



Please cite this paper as follows:

Rashidi, N., & Esmaceli, F. (2023). EFL university students' journey in claiming their foreign language identity. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 168-186. <https://doi.org/10.22055/RALS.2023.18075>

## Research Paper

# EFL University Students' Journey in Claiming Their Foreign Language Identity

Naser Rashidi<sup>1</sup> & Fatemeh Esmaceli<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author; Department of Linguistics and Foreign Languages, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran; [naser.rashidi@shirazu.ac.ir](mailto:naser.rashidi@shirazu.ac.ir)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Linguistics and Foreign Languages, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran; [esmaili9531513@shirazu.ac.ir](mailto:esmaili9531513@shirazu.ac.ir)

Received: 15/07/2022

Accepted: 17/11/2022

## Abstract

Identity and agency, based on the related literature, are the central parts of any learning activities, especially for language instruction. Following a mixed-methods design, identity options and their related indicators were studied among EFL university students. To this end, a sociodemographic-based questionnaire and four writing tasks were utilized as the instruments, which were filled out by 334 EFL university students. The data were then analyzed through a six-phase thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Having deployed a concurrent transformative strategy, the researchers transformed the extracted codes and themes into numbers, then analyzed them descriptively and inferentially. The results of the study showed that five identity options were dominant among the participants. Four identity indicators of "native language", "gender", "major", and "proficiency level" were also found to significantly correlate with the five identity options and affect their intensity and salience. Our findings demonstrated that language learning is a process of constant and continuous negotiation of self-positioning and repositioning. The study also showed that identity options are determined by students' past trajectories, social and relational contexts, challenges, and cultural-based shared perceptions. The study suggests that learners' identities and histories are strategically implemented in pedagogy to develop a supportive space for the students to exploit their potential.

**Keywords:** Identity; Familial Option; Social Option; Cultural Option; National Option; Religious Option; Social and Relational Context.

## 1. Introduction

Language learning is a complex process demanding not only exchanging knowledge and information but also requiring linguistic and cognitive resources for identity (re)construction. Moreover, full participation in any community of practice involves "becoming a full member of the community (target language community) and developing a sense of identity as a master practitioner" (Day, 2002, p. 16). Likewise, a full member of the community demands that learners have "access to information, resources, and the opportunities for participation" (Day, 2002, p. 15). This access seems to be mediated by learners' identities and agencies since the process of language learning comprises a particular community of practice, wherein language learners have their legitimate reasons and purposes for participation, and they see themselves legitimate members or potential members to communicate through that language. Learning, meaning, and identity are three concepts interwoven in the community of second/foreign language learners.

Interest in the relationship between language and identity goes back to the late 1990s with the studies of researchers such as Hansen and Liu (1997), McNamara (1997), Norton (1997), and Ivanic (1998). These studies were, in fact, a foundation for investigating the relationship between language and identity in language learning in the 1990s, which has resulted in a new paradigm in this field. Language use and identity denote that identity is "a socially constituted, reflexive, and dynamic product of the social, historical, and political contexts of an individual's lived experiences" (Hall



& Brown-Thirston, 2011, p. 31). Investigating identity in relation to language is the point at which research enters the field of pragmalinguistics, for which sociocultural context is a key factor (Block, 2014).

Having emphasized the role played by communicative processes in developing individuals' identities, Zenker (2013, p.1) argues that "memberships in social groups and categories", individual's "senses of (spatial as well as social) belonging", "their understandings of who they are", and "their positions generally in the world, as seen by themselves and ascribed to them by others" are among the factors which construct and shape individual identities. Identity exploration among EFL university students, cannot be done without considering their communicative processes, their memberships in social groups and categories, and their personal or social histories.

In fact, one of the main characteristics of identities is that they are multiple and complex and as emphasized by Jackson (2014, p. 131) "individuals have multiple identities, asserting different aspects of themselves in diverse social and cultural contexts and circumstances". She also adds that identities are being differentiated in terms of salience and intensity, which means that identities differ in "the degree to which an identity is prominent or stands out to us in a given situation" (Oetzel, 2009, p. 59). Identities equally differ in terms of their degree of significance, which is called identity's intensity (Collier-Thomas & Turner, 1994). Accordingly, we assume students' identities have various dimensions whose intensity and salience differ from situation to situation and from person to person.

The significance of the role played by language can be clarified by considering the fact that languages are "flexible and pervasive symbolic resources" and the most "important communicative means" in representing identity (Zenker, 2013, p. 1). Hence, individuals are constantly re-structuring "what is valued and what is legitimized" according to their "ethnicity, religion, language and sexual orientation to (re)position and reconstruct the undesirable imposed identities" (Shin, 2016, p. 33). In educational settings, identity is approached as the main component in both applied linguistics and critical pedagogy and is the most important causative factor for language learning processes, outcomes, and academic achievements (e.g., Gee, 2004; Norton, 2013; Norton Peirce, 1995; Toohey, Manyak, & Day, 2007). In fact, it is students' identity and agency that mediate between instructional resources presented by teachers and their perceptions and internalized knowledge. Likewise, identity can be considered a key factor in facilitating or impeding learning processes.

Moreover, achievement and underachievement patterns are said to be highly associated with identity negotiation, investment, and affirmation (Cummins et al., 2015). The importance of identity for academic outcomes is such that it is called "identities of competence" by Manyak (2004). The related literature illustrates that societal power and its influence on identity negotiation patterns can be seen to be the main causes of students' underachievement, especially the ones from lower social communities with discrimination and limited educational and professional opportunities (Cummins et al., 2015).

Identity in educational settings has been approached at two macro and micro levels. At the macro level, identity is mainly investigated in its wider sociocultural, political, and social contexts (e.g., Alimorad, 2014; 2015; Brown & Cheek, 2017; Norton, 1997; Rubinfeld et al., 2006; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015; Yazan, 2019; Zotos, Moon, & Shultz, 2020). At the micro level, on the other hand, isolated variables have been documented and described mainly out of their wider contexts (e.g. Anagnost, 2008; Boonchum, 2009; Brown & Cheek, 2017; De Castro, 2021). A close review of the literature on identity in educational settings, however, reveals that identity is highly complex in which "unique combinations of life experience, connections and interactions overlap, giving way to multiple identities" (Vasilopoulos, 2015, p. 62). Such a perspective, in effect, points to the main aspect of the sociocultural perspective on identity which comprises the theoretical framework based on which the present study was developed.

A sociocultural perspective regards identity as a complex, multiple, both dynamic and stable construct, both avowed and ascribed, variable in strength and salience, and both verbal and non-verbal (Jackson, 2014). Meanwhile, socialization is the main process through which identity is formed (Jackson, 2014). From a sociocultural perspective, family and native language, communities of practices, and more importantly, class movement and foreign language experiences are the most important factors to influence the (re)structuring of the identity of learners (Block, 2014).

Moreover, identity may differ from individual to individual according to its salience and intensity. Here, we can refer to identity options, which show various choices taken by people to intensify one dimension of identity over other dimensions in a particular situational context. Identity options may also be related to various identity indicators and

variables. This issue is more critical in educational settings wherein the marginalized learners are unduly underachieving not because of their low levels of intelligence or lack of perseverance and effort but due to their identity options and identity-related indicators.

The related literature, in effect, shows that there are few studies, in which the salience and intensity of EFL university students' identity have been investigated. In fact, the researchers could not find any study related to identity options among EFL university students. The particularity of EFL university students who are living in the Middle East is that their life stories are different since they have experienced war, heavy economic sanctions, or even a high rate of inflation. Moreover, Teaching General English in university contexts for more than five years, the researchers hypothesized that students with lower socioeconomic status or with a marginalized background had lower class-involvement, even though they were asked to express their ideas in their native language. In this regard, there is a rich body of literature in which the relationships between identity and sociodemographic backgrounds have been recognized (e.g., Liu, 2015; Shin, 2016; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015).

Moreover, the researchers' experiences of teaching have led them to reconsider the problem that students who are studying in a situation like Iran or Iraq have their own unique life experiences, connection, and interaction due to sociocultural contexts, their sociodemographic features, lack of authentic situation for using English, experiences of war, etc. which led the researchers to see how identity indicators differ among university students in terms of salience and intensity.

Meanwhile, there is a rich body of literature in which the relationships between identity and a vast verity of variables have been identified. For instance, identity was found to be associated with various individual, social, and contextual factors (e.g., Boonchum, 2009; Shin, 2016; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015; Zotos, Moon, & Shultz, 2020), as well as past experiences and trajectories (e.g., Shin, 2016; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015), relational contexts (e.g., Lane et al., 2019; Martin, 2020; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015), knowledge and discourses (e.g., Liu, 2015; Meo & Tarabini, 2020; Shin, 2016; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Villegas, et al., 2020; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015; Zotos, Moon, & Shultz, 2020), sociodemographic backgrounds (e.g., Liu, 2015; Shin, 2016; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015), and agency (e.g., Vasilopoulos, 2015; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015).

Regarding the significance of the study, it can be argued that learners' identity options are related to their strengths, challenges, innate abilities, and capacities to learn. In effect, it is the learner's identity that mediates between educational settings (teacher, classmates, materials) and their achievements. Conducting this study also may provide us with the factors contributing to students' identity options, and the challenges they may face, which in turn may provide some pedagogical support for educators in developing educational programs and syllabuses.

The aforementioned issues motivated the researchers to develop a study from the sociocultural perspective. In particular, we approached learners' identity as a sociocultural phenomenon in which learners' identity merges into the educational settings wherein their social exchanges and life histories lead them to have various identity options. Accordingly, the study followed several objectives: First, to investigate whether individual and contextual factors make any differences in identity options among university students; second, to identify the identity indicators which lead to various identity salience and intensity among the learners, and finally, to examine if the recognized identity indicators contribute to their identity options. To this end, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What factors contribute to EFL university students' identity formation?
2. What identity options can be developed out of the contributing factors?
3. Is there any relationship between EFL university students' identity options and their identity indicators (gender, age, major, native language, and English proficiency level)?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Design and Context of the Study

Following a mixed-methods design (concurrent transformative strategy), the researchers explored foreign language identity manifestation among 118 Iranian university students of General English and 206 Iraqi university students of Reading 1. It is worth mentioning that both GE and Reading1 included the four skills with the centrality of reading comprehension. The main objectives of the courses were to enable the students to read effectively, improve their comprehension, use efficient reading strategies, and build vocabulary. The courses are usually taken in the first year and second semester of the undergraduate program.

It is worth mentioning that we followed the concurrent transformative strategy, in which the codes (identity indicators) and themes (identity options) were created qualitatively, followed by counting the number of times they occurred in the text data, which then were turned into percentages. This strategy enabled us to see which identity indicators (codes) and identity options (themes) are more associated, and which one is more dominant among the cohort of EFL university students.

### 2.2. Participants of the Study

The population of the study was EFL university students. For the purpose of the study, we utilized purposive sampling, in which 118 Iranian EFL Shiraz university students who had taken the GE course with the researchers, and 206 Iraqi EFL Samara university students who had taken Reading 1 were selected as the participants of the study. The criteria for selecting the students who had taken the GE course were to include students from different majors, background knowledge, age, and various English proficiency levels. It should be noted that the GE is an obligatory course presented to all students entering Shiraz University, regardless of their majors. The Iraqi EFL university students needed to know English to facilitate the process of communication between the students and researchers. Table 1 shows the included participants.

Table 1. *Participants of the Study*

Participants	Number of Participants	Age	Native language	Gender	Majors
Iranian EFL University Students	118	18-39	Persian (80%) Arabic (10%) Turkish (10%)	Female (77.8%) Males (22.2%)	Arts-related majors, Science & Math-related majors, Medical-related majors, Literature, Language, & Social Sciences
Iraqi EFL University Students	206	18-40	Arabic (100%)	Female (52.5%) Male (47.5%)	English Language (teaching & translation)
Total	324	18-40	Persian (30%) Arabic (67%) Turkish (3%)	Female (62%) Male (38%)	Various

As Table 1 shows, the participants of the study included 38% male and 62% female University students with the age range between 18 and 40. Meanwhile, 30% of the participants were Persian, 67% were Arabic, and 3% were Turkish native speakers.

### 2.3. Instrumentations

For gathering the required data, four writing tasks and a socio-demographic-based questionnaire developed by the researchers were employed. Table 2 summarizes the details related to the used instruments:

Table 2. *The Data Collection Instruments*

Instruments	Components of the Instrument	Details of the Instrument	Justification & Purpose
Writing tasks	Four topics were given to students to write between 50 and 70 words. The topics were developed using the related literature (i.e., the	Topics: - Traditions and customs of their country;	To reveal some aspects of the learners' identity

	questions which were employed by the previous studies) (e.g., Amireault, 2020; Brown, 2017; Park, 2012). The main objective of the topics was to cover students' ideas regarding culture, misconceptions or their background knowledge, the roles of men and women, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An important experience from their childhood that has influenced their identity;</li> <li>- A place they will never forget;</li> <li>- Description of a celebration;</li> <li>- The kinds of things make their face red with anger.</li> </ul>	
Sociodemographic-based questionnaire	A questionnaire was developed by the researchers to gather data on the learners' age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, major, native language, other languages, experiences of learning another language or living abroad, job, marital status, hometown, parents' education and job, etc.	The students were asked to provide some details regarding the requested items in Persian or English. Some questionnaire items were orally asked of some participants since it had some ambiguities for them, and they were not certain how to express themselves. Particularly they talked or wrote about their definition of their own identity, and its changes during the past, their experiences and motivation for learning English or French, their cultural and subcultural misconceptions, and also gender, cultural, ethnic, and social group identities.	It is crucial since such information may uncover for us some fundamental aspects of identity

The questionnaire, in effect, helped us to gather the data on students' age, gender, native language, additional languages, education level, nationality, discipline and disciplinary group, living area (city, town, village), marital status, social role (studying or working), the experience of learning English or living in a region wherein English is considered as a native language, English proficiency level, and family backgrounds. The items of the questionnaire were developed using the related literature to reveal students' identities in academic settings.

The four writing topics were developed using the related literature (i.e., the questions which were employed by the previous studies) (e.g., Amireault, 2020; Brown & Cheek, 2017; Park, 2012), in order to cover students' ideas regarding culture, misconceptions or their background knowledge, the roles of men and women, their adversities and challenges, etc.

#### 2.4. Data Collection Procedures

The data were gathered from October 6th, 2020 to October 7th, 2021 using a questionnaire and four writing topics. To this end, first, a comprehensive sociodemographic google doc form-based questionnaire was developed, and the students were asked to fill it out. As Table 2 shows, the questionnaire was utilized to gather the data related to learners' age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, major, native language, other languages, experiences of learning another language or living abroad, hometown, etc. The students also took four writing tasks, in which the students had to present some narratives on the asked topics given in Table 2.

The utilized items in the questionnaire and the topics were extracted from previous studies (e.g. Amireault, 2020; Brown & Cheek, 2017; Park, 2012). Moreover, the names used in this study are all pseudonyms to preserve the participants' anonymity. Meanwhile, the gathered writings were numbered from 1 to 324, and the samples from 1 to 731 to facilitate the analysis processes, and for further reference. The referred extracts were selected randomly as a presentation of the developed identity variables dominant among learners.

#### 2.5. Data Analysis Procedures

After gathering the data, the participants' sociodemographic information collected from the questionnaire was tabulated, summarized, and put into SPSS21, based on which we could develop descriptive statistics of the participants. The gathered writings from the participants were entered in MAXQDA2020, wherein they were examined through a six-phase thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In analyzing the writings, we first overviewed the writings, followed by codification and re-codification, which led us to thematization. The codes, in effect, provided us with the indicators asserted by the participants as a projection of their identities. The themes also revealed to us the identity options taken by the students to intensify various dimensions of their identity, which were options rooted in the related identity indicators.



In analyzing the data, we utilized a concurrent transformative strategy, in which the codes and themes were developed qualitatively, followed by counting the number of times they occur in the text data.

For the purposes of the study and in line with the questionnaire, we categorized the writing tasks gathered from the participants according to several factors, namely, age, gender, native language, nationality, ethnicity, language learning experiences, majors, place of living, occupation, and educational levels. Such categorizations assisted us to recognize the participants' self-categorization, evaluation, and value-system in (re)constructing their positions based on which we could develop five identity options, that is to say, religious, cultural, national, social, and familial identity options.

Having tabulated, summarized, and coded the themes (identity options) along with the descriptive statics, we ran a multinomial logistic regression test to see if the recognized identity indicators significantly affect and even predict the participants' identity options.

## 2.6. Rigor of the Study

The confirmability and dependability of the study were ensured using rich and thick descriptions based on the questionnaire-related data and writing tasks in which different extracted themes were directly and vividly mentioned and asked in the questionnaire. Moreover, different steps for gathering and analyzing the data were transparently described and documented from the start of the study to the development and reporting of the results. Furthermore, to ensure the consistency of data analysis, we kept a meticulous record of the made assumptions, interpretations, memos, and notes in MAXQDA2020. The credibility of the study, on the other hand, was done through analyst triangulation in which another qualified researcher reviewed the collected data which showed us an 89% of likeness. In addition, member checking was utilized in which the data were shared with some participants (10% of them) who confirmed the presented findings.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Identity Variables

The descriptive statistics of the data gathered through the questionnaire were brought in Table 3. As Table 3 shows, 87% of the participants were single and 13% were married. A massive 70 percent of the participants were students of literature, language, and social science majors. Moreover, almost half of them were living in towns, and 61 percent were both working and studying. Meanwhile, a hefty 94 percent of the participants have learned English in private language schools, and almost half (47%) had intermediate levels.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of Socio-Demographic Information of the Participants*

Variables	Features	Percent
Marital status	Single	87%
	Married	13%
Majors	Art-Related Majors	10%
	Math and Science-Related Majors	7%
	Law and Politics-Related Majors	3%
	Wildlife Biology and Veterinary	3%
	Technology and Engineering Majors	7%
	Literature, Language, and Social Science Majors	70%
Place of living	Big cities	29%
	Towns	49%
	Villages	22%
Occupation	Both Studying & Working	61%
	Only Student	39%
Language learning experiences	Learning in Private Language Institutes	94%
	No Previous Learning	6%
Native language	Persian	34%
	Turkish	2%
	Arabic	64%
Foreign language	Only English	94%
	Both English & French	6%

English Proficiency Level	Beginner	22%
	Elementary	24%
	Intermediate	47%
	Advanced	7%

Having coded and analyzed the data gathered from both questionnaire and writing tasks, we found the following variables and sub-variables, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *The Recognized Identity Variables and Sub-Variables*

Identity Variables	Sub-Variables
Demographic Characteristics	Age
	Gender
	Ethnicity
Familial & Individual Factors	Personality features
	Home
	Hardships & Challenges
	Attitudes, Desires, & Recognition
Society-Related Factors	Beliefs & Tenets
	Social Interactions & Friends
	Religion-related Issues (e.g. Holy Quran, Mecca, prayer, hijab, etc.)
Social-Related Factors	In-Group & Affiliation-Related Activities
	University, School, College, & Classmates
	Cultural Backgrounds (celebrations, heritages, attractions, etc.)

The data demonstrated individual and personal factors as a source of identity manifestation among university students. For example, extract number 19 written by Kennett is full of personal projections of identity (e.g. my childhood, my life, my sleep, my waking up, my talk, my father, we, our life, me).

From the time of my childhood to now. I felt .... Because I will never see a wish in my life fulfilled. My life .... Every event in my life is a failure. My sleep ..... My waking up ... My talk to people ... But I am certain .... My father death when my father died I was at .... I was ... My father death ... my spiritual growth because we need him our life .... (extract number 19)

Extract number 19, in effect, highlighted the familial and individual factors along with society-related variables for which beliefs, tenets, and religious issues are dominant. Extract number 93 from Thomasina, another Iraqi university student, showed repeated mention of her childhood, her familial relations, and her experiences with war and ISIS (terrorist attacks):

Well my childhood was an ordinary childhood ... I actually ... me when ISIS came and ... I mean we getting through a big ... my family learned me ... (extract number 93)

Extract number 93 shows how her childhood experiences have restructured her identity. Extract number 173 from Fitz, an Iranian 24-year-old female student, illustrates social and relational contexts, challenges, and background knowledge as the main factors in developing her current identity. The following is some part of her writing describing herself:

I live alone .... my life I had a strange childhood, .....Because the mother ... and my father - may God preserve him.....I have a sister who is older than me, and our house ... between my mother and my father, .....And after I entered high school, my academic level ... and I graduated from high school, and I owned a car, and I .....I am currently living in a miserable situation, and I love my Lord, and I try ...Frankly, I doubted myself a lot, and I ... (extract number 173)

Extract number 173, in effect, shows that her identity is rooted in her past trajectories, religion, personality-related factors, and social and relational contexts. Our results, in particular, suggest that students' identity has composed of four groups of variables, namely, demographic characteristics (age, gender, & ethnicity), familial and individual factors (personality features, home, hardships & challenges, attitudes, desires & recognition), society-related factors (beliefs & tenets, social interactions & friends, religion-related issues such as holy Quran, Mecca, prayer, hijab, etc.), and social-related factors (in-group & affiliation-related activities, university, school, college and classmates, cultural backgrounds (celebrations, heritages, attractions, etc.).

Table 5 provides us with the distribution of the three main variables of familial and individual factors, society-related factors, and social-related factors found as the codes in the writings written by the students.

Table 5. *Distribution of the Recognized Identity Variables*

Variables	Sub-Variables	Percentage	Percentage
Familial & Individual factors	Personality Features	23.19	
	Home	16.35	50.93
	Hardships & Challenges	41.29	
	Attitudes, Desires, & Recognition	19.17	
Society-related Factors	Beliefs & Tenets	27	
	Social Interactions & Friends	31.88	25.30
	Religion-related Issues (e.g. Holy Quran, Mecca, prayer, hijab, etc.)	30.35	
Social-related Factors	In-Group & Affiliation-Related Activities	10.77	
	University, School, College, & Classmates	60.77	23.77
	Cultural Backgrounds (celebrations, heritages, attractions, etc.)	39.23	

According to Table 5, familial and individual factors comprise a massive 51 percent of the codes, followed by society-related factors at 25.30 percent, and social-related factors at 23.77 percent.

### 3.2. Five Identity Options: Religious, Cultural, National, Social and Familial

Based on the obtained variables discussed in the previous section, we developed five main themes (identity options), that is, religious, cultural, national, social, and familial options. The participants with the family option considered their identities mainly in relation to the significant others like father, mother, grandparents, etc. for example, Steffane wrote (extract number 11):

My parents are the best mother and father in the world and I prefer my family over others. they raised me and taught me and spent time with me so that I could learn and thank God for this blessing (extract number 11)

The familial identity option, in effect, deals with some particular issues such as home and in-group individuation factors. According to the recognized themes and codes expressed by the students in their narratives, the familial identity option is also associated with attitudes, desire, recognition, and security. This option, in particular, puts much value on personal relationships, domestic roles, and significant others. Moreover, the participants with the familial option to identity were considerably influenced by hardships, challenges, or negative experiences related to family members such as the death of their beloved ones, their confrontation with ISIS, war, accident, home demolition, or sectarian issues. The familial identity option is also composed of ethnicity and personality-related issues like anxiety, motivation, fear, doubt, self-confidence, etc.

The social identity option deals with the community of practice, in-group and affiliation-related activities. It is also associated with social roles and relations. Participants with the social option defined their identities in relation to their social roles and relations, their studies, work, friendships, and especially they talked about their schools, universities, and their friends to reveal their identities. As an example, Stormy said (extract number 49):

we are only the train that goes on that rail. . . . my university is. . . it is very beautiful. , I even felt that . . . for me. I entered the department head's room . . . He was a very good person. Then I met my . . . I love my university, my professors and my friends . . . (extract number 49).

The third option, i.e., cultural identity option, involves the cultural heritage of a country, and provides cultural backgrounds represented in some cultural celebrations like Nowruz, Yelda, Charshanbe Soori, etc. (which are some national formal holidays, especially among Iranian people). Some participants, in effect, defined themselves in relation to some cultural factors. For example, Mooney (extract number 203) claimed "we come from a culturally rich country and there are so many historical and cultural legacies in our country with a history of more than 2500 years". Hence, the participants with the cultural-oriented identity described themselves in relation to the cultural attractions.

The next option for identity, highly related to cultural and attitudinal dimensions of identity, is the religious identity option which addresses the beliefs and tenets of a group of people. Some participants, in describing themselves,



highlighted Muslim-related challenges, worries and concerns such as holy Quran, Mecca, religious celebrations, hijab, etc. As an illustration, Robinia mentioned (extract number 231):

I am a Muslim and for me visting Makkah, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is really pleasing. Every Muslim loves to go to Makkah, .... The most important thing by which I can express myself is being a Muslim (extract number 231)

Finally, the national identity option considers in-group and community of practices as the dominant identity variables, for which resources and issues of power are also important. In particular, the participants with the national option to identity expressed themselves in relation to their country, commonalities of practices shared among them(...)national holiday, significance of some cities as a sign of a nation, some national symbols, etc. For instance, Dag with a national option to identity stated (extract number 297):

I am an Iraqi person and I really care about my country, my native language and my nationality...I am an Arab...a Muslim...I wanna be useful for my country in future... (extract number 297)

Table 6. *Conceptualization of the Participants' Identity Options*

Identity Options (themes)	Conceptualization	Related Codes
Religious	Religious identity option as a part of identity system defines participants in relation to their beliefs and tenets.	Beliefs & Tenets Religion-related issues (e.g. holy Quran, Mecca, prayer, hijab, religious celebrations, sectarian issues etc.)
Cultural	Learners with Cultural identity option consider themselves highly in relation to their country-based heritage and cultural backgrounds represented in some cultural celebrations like Nowruz, Yelda, Charshanbe Soori, etc.	Cultural Backgrounds (celebrations, heritages, attractions, etc.) Cultural symbols; Attractions and background of the learners;
National	Learners with national identity option express themselves in relation to their country, commonalities of practices shared among them(...)national holiday, significance of some cities as a sign of a nation, some national symbols, etc.	Country, homeland, and values associated with the place one is living; Ethnicity;
Social	Social identity option is highly associated with social factors. Learners with a dominant social identity option define themselves in relation to a community of practice and highlight their social roles, in-group and affiliation-related activities.	Social interactions & friends In-group & affiliation-related activities; University, School, College, & Classmates; Social roles and activities; Community and commonalities of practices shared among them as a community (students, classmates, co-workers, etc.);
Familial	Personal or familial identity option refers to participants' identity system based on which they define themselves in relation to their particular individual characteristics, their domestic roles, significant others, relational contexts and the hardships or challenges they have experienced in related to their family and beloved ones.	Familial & individual factors; Personality features (e.g. self-confidence, ambiguity tolerance, motivation, fear and doubt); Home, Hardships, challenges, & adversities experienced by the learners;

As Table 6 shows, we developed five identity options of "religious", "cultural", "national", "social", and "familial" based on the observed frequencies and percentages of various codes. Table 7 shows the distribution of various identity options among the participants. Overall, the two social and familial identity options comprise just over a quarter, followed by cultural one which is over one in five (21.9%). The religious and national identity options constitute 15.1% and 11.4%, respectively.

In order to explore if there is a significant relationship between background knowledge and identity option, we ran a multinomial logistic regression. As Table 8 shows, *the p-value* is .543 and is, therefore, not statistically significant. Based on this measure, the model fits the data well. It means that background knowledge well predicts the identity options among EFL university students.

Table 7. *Distribution of Various Identity Options*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	=religious	49	15.1	15.1
	=cultural	71	21.9	37.0
	=national	37	11.4	48.5
	social	84	25.9	74.4
	=familial	83	25.6	100.0
	Total	324	100.0	100.0

Table 8. *Goodness-of-fit of the Predictability of Independent Variables on Identity Options*

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	125.280	524	.543
Deviance	161.260	524	.047

Table 9 demonstrates whether independent variables (age, gender, major, native language, & proficiency level) predict significantly the identity options taken by the students. Table 9, in effect, shows that except for the variable "age", the p-values of all other variables (gender, major, native language, and proficiency level) indicate that the associated Chi-square values are sufficiently large, given the degrees of freedom, since all the B-coefficients associated with each of the independent variables are below the cut-score of .05. Thus, there is a significant relationship between the independent variables of gender, major, native language, and proficiency level and all five identity options.

Table 9. *The Impacts of Various Identity Variables to Predict the Identity Options*

Effect	Model Fitting Criteria		Likelihood Ratio Tests		
	<i>-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model</i>		<i>Chi-Square</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Intercept	452.532		.000	0	.
Age	460.295		7.763	4	.101
Gender	510.728		58.195	4	.000
Major	539.571		87.039	20	.000
Native Language	480.886		28.354	8	.000
Proficiency Level	570.831		118.299	12	.000

Table 10 shows the effect of each identity indicator (age, gender, major, native language, & proficiency level) on the identity options taken by the EFL university students. Table 10 demonstrates gender (2) ( $P=.041$ ), major (1) ( $P=.049$ ), native language (3) ( $P=.045$ ), and proficiency levels (1) ( $P=.054$ ) can predict the religious identity options, significantly. In other words, male EFL students whose native language was Arabic, and who were studying arts-related majors with a proficiency level of beginner, are more likely to take the religious identity option. The cultural option identity can be predicted by age ( $p=.49$ ), majors (6) ( $P=.046$ ), native language (1) (.045), and proficiency levels (3 & 4) ( $P=.038$  & .050). It means that Persian students of higher ages, whose proficiency level is intermediate or higher, and who are studying literature and social sciences are more likely to adopt the cultural identity option. The national identity option can also be predicated by age ( $P=.050$ ), gender (2) ( $P=.038$ ), major (5) ( $P=.012$ ), and proficiency level (1) ( $P=.023$ ). Accordingly, male EFL students whose major was engineering and technology with the lowest proficiency level of beginner were more likely to choose the national identity option. The social identity option can be predicted by major (2 & 6) ( $p=.037$  & .033), native language (1) ( $p=.037$ ), and proficiency levels (3 & 4) ( $p=.044$  & .024). Likewise, the Persian participants whose majors were either science and math-related subjects or literature and social sciences, and the proficiency level of at least intermediate were more likely to select the social identity option. The familial identity option can be predicated by age ( $p=.019$ ), gender (2) ( $p=.031$ ), major (2) (.047), native language (2) ( $p=.029$ ), native language (3) ( $p=.039$ ), and proficiency level (2) ( $p=.021$ ), significantly. Hence, the male EFL students whose major was science and math-related issues with either Turkish or Arabic native language, and the proficiency level of elementary were more likely to select this identity option.

Table 10. *The Estimates of Each Independent Variable to Predict the Identity Options*

Identity		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
								<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bound</i>
=religious	Intercept	.823	1.321	2.928	1	.190			
	age	.834	1.392	4.226	1	.129	1.231	1.436	1.387
	[gender=1.00]	.693	1.439	4.231	1	.329	1.158	1.290	1.431
	[gender=2.00]	.398	1.673	5.451	1	.041	1.627	1.324	1.673
	[major=1.00]	.239	1.431	4.164	5	.049	1.345	1.469	1.239
	[major=2.00]	.245	.329	2.239	5	.321	1.391	1.239	1.873
	[major=3.00]	-.239	.413	8.303	5	.069	.469	.345	1.789
	[major=4.00]	.349	.025	1.164	5	.341	1.123	1.567	1.080
	[major=5.00]	-.321	.468	9.076	5	.073	.289	.341	2.199
	[major=6.00]	-.211	.029	.057	5	.439	.111	.345	1.051
	[native language=1.00]	.439	.324	.401	2	.129	1.412	1.567	2.317
	[native language=2.00]	.219	.262	.267	2	.349	1.321	1.765	1.915
	[native language=3.00]	.301	.481	5.361	2	.045	2.321	1.186	1.812
	[proficiency level=1.00]	-.239	.358	1.311	3	.054	.398	.330	1.239
	[proficiency level=2.00]	.349	.340	1.826	3	.312	1.131	1.345	2.435
	[proficiency level=3.00]	-.387	.345	.016	3	.074	.123	.479	1.531
	[proficiency level=4.00]	.298	1.213	23.353	3	.093	1.321	1.153	1.987
=cultural	Intercept	.398	1.329	7.349	1	.065	1.328	.329	1.876
	age	.933	1.398	5.898	1	.049	2.356	.678	1.487
	[gender=1.00]	-.211	.439	.172	1	.653	.843	.396	1.983
	[gender=2.00]	-.643	.673	.873	1	.323	.478	.673	2.329
	[major=1.00]	.287	.345	2.387	5	.129	1.498	.763	1.976
	[major=2.00]	.197	.478	.765	5	.298	1.311	.431	1.876
	[major=3.00]	-.439	.378	.321	5	.098	.298	.165	2.431
	[major=4.00]	.869	.376	.512	5	.087	1.211	.239	1.568
	[major=5.00]	.391	.879	5.329	5	.079	1.987	.389	2.213
	[major=6.00]	.454	1.719	9.125	5	.046	2.011	.297	5.261
	[native language=1.00]	.673	.387	8.239	2	.045	2.469	.349	1.893
	[native language=2.00]	.736	1.167	7.398	2	.066	1.187	.321	1.386
	[native language=3.00]	.478	.698	.389	2	.061	1.234	.243	2.985
	[proficiency level=1.00]	1.239	.476	.321	3	.067	1.013	.387	3.489
	[proficiency level=2.00]	.349	.653	.431	3	.091	1.770	.768	2.349
	[proficiency level=3.00]	.470	.489	1.238	3	.038	1.881	.561	1.467
	[proficiency level=4.00]	.768	.543	1.321	3	.050	1.810	.763	2.435
=national	Intercept	.790	.349	6.431	1	.024	1.203	.112	2.366
	age	-.428	.139	1.738	1	.050	.873	.349	1.539
	[gender=1.00]	-.763	.675	1.203	1	.066	.685	.239	1.351
	[gender=2.00]	-.439	.698	1.239	1	.038	.983	.391	1.431
	[major=1.00]	-.387	.498	1.349	1	.055	.739	.297	1.201
	[major=2.00]	-.492	.479	2.394	1	.068	.879	.298	1.199
	[major=3.00]	.242	.534	7.407	1	.420	1.289	.101	1.289
	[major=4.00]	.440	1.391	2.581	1	.681	1.237	.363	2.398
	[major=5.00]	1.381	1.913	2.349	1	.012	1.343	.278	1.345
	[major=6.00]	1.103	1.548	3.783	1	.149	1.977	.137	1.234
	[native language=1.00]	1.021	1.394	2.666	1	.159	1.962	.398	1.489

	[native language=2.00]	.569	1.261	3.203	1	.152	1.365	.148	1.706	
	[native language=3.00]	.916	1.942	4.203	1	.376	1.939	.963	1.023	
	[proficiency level=1.00]	.576	1.243	2.214	1	.023	2.778	.156	2.322	
	[proficiency level=2.00]	.639	1.087	1.598	1	.060	1.398	.346	1.769	
	[proficiency level=3.00]	1.065	1.927	3.321	1	.057	1.298	.356	2.120	
	[proficiency level=4.00]	.539	1.236	2.223	1	.077	1.667	.356	2.329	
social	Intercept	1.239	1.736	3.201	1	.039	1.543	.398	1.085	
	age	1.145	1.133	3.190	1	.056	1.865	.627	1.122	
	[gender=1.00]	1.103	.747	2.177	1	.065	1.013	.686	3.040	
	[gender=2.00]	.571	.756	1.571	1	.061	1.770	.433	2.780	
	[major=1.00]	.421	.373	1.277	1	.064	1.524	.714	2.165	
	[major=2.00]	-.279	.482	1.334	1	.037	.757	.394	1.948	
	[major=3.00]	.893	.670	1.777	1	.083	2.443	.757	1.089	
	[major=4.00]	.119	.583	1.042	1	.081	1.126	.459	2.529	
	[major=5.00]	.943	.717	1.731	1	.088	2.569	.530	1.476	
	[major=6.00]	1.461	.682	4.592	1	.033	1.312	.133	1.411	
	[native language=1.00]	.879	.479	3.367	1	.037	1.935	.642	1.163	
	[native language=2.00]	.224	.378	1.950	1	.076	1.401	.157	2.231	
	[native language=3.00]	-.367	.266	1.064	1	.082	.409	.341	1.367	
	[proficiency level=1.00]	.431	.934	1.443	1	.065	1.373	.540	1.489	
	[proficiency level=2.00]	.569	.635	1.085	1	.098	1.767	.606	2.153	
	[proficiency level=3.00]	.498	.710	1.348	1	.044	1.150	.786	1.626	
	[proficiency level=4.00]	.487	.349	1.121	1	.024	1.203	.112	1.366	
	familial	Intercept	.534	.769	1.133	1	.316	1.309	.637	1.930
		age	.375	.937	1.239	1	.019	1.764	.982	1.066
		[gender=1.00]	.327	.368	2.761	1	.083	1.112	.540	1.288
[gender=2.00]		.647	1.357	1.944	1	.031	1.415	.702	2.852	
[major=1.00]		.412	1.127	2.788	1	.090	1.567	.349	1.341	
[major=2.00]		.929	1.718	2.226	1	.047	1.321	.336	1.593	
[major=3.00]		.843	1.706	1.821	1	.069	1.158	.340	1.631	
[major=4.00]		.438	1.733	1.051	1	.051	1.487	.421	1.368	
[major=5.00]		.297	1.025	1.164	1	.281	1.131	.478	1.680	
[major=6.00]		.287	.341	2.205	1	.061	1.760	.663	1.929	
[native language=1.00]		-.427	.413	1.303	1	.062	.797	.355	1.789	
[native language=2.00]		.863	.925	1.164	1	.029	1.345	.978	1.080	
[native language=3.00]		-.429	.568	2.076	1	.037	.579	.351	2.199	
[proficiency level=1.00]		-.107	.229	.457	1	.021	.693	.638	1.051	
[proficiency level=2.00]		.345	.394	.501	1	.526	1.601	.651	2.317	
[proficiency level=3.00]		.535	.662	1.267	1	.569	1.145	.685	1.915	
[proficiency level=4.00]		1.432	.481	1.361	1	.412	1.044	.186	1.812	

The classification statistics presented in Table 11 show which identity options were best predicted by the background knowledge. The religious identity option was correctly predicted by background knowledge 87.8%, the cultural identity option 35.2%, the national identity option 62.2%, the social identity option 77.4%, and the familial

identity option 36.1%, out of the times. Overall, the five variables of "age", "gender", "native language", "proficiency level", and "major" can predict identity options 57.4% of the time correctly.

Table 11. *Evaluation of the Logistic Regression Model*

Observed	Predicted					Percent Correct
	=religious	=cultural	=national	social	=familial	
=religious	43	5	0	1	0	87.8%
=cultural	13	25	18	7	8	35.2%
=national	3	8	23	0	3	62.2%
social	2	8	1	65	8	77.4%
=famillial	3	7	0	43	30	36.1%
Overall Percentage	19.8%	16.4%	13.0%	35.8%	15.1%	57.4%

#### 4. Discussion

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate identity-related variables in an EFL context in order to identify the dominant identity options among non-native university students and the variables correlated with those options. Based on the results, the following factors were recognized as the indicators of identity, especially in academic settings:

- Ethnographical and socio-economic status of the learners;
- Attitudinal, desire, and recognition issues highly associated with the familial option to identity;
- Country, homeland, and values associated with the place one is living;
- In-group individuation factors;
- Family and personal relationships;
- Hardships, challenges, and adversities experienced by the learners;
- Ethnicity and sectarian issues;
- Personality-related issues like self-confidence, ambiguity tolerance, motivation, fear, and doubt;
- Beliefs and tenets;
- Social roles and activities;
- Community and commonalities of practices shared among a particular group;
- National symbols;
- Cultural heritage, attractions, and background of the learners;

By considering the above identity indicators, we can assume the EFL context as a community of practice whose members are English language learners. Meanwhile, identity seems to be highly interwoven with the processes of language learning. Students' social and personal histories, their experiences of success or failure, and their past backgrounds are the factors to impact their learning processes. As the study showed, native language, proficiency level in English, majors, and gender of the participants are the factors significantly contributing to the salience and intensity of various dimensions of identity, which as a result lead to various identity options. We can argue that the impact of the recognized variables on the taken identity options may be associated with participation patterns in which the students follow their reasons and purposes. In such a situation, the students do not consider themselves legitimate or even the potential members to communicate through that language. Accordingly, it may negatively influence their learning potential, and it may result in unduly underachievement among the students.

Like the findings of many other studies, the results obtained demonstrated that identity is a complex construct that may be affected by various variables (e.g., Andreassen, Bjørndal, & Kovač, 2019; Enyedy, Goldberg, & Welsh, 2006; Jackson, 2014; Monrouxe & Rees, 2015; Nordstrom, 2020; Oyserman, 2009; Villegas, Varona & Sanchez, 2020; Zotos, Moon, & Shultz, 2020). It is worth emphasizing that the above variables should be considered in their particular

sociocultural, political, and social contexts. The importance of contexts is due to the achieved results in which we observed that the participants repeatedly referred to their past trajectories (experience of war, their home demolition, their challenges, their English proficiency) and power struggle in depicting their identities (e.g., extract number 93). Moreover, we observed imposed identities among the participants due to their religion, their English accent, their appearances, social situations, and their linguistic and cultural challenges (e.g., extract number 173). Hence, we need to consider the data in their contexts, especially when the students talked about their experiences of war or ISIS which happened in the Middle East. Moreover, the results of the study confirm other studies in which individuals' trajectories, aspiration, beliefs, background knowledge, and preferences influence their identity options (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Martin, 2020; Meo & Tarabini, 2020; Park, 2012; Shin, 2016; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Villegas, Varona, & Sanchez, 2020; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015). Hence, it is identity and agency which mediate between learning and perception.

The recognized identity indicators and variables are in line with many other studies which can provide us with evidence to assume identity as a social-oriented construct that is ever-changing and developing in sociocultural, political, and social contexts of an individual's lived experiences. The results demonstrated that identity is influenced by demographic features (age, gender, ethnicity), social factors (social roles & relations), society (beliefs & tenets), and individual characteristics (personality, challenges, hardships, attitudes & desires). Hence, identity apparently plays a crucial role since it mediates between students' perception and the presented material by teachers. In effect, the programs and syllabuses can be functional and effective when they have included the concerns and backgrounds of the targeted students. We found that the concerns of the participants were highly associated with their past challenges including war, ISIS, the death of their significant others, and their social or cultural backgrounds. It means that a program developed based on an international textbook, originally designed for the concerns of European students, cannot function in a situation like Iraq. Our findings may corroborate Taylor's (2013) model of identity, in which identity refers to "self-images performed by individuals for different purposes in particular social contexts" (p.10).

Identity to Taylor refers to a multidimensional construct that is composed of various internal and external factors. Meanwhile, individuals may mask or unmask different dimensions of their identities in different situations (e.g., their private, public, ideal or imposed identities) (e.g., Meo & Tarabini, 2020; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Busse, 2016; Vasilopoulos, 2015). Hence, the results of the study can be explained through the two concepts of "strategic identity" and "identity option" followed by some researchers (e.g., Gu & Lai, 2019; Park, 2012; Virkkula & Nikula, 2010; Wolff & De Costa, 2017). The two concepts indicated that identity is a "shifting nexus of multiple subject positions" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 35) in which individuals "based on (their) roles, responsibilities, participation, background, and aspirations" (Vasilopoulos, 2015, p. 62) choose to intensify or heighten a particular dimension of their multidimensional identity.

Having considered the great emphasis put by the participants in describing their identities in relation to some particular groups such as a specific educational setting, a religious group (Shiite or Sunni Muslims), a geographical territory (homeland, Iraq, Iran, names of some cities or regions), etc., the researchers identified that group membership and social factors may contribute to identity development (e.g., Andreasen, Bjørndal, & Kovač, 2020; Day, 2002; Gee, 2004; Martin, 2020; Nguyen & Dao, 2019; Nordstrom, 2020; Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007; Vallente, 2020; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Villegas, Varona, & Sanchez, 2020; Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015;). Meanwhile, group membership can be considered as a locus wherein social groups and categories, personal and social histories are interacting, which in turn leads to multiple identities and agencies, due to which students may resort to their identity negotiation, investment, and affirmation as a mechanism to enhance or impede learning processes.

In the light of the presented results above, identity was found to be multidimensional which differs from person to person in terms of salience and strength, which led the students to choose different identity options. Moreover, five identity options were recognized to be dominant among the Iranian and Iraqi university students, namely, "the religious option", "the national option", "the cultural option", "the social option" and "the familial option".

Accordingly, learners' identities should be approached at different levels and with various degrees of salience. Likewise, individual agency is considerably vital for any university program, and language courses are not an exception. Norton (1997) was among the first researchers who underscored the role played by agency and investment in language courses. The importance of agency, according to Vasilopoulos (2015), is due to the fact that it enables learners to intensify and navigate their identity options. Moreover, it may motivate the learners to accept or reject new identity roles by



participation, non-participation, or even resistance (Duff, 2012) in masking or unmasking multiple identities to assimilate or differentiate their identities. Such a mechanism may result in achievement patterns.

Accordingly, students' identity has been constructed through their membership in social categories, formed by institutions or society based on gender, major, religion, or background knowledge including the shared hardships and adversities they have experienced as members of the same community. Meanwhile, students' identification levels are integrated and intertwined with power and status, which have influenced their self-perception. These issues cannot be ineffective for the achievement or underachievement of students in general, and university students in particular. However, we recognized and explained the variables contributing to learners' identities, and we could develop five identity options taken by them depending on the situational contexts, they comprise learners' preoccupations. It means that if the educational system does not implement students' concerns and backgrounds, it cannot realize their potential, whose repercussions can impact society. The situation can be more critical if we have implemented international materials, which have been developed based on the concerns of individuals. As an illustration, the participants of the study referred to ISIS, war, experiences of murder, demolition, or some national and cultural celebrations such as Charshanbesoori, Nowruz, or religious-related issues, including Muslims, Mecca, religious holidays, etc. which shows how important are these issues to them, and if the programs and syllabuses developed for them do not include their concerns, to students, the class may appear boring, the teacher unknowledgeable with low expertise, or even they may consider themselves as being unmotivated, without self-confidence and purpose. Henceforth, it wastes the capital of both the educational system and students.

Based on this study, identity is a process of choice-making negotiated by individuals based on their preferences. In fact, students try to define and reconstruct their identity in relation to their perspectives, attitudes, internal, and external factors. Likewise, they justify and explicate their various identity preferences in relation to their particular backgrounds, social factors, adversities, and challenges, as well as sociocultural contexts wherein they are living, studying, or working.

Hence, learner's identity can be viewed as a mediating mechanism through which learners can exert their choice-making, decision-making, problem-solving, goal-setting, and attainment. Likewise, the process of curricula development needs to base on targeted students' identity indicators and options by offering them choice-making opportunities.

## 5. Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

Language learning as a social practice is a complex process affected by various internal, external, social, and relational factors. Language learning is a process for restructuring identity among learners. The process of identity repositioning cannot be independent of the past, present, and future wherein students' past trajectories, their community of practices, skills, and new knowledge they are learning, and their aspiration and desired identities are negotiated. Meanwhile, students' background knowledge, including their school experiences, challenges, ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, gender, majors, and proficiency level in English is among the factors influential in restructuring what they assume to be valued and legitimized.

The findings of the study may be of great value for education in general and language teaching and learning in particular. Especially, we need to consider the sociocultural, political, and social context wherein language teaching and learning is going to happen. It is highly crucial since economic, religious, cultural, and racial hegemony may impose its restrictions. In other words, learners' background knowledge and particularly their past trajectories may make huge differences to see themselves as legitimate to learn a new language, and to open up new perspectives for study, participation, or non-participation in classroom tasks.

It should be noted that any lessons and any curriculum programs need to be developed by considering students' agency including their life histories, challenges, successes or failures, and, their identity options, since their agency may lead them to select their own language, community of practices, or even identity option. The learners may switch among their different identity options in order to maximize or minimize social bonds with their community members. Such a strategy enables them to change the intensity and salience of their identity option. Any educators and curriculum developers need to consider the above-discussed issues in order to provide educational equity for all learners. It is worth mentioning that learning new knowledge and perceptions demands power struggle, which can be empowering or

disempowering tools in different situations. It means that learners' agency is a crucial and determining factor for them to see new knowledge and perceptions as (dis)empowering tools.

Likewise, teachers may implement the study findings to compensate for the shortage of textbooks originally developed for ESL contexts. To this end, they may allocate some part of the class time to students' stories in which the students can share their life, learning, or even working experiences. Such a strategy for teaching makes learning more enjoyable and meaningful to students since they see how important are their identity-related variables (past trajectories and experiences, their past knowledge, family backgrounds, etc.) to their teachers and the educational settings, wherein they are studying. Accordingly, their motivation and in turn their achievement may be enhanced.

The study was conducted and targeted to academic settings. It means that the findings need to cautiously be applied to other contextual situations, including primary or secondary education. Furthermore, the participants of the study had relatively similar backgrounds and were Asian and Muslim. Likewise, the findings may not necessarily be applicable to European or American situations. To investigate the idea more, it is suggested that a study be conducted with other participants with different sociodemographic backgrounds, for instance, European or Canadian students. In addition, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study on other age or educational groups, for instance, kids or teenagers.

### **Information on Informed Consent or any Data Privacy Statements**

All subjects participated voluntarily and received a small compensation. The participants provide their written informed consent to participate in this study.

### **Authors Contributions**

Both authors are responsible for all parts of the paper. The author(s) read and approved the final manuscript. The paper is part of a dissertation conducted at Shiraz University.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

### **Funding**

No funding was available for the present study.

### **References**

- Alimorad, Z. (2014). Examining identity options in native and nonnative produced textbooks taught in Iran: A critical textbook evaluation. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, 5(2), 95–112.
- Alimorad, Z. (2015). I'm no longer a child: A closer look at the interaction between Iranian EFL university students' identities and their academic performance. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, 5(Special Issue), 43-52.
- Amireault, V. (2020). Integration process and identity redefinition of Chinese adult learners of French as a second language in Quebec. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 19(6), 365–378.
- Anagnost, A. (2008). From “class” to “social strata”: Grasping the social totality in reform-era China. *Third World Quarterly*, 29(3), 497–519.
- Andreasen, J. K., Bjørndal, C. R., & Kovač, V. B. (2019). Being a teacher and teacher educator: The antecedents of teacher educator identity among mentor teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 85, 281–291.
- Block, D. (2014). *Second lagunage identities*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Boonchum, P. (2009). A study of self-identity changes and correlation of influential factors of Thai students studying English. *Educational Research and Review*, 4(11), 535–548.

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Brown, L. & Cheek, E. (2017). Gender identity in a second language: The use of first person pronouns by male learners of Japanese. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 16(2), 94–108.
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2005). Language and identity. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *A companion to linguistic anthropology*, (pp. 369 – 394). Blackwell.
- Collier-Thomas, B., & Turner, J. (1994). Race, class and color: The African American discourse on identity. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 14(1), 5– 31.
- Cummins, J., Hu, S., Markus, P., & Kristiina Montero, M. (2015). Identity texts and academic achievement: Connecting the dots in multilingual school contexts. *TESOL Quarterly*, 49(3), 555–581.
- Day, E. M. (2002). *Identity and the young English language learner*. Multilingual Matters.
- De Castro, G. L. (2021). Investigating optional functional element and obligatory contour principle in L2 comprehension and production among ESL learners. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, 12(1), 3-14.
- Duff, P. A. (2012). Identity, agency, and second language acquisition. In A. Mackay & S., M., Gass (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 410–426). Routledge.
- Enyedy, N., Goldberg, J., & Welsh, K. M. (2006). Complex dilemmas of identity and practice. *Science Education*, 90(1), 68–93.
- Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling*. Routledge.
- Gu, M. M., & Lai, C. (2019). An ethical analysis of how ESL teachers construct their professional identities through the use of information technology in teaching. *British Educational Research Journal*, 45(5), 918–937.
- Hall, H. R., & Brown-Thirston, A. (2011). *Understanding teenage girls: Culture, identity and schooling*. R&L Education.
- Hansen, J. G., & Liu, J. (1997). Social language and identity: Theoretical and methodological issues. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 567–576.
- Ivanič, R. (1998). *Writing and identity (Vol. 10)*. John Benjamins.
- Jackson, J. (2014). *Introducing language and intercultural communication*. Routledge.
- Lane, A. K., Hardison, C., Simon, A., & Andrews, T. C. (2019). A model of the factors influencing teaching identity among life sciences doctoral students. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 56(2), 141-162.
- Liu, S. (2015). Searching for a sense of place: Identity negotiation of Chinese immigrants. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 46, 26–35.
- Manyak, P. C. (2004). What did she say? Translation in a primary-grade English immersion class. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 6, 12–18.
- Martin, C. (2020). From LSA to teacher: The value of classroom experience in shaping a ‘teacher’ identity. *Support for Learning*, 35(1), 23–42.
- McNamara, T. (1997). Theorizing social identity; what do we mean by social identity? Competing frameworks, competing discourses. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 561–567.
- Meo, A., & Tarabini, A. (2020). Teachers’ identities in second chance schools: A comparative analysis of Buenos Aires and Barcelona. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 88, 1–11.
- Monrouxe, L. V. & Rees, C. E. (2015). Theoretical perspectives on identity: researching identities in healthcare education. In J. Cleland, & S. J. Durning (Eds.), *Researching medical education* (1st ed., pp. 129–140). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Nguyen, X. N. C. M., & Dao, P. (2019). Identity exploration and development in TESOL teacher education: A three-dimensional space narrative inquiry perspective. *TESOL Journal*, 10(4), 492–508.

- Nordstrom, J. (2020). Teaching in the periphery: Teacher identity in community language schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 96, 1–9.
- Norton Peirce, B. (1995). Social identity, investment and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29, 9–32.
- Norton, B. (1997). Language, identity, and the ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 409–429.
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Oyserman, D. (2009). Identity-based motivation: Implications for action-readiness, procedural-readiness, and consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19(3), 250–260.
- Oetzel J. G. (2009). *Intercultural communication: A layered approach*. Vango Books.
- Park, H. (2012). Insight into learners' identity in the Korean English as a lingua franca context. *Journal of Language, & Education*, 11(4), 229–246.
- Pavlenko, A. & Blackledge, A. (eds.). (2004). *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts*. Multilingual Matters.
- Ren, Y., Kraut, R., & Kiesler, S. (2007). Applying common identity and bond theory to design of online communities. *Organization Studies*, 28(3), 377–408.
- Rubinfeld, S., Clément, R., Lussier, D., Lebrun, M., & Auger, R. (2006). Second language learning and cultural representations: Beyond competence and identity. *Language Learning*, 56(4), 609–631.
- Shin, J. (2016). Hyphenated identities of Korean heritage language learners: Marginalization, colonial discourses and internalized whiteness. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 15(1), 32–43.
- Taylor, F. (2013). *Self and identity in adolescent foreign language Learning*. Multilingual Matters.
- Taylor, F., & Busse, V. (2016). When the learner becomes the context: Strategic identity display in learning English as a foreign language in Europe. In J. King (Ed.), *The dynamic interplay between context and the language learner* (pp. 66–83). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Toohy, K., Manyak, P., & Day, E. (2007). ESL learners in the early school years: Identity and mediated classroom practices. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *International handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 625–638). Springer Science.
- Vallente, J. P. C. (2020). Framing pre-service English language teachers' identity formation within the theory of alignment as mode of belonging in community of practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 96, 1–11.
- Vasilopoulos, G. (2015). Language learner investment and identity negotiation in the Korean EFL context. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 14(2), 61–79.
- Villegas, D. F. M., Varona, W. H., & Sanchez, A. G. (2020). Student teachers' identity construction: A socially-constructed narrative in a second language teacher education program. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 91, 1–10.
- Virkkula, T., & Nikula, T. (2010). Identity construction in ELF contexts: A case study of Finnish engineering students working in Germany. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 20(2), 251–273.
- Wielgosz, M., & Molyneux, P. (2015). “You get to be yourself”: Visual arts programs, identity construction and learners of English as an additional language. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 14(4), 275–289.
- Wolff, D., & De Costa, P. I. (2017). Expanding the language teacher identity landscape: An investigation of the emotions and strategies of a NNEST. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(S1), 76–90.
- Yazan, B. (2019). Toward identity-oriented teacher education: Critical autoethnographic narrative. *TESOL Journal*, 10(1), 1–15.
- Zenker, O. (2013). *Irish/ness is all around us: Language revivalism and the culture of ethnic identity in Northern Ireland* (Vol. 6). Berghahn Books.

Zotos, E. K., Moon, A. C., & Shultz, G. V. (2020). Investigation of chemistry graduate teaching assistants' teacher knowledge and teacher identity. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 57(6), 943–967.

## Appendix

### Samples of Writings

#### Extract 13

I came from Iraq, when i say the name of that country very different cultures come to my mind and each culture have its own traditions and customs.

Like in the north of Iraq there is Kurdish people which they have their own tradition and customs in festivals and in living. They have thier special food, dance, and clothes.

In the north-west from Telafer down to Kerkuk city they are Turkmen people which they differ from Kurdish people in tradition and language.

Down to the Baghdad, Salahaddin, Al-Anbar, Najaf, Basrah, and... etc they are arab which they have their own traditions and customs and also some Kurdish and Turkmen people which have mutual tradition such as food(dolma or biryani), dance(chobi).

These differences is an advantage for people who live in this country because he see all these differences in one country which is very rare.

#### Extract 22

There are many inherited customs and traditions, the most important of which is the generosity and welcoming of guests, as well as there are aqam of the year in which certain foods abound and work on them continuously, in addition to the Arab dress like an abaya

#### Extract 53

There is no doubt that civilization in Iraq has been researched by researchers, analysts and aspirants wrote about it to explore its processes and effects. That giving, because the Iraqi society is rich in a rich popular culture and rich heritage, in which it has values, morals, customs, traditions, behavioral patterns and innovations, which are the juice of thought and experience, and the outcome of a long history of interaction between man and his geographical environment, with the diversity of its divisions and demarcations from the city to the countryside, and from the mountains to the desert. After thousands of years, they still carry that culture of customs and traditions and some of the superstitious beliefs that stemmed from their ancestors the Sumerians, Babylonians, Akkadians, Assyrians and Abbasids, despite the frequency of invaders throughout the ages, and their attempts to change the identity of the Iraqis, but they all failed to do so, as well as Iraq has a huge number of proverbs And judgment, tales and folk art in many fields

#### Extract 87

Hi, I'm mustafa Qassim from Iraq. I will tell you about my country. Iraq has one of the world's oldest cultural histories and boasts a rich heritage. Here you will find information about Iraqi culture, cuisine, music, sports, art and literature. Iraq has long reflected cultural diversity. Although Iraqis generally are a religious and conservative people, there are strong secular tendencies in the country. Iraq is a Muslim nation with Arabic and Kurdish as its official languages. As such, Islamic holidays are celebrated. Other holidays include the Newroz, the Iraqi Army Day, and the International Workers' holiday. Weekends in Iraq are Friday and Saturday, as opposed to the Western version of Saturday and Sunday.

#### Extract 119

One of my bad experience from my childhood is related to my fifth grade class in school. I had a bad teacher that she always compared the students with each other and she always told us you should be the best, you must be accepted by Sampad school and ... in fact i never enjoyed that class and this behavior of my teacher maked me too stressful and the effects of that class is still with me!



© 2023 by the authors. Licensee Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0 license). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

