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Title: Current L2 self-concept of Finnish comprehensive school students : The role of grades, parents, peers, and society

Year: 2021

Version: Published version

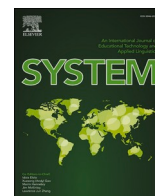
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Please cite the original version:

Kangasvieri, T., & Leontjev, D. (2021). Current L2 self-concept of Finnish comprehensive school students : The role of grades, parents, peers, and society. *System*, 100, Article 102549.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102549>



Current L2 self-concept of Finnish comprehensive school students: The role of grades, parents, peers, and society

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

L2 motivation
Current L2 self-concept
English
LOTes
SEM

ABSTRACT

L2 (second/foreign language) motivation research in Finland has been scarce. Furthermore, international motivational research has focused more on ideal and ought-to selves, leaving the current L2 self-concept in the background. In the present study, we attempted to address this gap, exploring what shapes L1 (mother tongue) Finnish students' understanding of themselves as users and learners of L2s. Using structural equation modelling, we studied the relationships between students' ($n = 1,206$) current L2 self-concept and parental encouragement, peer pressure, societal expectations, and grades. We further studied which of these factors are the best predictors of students' current L2 self-concept. We explored these relationships separately for English and languages other than English (LOTes). The analysis showed that while in both groups, students' grades and societal expectations shaped students' current L2 self-concept the most, other factors played a greater role in the LOTes group than in the English group. We discuss these findings with reference to the teacher's role in shaping students' current L2 self-concept.

1. Introduction

In the study we report on in this paper, we explored how various motivational factors and learning outcomes were related to L1 (mother tongue) Finnish students' current L2 (second/foreign language) self-concept, that is, the way they currently see themselves as language users. Our inspiration for the study was that the available research in and outside Finland has focused more on future learner selves, whereas we, following others (Iwaniec, 2014a; Thorsen, Henry, & Cliffordson, 2017), argue that the current L2 self-concept is essential in students' motivation. Furthermore, as Mercer (2011) strongly argued, the role of others and learning outcomes in learner motivation is hard to overestimate. That said, L2 motivation research focuses on single such factors, rarely if ever exploring the influence of all these on students' L2 selves together, which is the goal of this study.

Further inspiration for the study serves the lack of L2 motivation research in Finland. While there were notable early studies of learner motivation in Finland (e.g., Julkunen, 1998a, 1998b; Julkunen & Borzova, 1997; Laine, 1977), recently, the motivational studies have been sparse in number and generally did not have a specific focus on learner motivation (e.g., Alderson et al., 2015; Härmälä, Leontjev, & Kangasvieri, 2017). No large-scale studies focusing explicitly on L2 motivation have been conducted lately in the Finnish context except for the research undertaken by (Kangasvieri, 2019, 2022) of the present paper.

Outside Finland, L2 motivation research has been flourishing, inspired recently by Dörnyei's L2 self-system (2005). As we outlined above, the conceptualisation focuses on possible selves in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). However, even though the argument

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implies that for students to be motivated, the future self should be notably different from the current self, studies focusing on students' current L2 self-concept are less numerous than those focusing on future L2 selves (Thorsen, Henry, & Cliffordson, 2017). Namely, while generally, significant others, society, but also formal appraisals of performance in education have been found to influence L2 motivation (Mercer, 2011), there have been notably fewer studies exploring their role in the formation of the current L2 self-concept, especially studies considering several of such factors together.

Finally, the inspiration for the design of our study served the lack of research on learner motivation towards languages other than English (LOTES; Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017). English is the most studied foreign language in schools across Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017), including Finland (Statistics Finland, 2019), having proficiency in the English language being often taken for granted (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Ushioda, 2013). For studying LOTES, however, parents' and peers' encouragement is lacking (e.g., Lanvers, 2017), and motivation to study LOTES is generally lower than that in English (Dewaele, 2005; Henry, 2010, 2011; Julkunen, 1998a, 1998b; Ushioda, 2017).

Considering the outlined gaps, we explored how parental encouragement, peer pressure, societal expectations, and grades explained L1 Finnish students' current L2 self-concept, studying this separately for English and LOTES. Next, we review the literature that inspired the present study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Defining current L2 self-concept

There has recently been a strong argument for reimagining L2 motivation as a self-system (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Ushioda, 2006). It consists of the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. An ideal L2 self is the desirable L2 user that the student would like to become. As Dörnyei (2005; 2009) discusses, the importance of the ideal L2 self lies in that motivation to learn an L2 is partly shaped by students' desire to minimise the gap between the current and the ideal L2-self. Ought-to L2 self is what language learners consider is expected from them to possess; it is an "imported" self-image" driving L2 learning motivation through a sense of responsibility and obligations (You & Dörnyei, 2016: 498). L2 learning experience refers to self-beliefs shaping mostly due to the influence of the formal language learning contexts, including student success in the classroom and the influence of the language teacher (Martinović, 2018). The current L2 self-concept (language I [kieliminä]; Laine & Pihko, 1991) is an internalised image that a language learner has about themselves as a language user and learner.

One challenge to defining L2 self-concept emerges from various interpretations and definitions of it. Mercer (2011, p. 14), for example, defined it as "an individual's self-descriptions of competence and evaluative feelings about themselves as a Foreign Language (FL) learner." It also appears Mercer (2011) uses the terms "current L2 self-concept" and "L2 self-concept" interchangeably. Others, however, defined self-concept (and L2 self-concept) as encompassing the actual/current self, the ideal self, and the other/social self (Julkunen & Borzova, 1997; Laine 1977).

Mercer (2011) also argued for considering learner current L2 self-concept as situated and dynamic, or, rather simultaneously exhibiting both stable and dynamic aspects (see also Moyer, 2018). The author also underscored the role that others, peers, parents, and teachers, as well as measures of learning outcomes play in the formation of students' current L2 self-concept (see also Henry & Cliffordson, 2017). Others, however, conceptualise self-concept as a rather static representation of oneself that is past-oriented. Thus, it is not dependent on ideal and ought-to selves and represents students' self-beliefs about themselves (e.g., Iwaniec, 2014a), in the domain of L2, as language users and learners. This apparent difference in conceptualisation stems, perhaps, from the degree of generalness. Evidence suggests that global self-concepts are stable, whereas more specific self-concepts are malleable and situation-specific (Marsh, 1990).

In the present study, we consider *the current L2 self-concept* (also referred to as *actual L2 self-concept*) as a malleable and a changing construct. We define it as "an individual's self-descriptions of competence and evaluative feelings about themselves" (Mercer, 2011, p. 14) currently, that is, using Julkunen and Borzova's (1997, p. 27) words, "person's notions, beliefs, and cognitions of what she actually is like." Considering the research outlined above, the current L2 self-concept studied with reference to separate L2s, as we do in this study, should be malleable. We will use the term *L2 self-concept* to refer to discussions of students' L2 selves encompassing their future selves, and the term *self-concept* to refer to the corresponding construct not limited to the L2 domain. However, we will also respect the terminology used by the authors whose studies we outline in this paper.

Indeed, research focusing on what we consider current self-concept in separate L2s finds it malleable. To give an example, Yoshida (2013) in a qualitative study of L2 Japanese learners' current L2 self-concept found that through learners' experience of using the L2, their current L2 self-concepts became more positive.

Still, often the focus of research is on future selves. To build an argument for expanding L2 motivation research on the current L2 self-concept, Thorsen, Henry, and Cliffordson (2017) conducted a study of 291 L1 Swedish students of L2 English. They argued for including measures of current L2 self-concept to L2 motivation research, demonstrating that the power of ideal L2 self to explain L2 English students' effort to study English in Sweden decreased substantially from grade 7 to grade 9. (See also Henry & Cliffordson, 2017; Yung, 2019).

Therefore, it appears that in L2 motivation research, there has been a greater focus on future selves than on the current self, despite the importance of this construct. This serves as the main motivation for our inquiry.

2.2. External factors and L2 selves

The role of significant others in learner L2 motivation has been frequently studied. Similarly, the relation between learner achievement and their L2 motivation has been explored, too.

Generally, the role of parents in learning English has been found notable. Csizér and Kormos (2009) found that parental encouragement significantly predicted both the positivity of learning English and learners’ L2 ought-to-selves. Chen (2017) found that parents played an important role in senior high school students’ motivation. Pawlak (2016), too, found that parental encouragement played an important role in motivating BA-level students to study English. At the same time, a limited role of parental encouragement was found as well (Bartram, 2006a; Iwaniec, 2014b; Iwaniec & Ullakonoja, 2016). Iwaniec (2014b) and Iwaniec and Ullakonoja (2016), for example, studying English language learners in Finland and Poland, found that parental encouragement played a rather limited role in students’ motivation in both contexts.

Iwaniec (2014b) and Iwaniec and Ullakonoja (2016) also studied the role of peer pressure (influence on learners from their peer groups) in learner L2 motivation. Iwaniec (2014b) found that the role of peers in motivation was rather low; though Iwaniec and Ullakonoja (2016) found that the Finnish sample reported more support from peers than the Polish sample did (it was limited in both samples). Still, as Bartram (2006b) found, peers’ perceptions of and attitudes to the language as a school subject can influence motivation.

With regard to societal expectations, recently, Matusin (2014) studied Croatian learners’ (n = 58, aged 14–18) L2 English motivation. The author found that by the age of 17–18, peers, family, and teachers had less influence on learner L2 motivation than societal

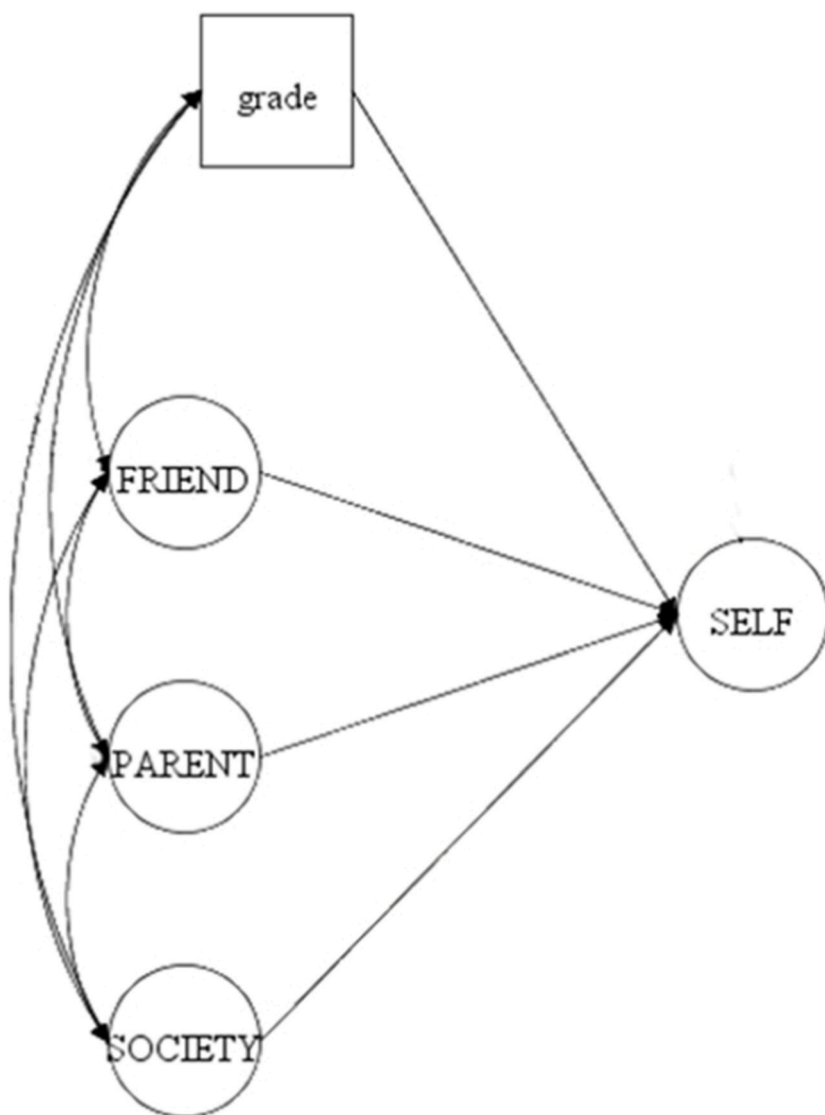


Fig. 1. The hypothesised relationships among the variables.

expectations did. Focusing on self-concept, [Prasangani \(2015\)](#) found that societal expectations had the strongest association with the 361 Sri Lankan undergraduate students' of English L2 ideal and ought-to selves among the studied variables.

Finally, grades have been found to have a powerful impact on learners' selves, as argued by, e.g., [Dörnyei and Ushioda \(2011\)](#), who also argued that grades are problematic as they focus on performance outcomes rather than the learning process. Formal appraisals of students' performance, such as grades and exam results, serve as indicators of their success by themselves and as a source for comparison with peers, both contributing to forming learners' current L2 self-concept ([Mercer, 2011](#)). Indeed, a strong association between learning outcomes and various L2-self concepts has been found. [Dörnyei and Chan \(2013\)](#) studying the relationship between Chinese L2 English and Mandarin learners' (aged 13–15) future L2 self-concepts and their grades, found that there was a positive association between learners' ideal L2-selves and achievement, though, for English, ideal L2-self correlated with grades less strongly ($r = .24$) than in Mandarin ($r = .42$). [Chao, McInerney, and Bai \(2019\)](#) studying 1092 students' of English and Chinese (current) L2 self-concept in relation to their L2 achievement measured as self-reported exam scores found that (current) L2 self-concept was a significant predictor of students achievement. [Yung \(2019\)](#), in a study of Hong-Kong students of English, found that students had insecure actual L2 selves and to get higher grades in English, sought private tutoring. In a recent study conducted in Finland, [Härmälä, Leontjev, and Kangasvieri \(2017\)](#) found that students' ($n = 1219$) opinions of English (the current L2 self-concept being a part of it) was a strong predictor of their L2 English proficiency, their future study plans affecting their proficiency indirectly via the opinions factor. Outside the L2 field, focusing on the role of teacher rating of learners' achievement in the changes in elementary learners' academic self-concept, [Gest, Domitrovich, and Welsh \(2005\)](#) found that the former served as a significant predictor of the latter. Meta-analyses (e.g., [Huang, 2011](#)) have found a significant relationship between academic self-concept and achievement, too.

We can, therefore, conclude that grades have a powerful impact on the development of the current L2 self-concept, even if their relationship is likely to be reciprocal rather than unidirectional.

The impressive and ever-growing body of research, as we outlined above, has created a strong argument for the notable role of peers, parents, society, and learning outcomes/grades in the formation of learner L2 selves. However, studies that considered several or all of these factors simultaneously are much rarer and oftentimes lack the focus on the current L2 self-concept despite the argument for the benefit of this research. This inspired our present inquiry.

3. Method

3.1. Research questions

In the present study, our goal was to find answers to the following research questions:

- 1) What are the relationships between the grades, parental encouragement, peer pressure, and societal expectations, and students' current L2 self-concept?
- 2) Which of the following factors: parental encouragement, peer pressure, societal expectations, and school grades—are the best predictors of students' current L2 self-concept?

Both research questions were asked separately for the L2 English and LOTEs group. With reference to the first research question, we hypothesised that there are statistically significant correlations among the studied variables. With regard to the second research question, we hypothesised that both the out-of-school motivational factors and students' grades were significant independent predictors of their current L2 self-concept. We cautiously included parental encouragement as one, even though the previous research in Finland found little influence of parents on L2 motivation. The hypothesised relationships among the variables in the study are illustrated in [Fig. 1](#).

3.2. Participants

The participants in the study were ninth-graders (aged 15–16; of them, 59.7% girls and 40.3% boys) from 33 Finnish-speaking comprehensive schools all around Finland, both bigger towns and cities and rural areas. There were altogether 1206 completed survey responses. The ninth-graders were selected as the target group for the study, as by grade 9, all the L2 choices are made/done in the Finnish comprehensive school education.

The L2s covered in this study were the most frequently studied languages in the Finnish schools at the time of the data collection

Table 1
Languages in the study.

Language	Compulsory lg.	First optional lg.	Second optional lg.	Total
English	709	–	–	709
German	–	113	145	258
French	–	49	107	156
Russian	–	10	30	40
Spanish	–	–	43	43
Total	709	172	325	1,206

(Kumpulainen, 2014). In the Finnish educational system at that time, the first compulsory language (usually English) was introduced in grade three (about 9 years old). The first optional language was introduced in the fourth or fifth grade. The second optional L2 was generally introduced in grade 8 (Kumpulainen, 2014). The Swedish-medium schools were excluded from the data collection, as the foreign language studies are implemented in a different way there.

In Table 1, the studied sample is partitioned according to the languages about which the students responded.

This sample is representative of the population of year 9 students in the Finnish-medium schools in Finland in years 2012–13 with the 95% confidence, the total population of nine-graders in the Finnish-medium schools being 56,430 in the year 2012 and 54,689 in the year 2013 (Statistics Finland, 2020a, 2020b).

3.3. Data

The data in the study were collected in a large-scale survey. The data collection instrument included students' background information (of which we use only the studied languages data in this study; see Section 3.2), scales eliciting various motivational aspects, and students' self-reported grades, as we will discuss below. The instrument was piloted in several stages: (a) items checked by several senior researchers experienced in conducting surveys, experts in psychology and motivational research, and experts in applied statistical research, (b) tried out with a number of classes in comprehensive schools in two cities. The internal consistency of the motivational scales in the piloting stage suggested that the scales were reliable.

The full instrument consisted of 13 different motivational scales. The scales were based on existing instruments (Dörnyei, 1990, 2001; Gardner, 1985, 2004; Julkunen, 1998a, 1998b; Julkunen & Borzova, 1997; Williams & Burden, 1997). Of these 13 motivational scales, for this study, four scales were selected: (1) the scale measuring the current **L2 self-concept** and those measuring (2) **parental encouragement** (i.e., motivation from parents; $k = 7$), (3) **peer pressure** (i.e., motivation from friends; $k = 4$), and (4) **societal expectations** (the internalised expectations of the societal importance of the language; $k = 3$). We will refer to the items, and the latent variables behind them, in the current L2 self-concept factor group as to SELF items (and the items as to SELF1, SELF2, etc.), the parental encouragement group as to PARENT items, peer pressure group as to FRIEND items, and societal expectation group as to SOCIETY items. The items in the present study are presented in Appendix A. The items originally in English were translated into Finnish, the translations checked by two L1 Finnish researchers.

Students' grades were also a variable in our study. Before we elaborate on how these data were collected, we note that grading in the Finnish comprehensive schools is given on the scale from '4' to '10', a grade of four being a fail (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). The goals outlined in the Finnish National Core Curriculum (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004) valid at the time of the data collection (late 2012–early 2013) are the best reference for providing an overview of grading at the time of data collection. The grade of '8' is awarded when a student demonstrates the achievement of the standard of the subject-specific criteria ('good'), those in L2s including language proficiency criteria, cultural knowledge, and learning strategies. A grade of '5' ('pass') denotes that the student has demonstrated an adequate degree of performance in these criteria; a grade of '4' is a fail. The grading is done with reference to the general foreign language learning objectives, e.g., students being able to use their linguistic resources creatively in a variety of formal and out-of-school contexts and students' cultural and language awareness (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). The final assessment grades in years 8 or 9 should be nationally comparable, but classroom assessment has mostly been teachers' responsibility, so it is difficult to generalise what exactly contributes to school grades that students receive (see Tarnanen & Huhta, 2011).

The first author sent an invitation to take the survey to the school administration, who decided how many L2 groups participated. The school administration, teachers, parents/guardians, and students were informed of the goals of the study, how the survey was to be taken, and where these (anonymised) data would be used. Written consent was obtained from all the parties.

This survey was administered online, and the students took it during one of their regular language lessons. During the data collection, the students were asked to rate statements coming from motivational scales presented in a random order in terms of how true those statements were for them on a Likert scale from 1 (consider not true at all) to 5 (consider totally true).

As it was difficult, if not impossible, to arrange otherwise, due to having to connect students' responses to the data allowing for identifying them as individuals, the students were asked to report their grades themselves. Still, we are rather confident that self-reported grades reflect students' academic achievement in the L2s we studied well (see Hattie, 2009). In Table 2, descriptive statistics for self-reported grades are presented.

While there were differences in the students' grades across the languages, there was no significant difference between them, $F(4,$

Table 2
Students' grades, partitioned by language.

	Mean	95% CI Lower	Upper	SD	Median
English	8.07	7.97	8.17	1.327	8.00
German	8.12	7.96	8.29	1.338	8.00
French	8.29	8.08	8.50	1.309	8.00
Russian	8.34	7.84	8.84	1.529	9.00
Spanish	8.47	7.98	8.95	1.564	9.00
TOTAL	8.13	8.05	8.21	1.345	8.00

1172) = 1.82, $p = .123$.

The data were analysed using Mplus version 7.4 (Muthén and Muthén, 1998–2015). We followed Hu and Bentler’ (1999) guidelines for fit indices: CFI and TLI larger than .95, RMSEA smaller than .06, and SRMR smaller than .08. We used all of the available data and robust multiple likelihood estimator in our analysis.

Originally, eight items targeted the current L2 self-concept. However, the reliability analysis indicated that the internal consistency of the scale was rather low. Considering the relatively low item-total correlation (.45) and its wording (“If I try hard enough, I will perform most difficult tasks”) being different from the rest of the items, SELF5 was removed from the initial analysis. Of the remaining items, four (SELF2, SELF4, SELF6, and SELF8) were originally worded negatively. The direction of these items, as well as that of FRIEND3, was reversed for the analyses. The internal consistency of the resulting group of the SELF items was high, $\alpha = .893$.

Before conducting the analysis, we studied whether there were large multivariate outliers, examining the Mahalanobis distances, noting the cases for which the Chi-square value exceeded the critical value of $\chi^2(23) = 49.728$, $\alpha = .001$. For each identified outlier, we studied the patterns of students’ responses on the whole survey. We excluded four cases whose responses indicated that students did not take their task seriously, for example, oscillating between “completely true” (5) and “not at all true” (1).

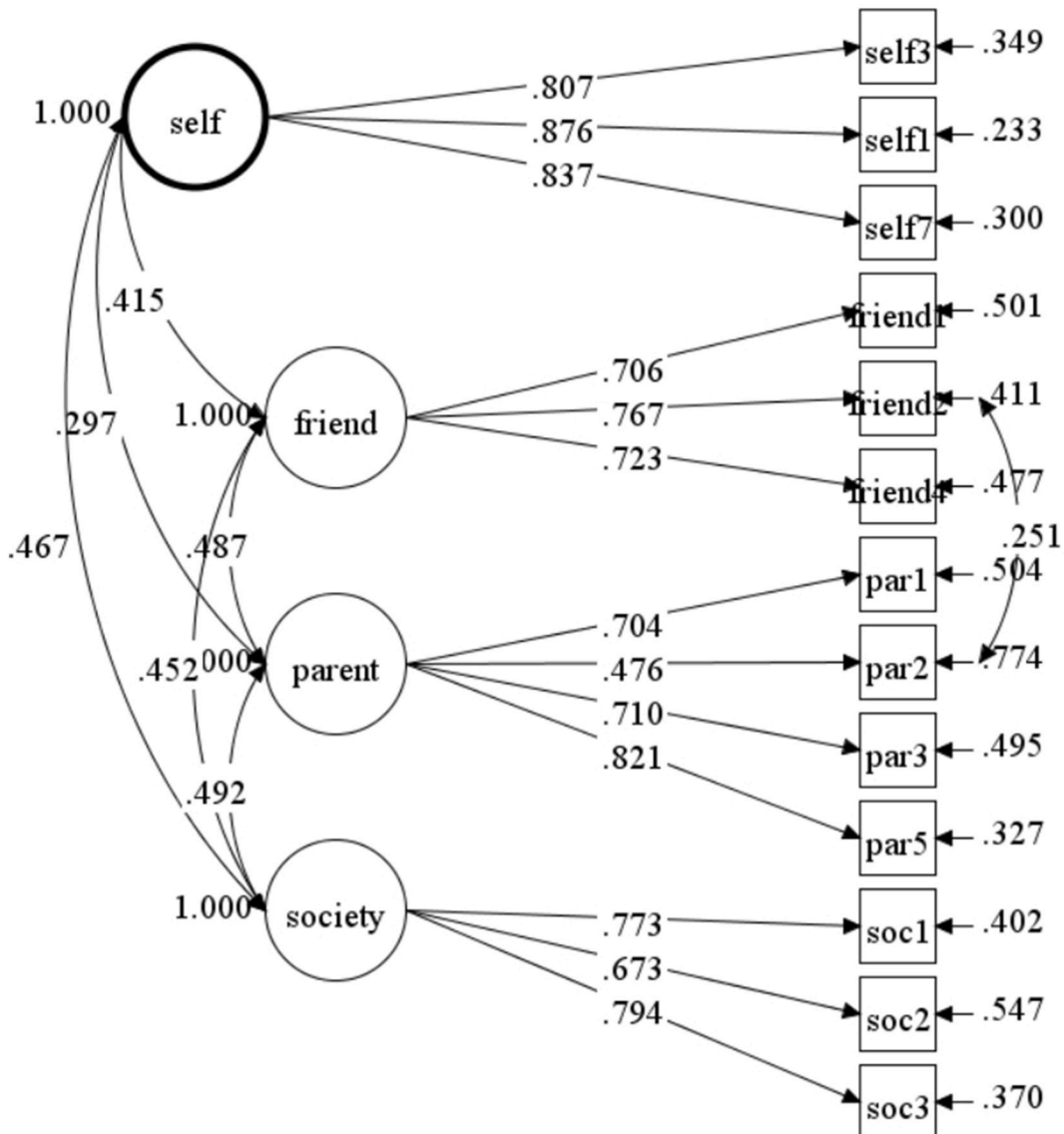


Fig. 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis, LOTES group.

4. Analysis

4.1. Building the models

Since the instrument was built based on the previously existing instruments, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted. The CFA confirmed that with the exception of the loading of FRIEND3 (for English, $\beta = .193$; for LOTEs, $\beta = .315$), the items loaded strongly to the corresponding factors. However, the fit of the models was unsatisfactory, e.g., for the English only group, $X^2(183) = 1133.88, p < .001, CFI = .838, TLI = .814, RMSEA = .086$ (95% CI [.081; .090]), $SRMR = .090$.

First, we excluded all of the initially negatively worded items from the model (see Section 4.2 for our rationale). Following that, not to complicate the interpretation of the model, we excluded PARENT7, which, as the modification indices suggested, loaded to both the PARENT and the SELF factor. We propose that its wording (“In my parents’ opinion, I should spend more time studying this language”) made it also related to the current L2 self. For the same reason, we removed PARENT4 and PARENT6, which loaded to the SOCIETY factor. The wording of PARENT6 “My parents stress the importance of this language for me after I leave school.” links it to societal expectations. It is more difficult to understand how PARENT4 (“In my parents’ opinion, it is really important for me to learn this language”) connected it to the SOCIETY factor, but it might have reflected the general opinion about the importance of the languages in the Finnish society. Finally, we introduced a small residual correlation (not substantially changing the loadings) between PARENT2 (“Parents tell me to ask the teacher for help when I have problems.”) and FRIEND2 (“My friends encourage me to study this language.”), whose wording probably made them refer to the formal school context.

In the English only group, the fit of the resulting model was $X^2(58) = 199.14^1, p < .001, CFI = .959, TLI = .944, RMSEA = .059$ (95% CI [.050; .068]), $SRMR = .046$. In the LOTEs group, the fit was $X^2(58) = 83.84, p < .001, CFI = .987, TLI = .983, RMSEA = .030$ (95% CI [.014; .044]), $SRMR = .033$.

The corresponding factor scores from these models and those in the full models (with all the items and no residual correlations) correlated strongly, sharing from 91% to 99.8% of the variance. The factor determinacy scores were also high, ranging from .89 to .95. Overall, in our opinion, the models represented a good balance between fit and parsimony, allowing for making reliable generalisations. Having examined the fit and having considered the alternative models (see Section 5.2), we accepted the models as final.

In [Appendices B and C](#), the standardised loadings are reported. As the correlations among the factors are reported separately in the paper, we did not include these in the appendices. [Fig. 2](#) illustrates the models with reference to the languages other than English group. In the figure, standardised loadings are reported.

To give the reader a better overview, we next present what are essentially mean figures of means across items in each scale and for each of the two groups we studied ([Table 3](#)).

We next ran two structural equation models (SEM), one for English only, one for LOTEs, regressing the SELF factor on grades and the three out-of-school motivational factors, as will be discussed in the Results section.

4.2. Alternative models

We, at this point, would like to elaborate on our rationale for accepting the two models as final over other models.

The highest modifications indices in the initial models implied that the initially negatively worded items had substantial shared residual variance, suggesting the common method bias ([Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012](#)) due to the negative wording of the items. However, the introduction of a factor accounting for the common method bias did not improve the fit to a satisfactory degree, e.g., for the English only group, $X^2(170) = 598.71, p < .001, CFI = .927, TLI = .910, RMSEA = .060$ (95% CI [.055; .065]), $SRMR = .075$. Hence, we excluded these items instead.

Modification indices also suggested we introduce a specific factor, to which FRIEND1 (“in my friends’ opinion, studying/learning this language is important”) loaded negatively and FRIEND2 (“my friends encourage me to study/learn this language”) and PARENT3 (“my parents are really interested in everything that I do in this language lessons”), positively. The factor significantly negatively correlated with the SOCIETY factor. The fit of that model was very good $X^2(52) = 96.72, p < .001, CFI = .987, TLI = .980, RMSEA = .035$ (95% CI [.024; .046]), $SRMR = .029$. We also have a working interpretation of the factor: a small number of students who have internalised the societal understanding of the English language as important did not think that there was explicit encouragement for their language learning from parents and friends.

Studying whether this factor is an actual factor could be an interesting undertaking. However, this would require rigorous

Table 3
Means of the subscales analysed in the study.

	Lg-s	Mean	SD
SELF	English	3.52	1.09
	LOTEs	2.64	1.02
FRIEND	English	3.30	.97
	LOTEs	2.39	.97
PARENT	English	3.04	1.02
	LOTEs	2.75	1.00
SOCIETY	English	4.03	.98
	LOTEs	2.26	.95

validation and detailed reporting. However, considering that the goal of this paper is different and the same generalisations could be made from the models used in the study and the alternative models, we opted for using a theoretically informed model.

5. Results

To ascertain whether there were significant relationships between students' current L2 self-concept and their grades, and the three out-of-school factors (research question 1), we examined the correlations between them. The correlational matrices (Tables 4 and 5) are extracted from the CFA models to which we added the students' grades.

In both groups, of all the variables, learner grades correlated with the students' current L2 self-concept the highest (38% of the variance in the English only group and 34%, in the LOTEs group). The three out-of-school factors intercorrelated moderately to strongly, too.

However, in the English only group, of all the out-of-school factors, the current L2 self-concept correlated substantially only with the societal expectations (about 20% of the shared variance), correlations with peer pressure (7% of the variance) and parental encouragement (2% of the variance) being weak. In the LOTEs group, the correlations of the three factors with the students' current L2 self-concept were notably higher (from 9% to 21% of the shared variance). Still, in both groups, societal expectations correlated with the students' current L2 self-concept the highest among the three out-of-school factors.

Therefore, while our hypothesis with regard to the first research question held, in the English only sample, the significant relationships between SELF and peer pressure and parental encouragement were due to the large sample size. However, in the LOTEs group, all the out-of-school motivational factors' correlations with SELF were moderate.

To find an answer to the second research question, that is, the extent that the studied factors uniquely contributed to students' current L2 self-concept, we ran two structural equation models (SEM), regressing the SELF factor on grades and the three out-of-school motivational factors. The fit of both models was satisfactory, $X^2(52) = 210.46, p < .001, CFI = .961, TLI = .947, RMSEA = .055$ (95% CI [.047; .063]), $SRMR = .044$ for the English group and $X^2(70) = 106.96, p < .001, CFI = .982, TLI = .976, RMSEA = .035$ (95% CI [.022; .047]), $SRMR = .034$ for the LOTEs group.

Figs. 3 and 4 illustrate the models. The thicker lines in the figures are regression lines. In order not to overcomplicate the figures, only significant relationships are shown. In Appendices D and E, we report the standardised coefficients for the regressions. The reader can use Figs. 3 and 4 and Appendices B and C as reference for other relationships.

While the overall trends emerging from the two models are similar, there are notable differences. In the English group, of the three out-of-school factors, only societal expectations ($\beta = .250$) uniquely explained some variance in addition to grades ($\beta = .516$). In the LOTEs group, the contribution of societal expectations was higher ($\beta = .321$), and peer pressure, too, explained a small amount of variance ($\beta = .160$) in SELF.

We suggest that the reason for peer pressure and parental encouragement not emerging as strong predictors in the LOTEs group was in part due to the large intercorrelations among the latent factors. As separate predictors, these variables did explain a notable amount of variance in SELF, but they did not explain much variance not accounted for by the grades and societal expectations. Still, our second hypothesis was only partially supported.

6. Discussion

The inspiration for the present study was the underrepresentation of students' current L2 self-concept in L2 motivational research as well as the lack of research on learner motivation in Finland. Our first aim was to explore the relationships between students' L2 current self-concept and grades, peer pressure, parental encouragement, and societal expectations. The second aim was to determine which studied factors serve as the best predictors of students' L2 current self-concept. We studied English and LOTEs separately.

The correlational analyses indicated that for L2 English, grades and societal expectations share the most variance with the students' current L2 self-concept. These findings are not unexpected considering the status of English and the previous research (e.g. Matusin, 2014; Prasangani, 2015). The lower correlations with peer pressure and parental encouragement are interesting, though, too, expected (Iwaniec & Ullakonja, 2016). We propose that the correlations might have to do with age, parents losing authority as students get older. It could also be that for English, students perceived encouragement from parents and peers to be lower as compared to societal

Table 4

Pearson's correlations among the students' L2-selves, the grades, and the out-of-school motivational factors; English only group.

	SELF	GRADES	FRIEND	PARENT	SOCIETY
SELF		.617	.258	.143	.451
sig.		<.001	<.001	.002	<.001
GRADES	.617		.180	.081	.382
sig.	<.001		<.001	.073	<.001
FRIEND	.258	.180		.680	.591
sig.	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
PARENT	.143	.081	.680		.492
sig.	.002	.073	<.001		<.001
SOCIETY	.451	.382	.591	.492	
sig.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	

Table 5
Pearson’s correlations among the students’ L2-selves, the grades, and the out-of-school motivational factors; LOTEs group.

	SELF	GRADES	FRIEND	PARENT	SOCIETY
SELF		.587	.414	.295	.462
sig.		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
GRADES	.587		.198	.087	.120
sig.	<.001		<.001	.078	.023
FRIEND	.414	.198		.487	.453
sig.	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
PARENT	.295	.087	.487		.492
sig.	<.001	.078	<.001		<.001
SOCIETY	.462	.120	.453	.492	
sig.	<.001	.023	<.001	<.001	

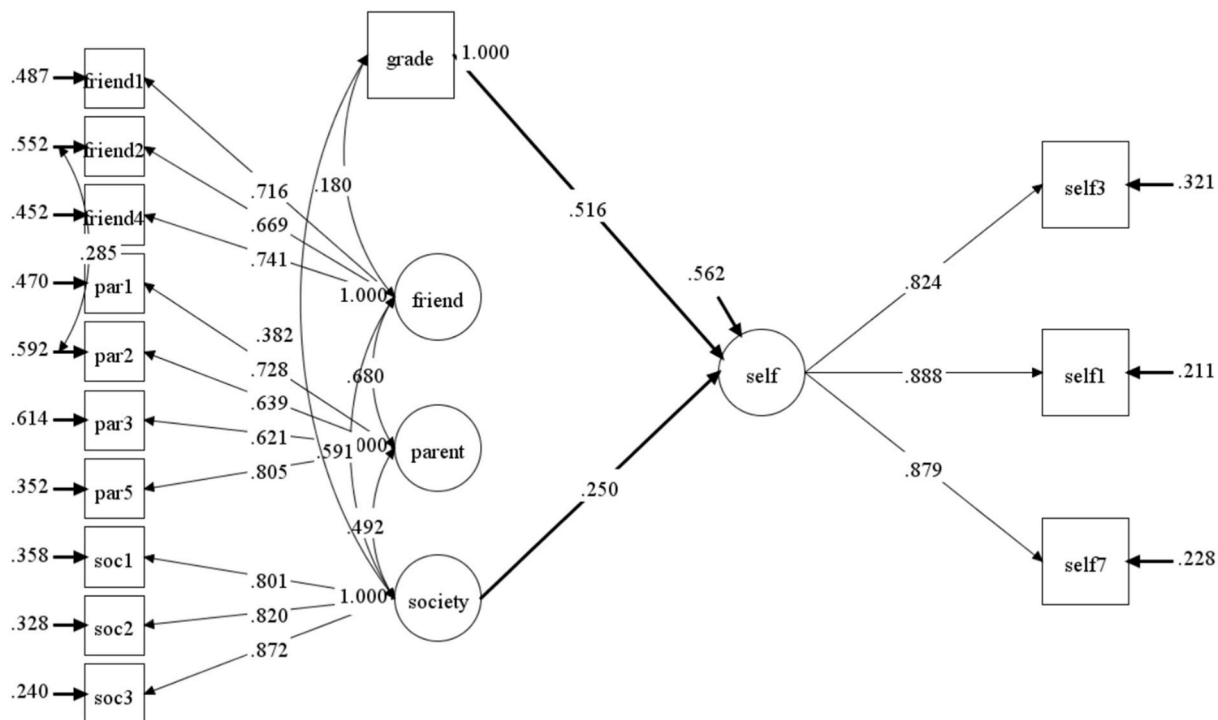


Fig. 3. Structural equation model, grades and out-of-school motivational factors predicting L2 self-concept, English only group.

expectations, or parents themselves considered that less motivation was needed. Regardless, we hypothesise that the status of English was the likely reason for the finding. However, we urge the reader not to interpret this as parents not playing any role in the formation of students’ L2 English self-concept. We agree with Pawlak (2016) that parental encouragement can play a role in following steps of education as well as with Iwaniec and Ullakonoja (2016) that parents play a larger role at the early stages of language learning.

The picture is different in the LOTEs group. In that group, the correlations between students’ current L2 self-concept and motivation from peers and parents were notable, though the grades and societal expectations still correlated the highest with the L2 self-concept. This should not be interpreted as these motivational factors being rated higher in the LOTEs group (see Table 3); this was not the case (see also Lanvers, 2017). Rather, the findings for LOTEs, it is more likely that the higher the encouragement from peers and parents is, the higher the students’ positive perception of themselves as users of the language (see also Sugita McEown, Sawaki, & Harada, 2017). This is, perhaps, explicable by the different status of languages. As we suggested above, for English, students need less external support from parents and friends.

What regards our second research question, grades and societal expectations were the best predictors of students’ current L2 self-concept in L2 English and LOTEs groups. This finding should not be interpreted as other factors not playing any role. The correlations imply that these are related, especially for the LOTEs group. However, due to the shared variance among the factors, parental encouragement, for example, did not emerge as a unique predictor and peer pressure explained only a small additional amount of variance in the second SEM model. Still, what regards LOTEs, the correlations suggest that the higher the parents and peers motivate students, the more positive their current L2 self-concepts is, which is especially important considering the lack of motivation from them in LOTEs (Table 3).

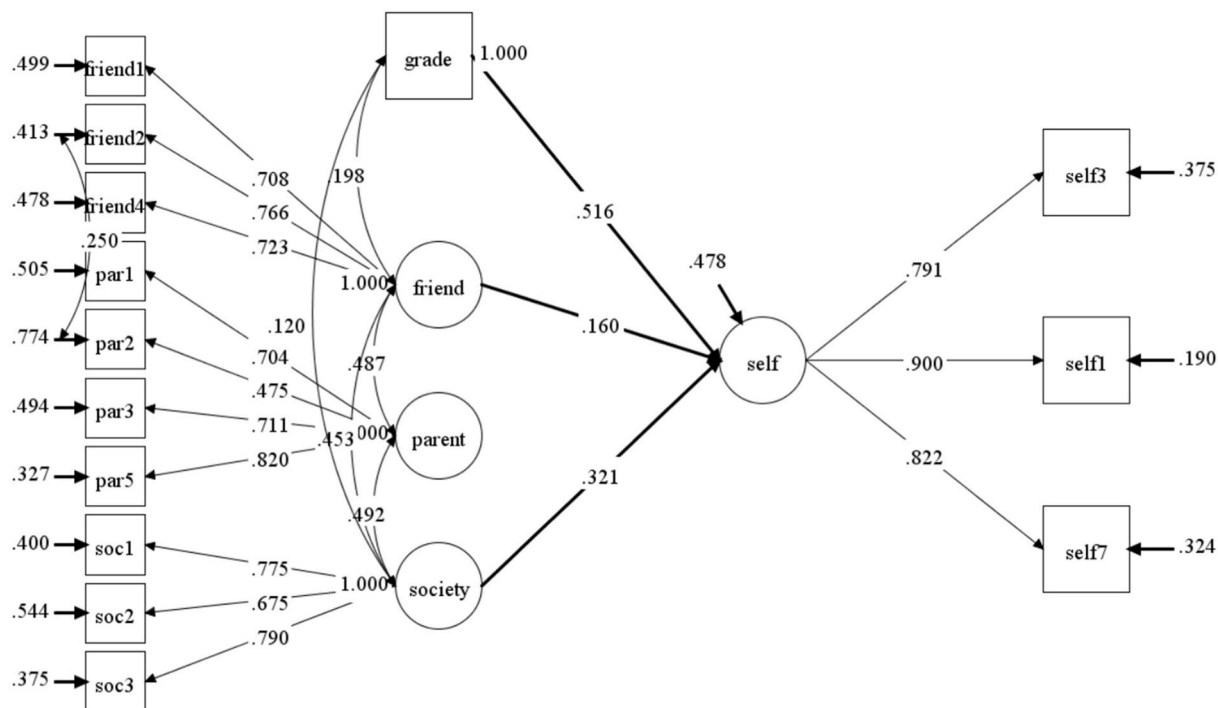


Fig. 4. Structural equation model, grades and out-of-school motivational factors predicting L2 self-concept, LOTEs group.

Grades predicted the students’ current L2 self-concept to the greatest extent, which is in line with the previous research (Chao, McInerney, & Bai, 2019; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Härmälä, Leontjev, & Kangasvieri, 2017). This finding underscores the interrelationship between the formal appraisal of students’ performance and their current L2 self-concept. Thus, we shift our discussion to the role of formal education in the formation of students’ perceptions of themselves as users of L2s. As Mercer (2011) discussed, students’ perception of learning experiences such as their perception of achievement as success or failure depends on a variety of factors, teachers being, perhaps, the most prominent significant others mediating students’ L2 learning and, as a result, their current and future L2 self-concepts. Studying further how teachers mediate students’ experiences of grades, in turn, shaping the development of students’ L2 selves can be an interesting research direction. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) noted the apparent problem of grades having a strong impact on students’ L2 motivation, as they concentrate on the product rather than the process of learning. Admittedly, we have not studied the impact of other kinds of assessment, such as the formative assessment in the classroom. With the growing emphasis on formative assessment as a continuous process whose aim is to guide students’ learning in Finland (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2020), it would be an interesting direction for further research in Finland.

We argue that in addition to the ideal L2 self, it is also students’ current L2 self-concept that needs to be supported by the teacher. If students feel discouraged in their current abilities, i.e., their current L2 self-concept is hindered whereas their ideal L2 self is nurtured, this might not result in increased motivation to study a language. We, do not think their ideal L2 self will even be able to grow in this scenario. We will elaborate on the role of teachers in shaping students’ L2 self-concept in Section 7.

7. Conclusions

The goals of the study were (1) to explore empirically the relationships between students’ current L2 self-concept and their grades, parental encouragement, peer pressure, and societal expectations and (2) to find which factors among studied are the best predictors of student’ current L2 self-concept. We studied these separately for students of L2 English and LOTEs.

Both similarities and differences were found in the two groups. Namely, while the overall trends were similar in that both grades and societal expectations played the largest role in the formation of the students’ current L2 self-concept, in the LOTEs group, the role of parents and peers was more pronounced.

Even though we defined the relationships in the SEM models as unidirectional, we rather consider the relationship between students’ L2 self-concept and grades as reciprocal. The same should be true for the motivation from the teacher, should we have included this factor. We are not arguing that the teacher should nurture students’ selves with grades. Rather, seeing the teacher-student relationships as contributing to both students’ self-concepts and learning outcomes (Chao, McInerney, & Bai, 2019; Mercer, 2011; Wubbels, Brekelmans, Mainhard, den Brok, & van Tartwijk, 2016), we propose that teachers help students enhance their L2 self-concepts such that students become motivated (see Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012). This should then result in improved learning outcomes, in turn, feeding back to shaping of students’ L2 current and ideal selves. In other words, we

propose that teachers can take the role of mediating and guiding the students' current L2 self-concept. This can be done from two angles. First, considering the role of society in shaping students' current L2 self-concept, teachers (and parents and peers alike) can use this to guide students, building on the importance of knowing languages in society. Second, considering the previous research into teacher-student relationships (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008), teachers consciously using motivational strategies (such as eliciting students' retrospective self-evaluation and increasing students' expectancy of success), building on students' grades, can help students create a positive and high image of themselves as users and learners of the language. We further suggest that Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) ten commandments to teachers are relevant in this regard, giving teachers a list of important points to keep in mind in their teaching practice. Still, it remains to be seen whether and how such interactions with students shape their motivational self-system in the Finnish context. Future research could study the relationships we propose here among learner selves, teachers' guidance to students (and teachers' view of students' selves, their self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-confidence) and learning outcomes more comprehensively. Additionally, there is a need to study relationships as those as explored in this paper longitudinally. Quantitative designs can include latent growth curve modelling, allowing for tracing the interrelatedness of longitudinal changes in variables under study. A prerequisite for this could be studying how changes in students' current L2 self-concept lead to changes in their ideal and ought-to selves, as well as their learning process and outcomes (see Thorsen, Henry, & Cliffordson's (2017) argument). We suggest future research look into this. We further suggest, siding with Mercer (2011) and Ushioda (2017), that a qualitative orientation of such research is warranted. One interesting suggestion for a longitudinal qualitative design would be a narrative study using learning diaries. Such design, we propose, could make it possible to explore deeper how teachers support and enhance students' current L2 self-concept and how, as a result, students' motivation changes, in turn, changing teachers' assessment of students' performance. We hope that the present study produced a stronger basis for such further research.

Still, several limitations need to be mentioned. One of them is that we studied all languages other than English together. While there is a basis for our decision as we outlined earlier, the languages we studied still have their own histories in Finland. Hence, the picture for individual languages could be different from the generalised picture that we drew in the present study. Still, our decision was also practical, as the sample sizes for separate languages other than English were rather low (see Table 1) and would not have allowed us to build reliable models. Furthermore, we did not compare the differences between the two samples, LOTEs and English, in a SEM model, instead observing similarities and differences between them. Additionally, the instrument in the study was rather long, which might have affected the reliability of the students' answers. We note, still, that our study of multivariate outliers should have minimised the possibility of this happening. Finally, to be able to claim more strongly that the current L2 self-concept shapes students' motivation, learning processes and products, and leads to changes in L2 ideal and ought-to selves, longitudinal qualitative and quantitative designs are needed following students through the years of their school education. This latter is an ambitious project, but it can be essential for strengthening the argument that we made in this study.

Endnotes

1) The problem with using chi-square index as the sole indicator of model fit is that the larger the sample, the more difficult it is to obtain a non-significant Chi-square value (e.g., Fayers & Machin, 2016). In this study, we used the normed Chi-square (Chi-square value divided by the degrees of freedom). The normed Chi-square for the English only group was 3.43 and for LOTEs group, 1.45.

Author statement

Teija Kangasvieri is responsible for conceptualisation, methodology, project administration, validation, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, and writing of the original manuscript and its revised version.

Dmitri Leontjev is responsible for methodology, formal analysis, and writing of the original manuscript and its revised version.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Leena Polenov for her invaluable practical assistance as we worked on the manuscript. We wish to thank Professor Asko Tolvanen for his advice on the models.

Appendix A. Questionnaire items in the study

Item	Wording
Current L2 self-concept	
SELF1	I am really good at this language.
SELF3	I can write this language well.
SELF7	Studying this language is easy.
Peer pressure	
FRIEND1	My friends think that studying this language is important.
FRIEND2	My friends encourage me to learn this language
FRIEND4	My friends have a positive impact on my studying this language.

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Item	Wording
Parental encouragement	
PARENT1	My parents try to help me to learn this language.
PARENT2	My parents urge me to seek help from my teacher if I am having problems with this language.
PARENT3	My parents are very interested in everything I do in this language class.
PARENT5	My parents encourage me to practice this language as much as possible.
Societal expectations	
SOCIETY1	I study this language because all educated people should speak it.
SOCIETY2	All Finnish people should speak this language.
SOCIETY3	Proficiency in this language is a part of general culture.

Appendix B. Standardised estimates, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, the English only group

	Estimate	95% CI		Sig.*
		Lower	Upper	
SELF BY				
SELF1	.890	.857	.923	
SELF3	.819	.778	.860	
SELF7	.881	.849	.914	
FRIEND BY				
FRIEND1	.716	.654	.779	
FRIEND2	.669	.605	.734	
FRIEND4	.741	.683	.799	
PARENT BY				
PARENT1	.729	.673	.785	
PARENT2	.639	.574	.703	
PARENT3	.620	.559	.681	
PARENT5	.805	.759	.852	
SOCIETY BY				
SOC1	.802	.754	.850	
SOC2	.821	.782	.860	
SOC3	.870	.834	.905	
PARENT2 WITH FRIEND2				
	.285	.191	.379	

*p < .001 unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix C. Standardised estimates, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, LOTEs group

	Estimate	95% CI		Sig.*
		Lower	Upper	
SELF BY				
SELF1	.876	.842	.910	
SELF3	.807	.762	.851	
SELF7	.837	.788	.885	
FRIEND BY				
FRIEND1	.706	.629	.784	
FRIEND2	.767	.700	.835	
FRIEND4	.723	.649	.797	
PARENT BY				
PARENT1	.704	.638	.771	
PARENT2	.476	.391	.560	
PARENT3	.710	.649	.772	
PARENT5	.821	.766	.875	
SOCIETY BY				
SOC1	.773	.711	.835	
SOC2	.673	.604	.742	
SOC3	.794	.736	.851	
PARENT2 WITH FRIEND2				
	.251	.142	.359	

*p < .001 unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix D. Standardised estimates in the structural equation model, regression lines only, the English group

	Estimate	95% CI		Sig.*
		Lower	Upper	
SELF ON				
FRIEND	.059	-.065	.182	.350
PARENT	-.062	-.175	.052	.288
SOCIETY	.250	.142	.358	
GRADE	.516	.441	.591	

*p < .001 unless otherwise indicated

Appendix E. Standardised estimates in the structural equation model, the LOTEs group

	Estimate	95% CI		Sig.*
		Lower	Upper	
SELF ON				
FRIEND	.160	.047	.273	.006
PARENT	.014	-.089	.117	.786
SOCIETY	.321	.213	.429	
GRADE	.516	.449	.583	

*p < .001 unless otherwise indicated.

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