al., 2021).

It is apparent through the literature review that EE, the ideal L2 self, and WTC have a

complex and multidirectional interrelationship. To our understanding, the ideal L2 self influences the use of EE and WTC positively. EE seemingly strengthens the ideal L2 self and L2 WTC. L2 WTC and EE then encourage each other (Fig. 3). It is a system that fuels itself, but the source of most motivation and drive in the student stems from a strong and vivid ideal L2 self. A strong ideal L2 self will create an L2 learner who is determined, resourceful, and curious – all qualities which make for great success inside and outside of the classroom. With respect to the Swedish context, this model then promises great effects. Swedish students score high on WTC (Lee & Sylvén, 2021; Lee et al., 2021), have a strong ideal L2 self (Lee et al., 2021), and engage in EE a lot compared to other students (Lee & Sylvén, 2021). If the positive effects of this self-sufficient system are assumed, then Swedish students should show plenty of WTC both inside the classroom and outside in EE settings. As mentioned in the introduction, this is, however, not the reality in Swedish classrooms. One or several aspects of this model are not supported by current Swedish teaching methods or classroom practices. This leads to the loss of the overall effect and lower student WTC that has been observed in classrooms. The reasons for this are expanded upon in the following section 5.2.

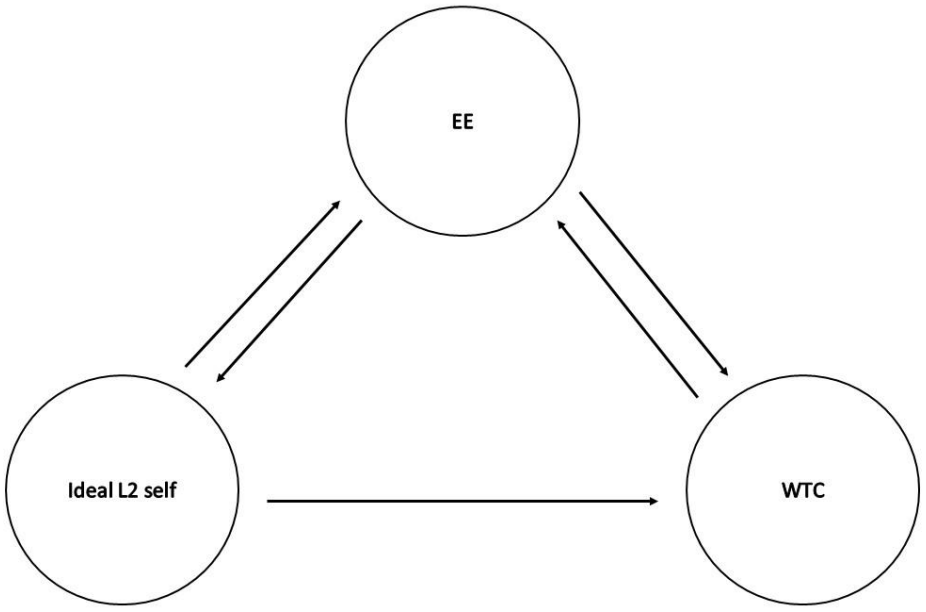

Figure 3. Model of the perceived relationship between WTC, the ideal L2 self, and EE.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

This section presents what pedagogical implications can be drawn from this literature review. Firstly the summarized implications from the above literature review will be disclosed, followed by a paragraph that investigates how they relate to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, n.d.) and the Swedish upper secondary context. Lastly, a brief discussion of said sections will conclude this review.

Most of the reviewed papers have a different context than Swedish upper secondary schools, and therefore their pedagogical implications will be context-specific. Two studies in particular recommended a communicative approach, alas, these studies were conducted in South Korea and Iran, where student-central communication is not promoted (Ebn-Abbasi et al., 2022; Lee, 2019). Their findings also state that the Korean and Iranian classrooms are more teacher-centered and test-oriented which could imply that students' ought-to selves are bigger than their ideal L2 selves. These findings bring us to the second pedagogical implication, namely that teachers should help students create better ideal L2 selves (Lan et al., 2021; Lee & Lu, 2023; Öz, 2016). As shown in section 4.1, a strong ideal L2 self drives students to talk more, showcase higher L2 WTC, and become more goal-oriented. The last two themes that are put forward as pedagogical implications are individualization and authenticity, which seem to be relevant in many of the researched countries' teaching contexts, as well as the Swedish one (Kanat-Mutluoğlu, 2016; Lee, 2019; Lee & Lu, 2023; Olsson, 2012; Sak, 2020; Sundqvist, 2009; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012; Zhang et al., 2022). While relevant, themes of individualization and authenticity might not be as prevalent in other countries' curricula as it is in the Swedish one. The established preference for teacher-centered classrooms in lieu of student-centered classrooms could be an indication of this. It is also worth noting that it is not given that all curricula advocate for students to develop educational autonomy or independence.

The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, n.d.) however, states that schools have a mission to help students find their independence, provide an education based on democratic values, and help students take responsibility for themselves and society. The education should stimulate creativity, innovative thinking, confidence, and curiosity. What is transcribed in both the curriculum and the English syllabus (2011) is that digitalization must be adhered to. Teachers should use digital tools themselves as well as help students navigate the digital society and develop their digital competencies. Furthermore, what the English syllabus states which is relevant for this review is that students should be given the

opportunity to develop communicative skills through functional and meaningful contexts as well as relate the content to their own experiences and knowledge. Lastly, the teaching should be conducted in English as much as possible.

When comparing these transcripts from the Swedish National Agency for Education to the issues stated in the introduction of this study, there seems to be a misalignment. It seems that teachers should already be equipped with the correct tools to have students communicate in the TL, but it appears that something is not working. The problem areas are threefold. The first is how the above external and practical implications translate to cultivating the internal ideal L2 self. Even though the curriculum states that teachers should help students realize their full potential, such as creating an ideal L2 self, it is a difficult task. Students in upper secondary school are in the midst of developing their personalities and autonomy, which should be an optimal time to develop their ideal L2 selves. However, if teachers assert their authority rather than guiding students to self-development it might hinder the cultivation of the ideal L2 self.

Secondly, it is a difficult task for teachers to create authenticity in the classroom. As Swedish teenagers in general are good at English and engage in many EE activities, perhaps it is difficult to recreate challenging activities that are also meaningful to students in the classroom. It is possible that instead of fostering and nurturing students' ideal L2 self, the classroom milieu advocates for an ought-to self where students focus more on grades and graduating. The difficulty of creating authenticity could be connected to the third and last problem area, the practical difficulties. Another pedagogical implication and requirement from the English syllabus (2011) is that education should be individualized. However, lack of resources and lack of teacher presence complicates the realization of individualization. Furthermore, instrumental difficulties that hinder teachers from actual teaching are time limitations and documentation. If teachers are expected to solve the problem with students not communicating in the TL they need better conditions for doing so.

5.3 Future research

This literature review has looked at the interaction and correlation between three elements of research. To visualize what future research needs to focus on, the Venn diagram (Fig. 2) presents a clear picture of what fields have been covered and which have not. There is plenty of research done regarding how the ideal L2 self is affecting students' WTC, but research on how EE is affecting WTC is lacking, and there is also a research gap between EE and the

ideal L2 self. This gap is pointed out by Yashima et al. (2018), who state that earlier research has given its attention to the trait-like elements and that upcoming research should put their focus on situational factors which will then provide a deeper understanding of the concept of WTC as a whole.

It is evident from the research conducted on the ideal L2 self that it is a concept which is realized both inside and outside of the classroom walls. There needs to be more research regarding how EE is affecting both the ideal L2 self and WTC. If future research can shine a light on how EE is affecting student WTC in class it will provide teachers with better tools to create a communicative classroom atmosphere where students feel their ideal L2 self is being actualized. Lastly, more research conducted by Swedish researchers in the context of Swedish upper secondary schools is needed as the matter is context-specific.

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