

# The English Learner's Identity in O' Level EFL Classroom and Its Effect on EFL Learning Investment

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## Abstract

The relation between language and identity is not a new thing to discuss, but it has a powerful influence on learner's self. This issue specifically with English non-native learners is prominent through its greater demand in academic and popular discourse on language usage and its learning throughout the country of Pakistan. The aim of the study is to investigate the construction of identity of L2 learners within English-only ideology in O' level classroom and its impact on EFL Learning Investment. The findings of the present study indicate that the huge impact of investment on learner's identity inside and outside the classroom. In this study, data was collected from three learners from Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan whose identities are in a state of adaptation in the process of learning. It is observed that English language has a dominance by its number of learners which are increasing day by day and it has become a medium of communication by many of the cultures adopting it as a 'must learn language'.

**Keywords:** Identity; investment; English learners' identity; English language learning.

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## 1. Introduction

Social scenario of Pakistan denotes those students are more vigilant and very desperate to learn English due to the demand from society and family, imposition of power relation in classroom and socio-economic situations. Today's world of technology and new demands from people turn out things and this has been investigated by Norton (2015) as a foundational work on language and investment. The model actually addresses the need of learners and comprehensively examined the relationship between identity, social interaction and investment. Moreover, it may get context online and offline accordingly due to the new world order.

Especially Pakistani learners take greater ownership of English language and develop their extra unique form of competence. So, teachers and learners want to reframe their techniques accordingly. It is visible in the classrooms of O and A levels which is one of the highly recognized globally and people wanted to get education through this forum. Due to its modernist approach people are more familiar about it. So it may lead different other things and the relation between language and identity has powerful influence on learner's self. This issue specifically with English non-native learners is prominent. As Kapp and Rudwick (2004) discusses the status of English and its hegemony. In Pakistan learners are more desperate to learn English so to gain status in the society therefore they are seeking for different ways.

In a qualitative framework it is practicable to see investment by adding meaningful connection of learner's desires and struggle to give full efforts to language learning where at the same time identity effects.

## 2. Literature Review

There is a developing body of research on construction of English learner's identity and the impact of different social background students and their effect within Pakistani context where English is said to be as the official language but influences on other local languages even on national language which is itself a problem.

Language cannot be separated from the culture because their relation is vice versa as Mubarak (2013) quoted that culture is socially learned and we learned from the language of specific culture because it includes all human practices, social and ideological norms. As Rao (2018) advocates that both terminologies are complementary in a way that one enriches the other.

According to Owen (2011) proves that language is the prominent manifestation of individual's identity in contrast to other modes of identification. This statement figures out that one's identity would slowly affect his ideas, behaviors, attitudes and perceptions.

According to Holland and Lave (2001) discusses the socio-culture which asserted that identity is not only a single entity but a dynamic phenomenon. Moreover, Identity is inseparable with the language learner because owing to diverse position in different social interaction, it is formed during practice in classrooms.

Moreover Negru-Subtirica et al. (2015) talked about the internal psychological process of identity development therefore the construction of identity does not mean that it wouldn't be change but it will keep changing due to the command and interaction to others in the world. For instance, in a classroom, students from different school of thought sharing the same environment will lead to never stop constructing identities.

However, when students experiences O and A level then advance scenario of English change their self and perspective of the world. So, they undergo the process of change in identity.

Many scholars believed that communities and identities are interconnected creating a cause to established relationship between persons, activities and the world. These words had spoken by Teng (2018) who claimed development of identity is based on participation within the specific community.

Furthermore, it would be fragmented, multi framed and contradictory. For instance, in this present study, learners are from O level classrooms, their identities fluctuate due to its hybrid nature, their performances in classroom will decide their readiness of participation in English learning. Likewise, EFL classrooms are quite struggling for learners as Kim (2003) believed that learner's identity is constructed and at the same time it would be affected because of the driven pressure in EFL classroom by teachers, activities and competitions. In the same manner it happens in O level English classroom where learners feel pressurized when it comes to perform their part during any class activity.

There are various ways of interpretation of the word "identity" in various domains. When it comes to recognize the self, as for Dutton et al. (2010) has talked about, the personal identity. Similarly, a member of a relationship would be called as relational identity. Lastly, a member of social group would be named as a social identity. This school of thought is also undergoing the development process positively because individual will hold its identity favorably and even in referred to other group it will change with the passage of time. So as a result, identity is the name of accepted changes and adaptation in order to progress.

The term investment not only used for business world but for language as well and an individual identity which again is in flux. The notion of investment reflects the idea of motivation as Dr Melinda Kong (2016) sheds light on this concept where she aligns the concept of investment with motivation for dedication which is showed by learners in EFL classrooms. In addition to this, investment is interconnected with identity of an individual, power relations and language learning. For instance, especially in Cambridge setup learner enters into EFL classroom with certain hopes for future upbringings which can lead them to the different level of acceptance of worldwide like job, power, and communication with foreigners and to take admission in foreign programs of foreign countries.

The concept of investment is one of the new terms which is used by many theorists now a days. Identity itself is understood with the relation of investment. According to Norton (2013) investment is impacted by the uneven distribution of power perceiving by language learners and various factors like contextual, social, historical nature is related to language use. Learner mainly invest in target language due to two reasons one is to acquire symbolic resources which includes education, language and friendship and another is material resources include capital goods, real estate and money.

Furthermore Teng & Bui (2018) investigated and find out that the concept of investment in language learning highlighted the conditions which are related with power that how power limits the opportunities for learner for instance how to speak and use target language. So its notion is much related with the socially or historically constructed relationship between learners and target language.

Many of the previous researches showed that learners are themselves wanted to invest in language learning by putting their all efforts, as they are familiar about the international importance of English. Norton & Kamal (2003) investigated in Pakistani context they examined students of middle age lean to learn English related to the benefits to invest in English both locally and internationally. They know English learning may advance their social, cultural background and it may open the routes for them to go worldwide communications.

The model of investment which is given by Norton reflects certain questions like what are English language learners imagined identities and how do these affect their investment in their language and literary practices of their classrooms. Maritza Collazos Mona (2010) for her investment is the way for learners to spend fully for language learning process to enhance the value of their culture and intellectual level. In other terms, learners spend to locate themselves on the highest ground by gaining atrocities of language.

Likewise, learners usually learn foreign language for the sake of social recognition and to plan to have economic stability which may increase their living conditions. If a learner would increase the material resources so by the end, they would gain social prestigious space in social power sphere.

According to Bonny Norton she has argued that if learners "invest" in the language which they want to learn, they will only do so for the reason that they will attain different social tools. For example, investment in language will help one to attain higher education with increased cognitive abilities and increased focus. This in turn helps them to attain higher goals which can increase one's chances of success and fame. Furthermore, traveling the world can help an individual to mingle around with the people and learn new experiences and share their thoughts and learn new skills from them. Meeting new people helps to embrace and understand different cultures which in turn increase social adaptability. This creates a wide social network of an individual which helps him to understand and learn far greater perspectives of this world. This was impossible otherwise, had the individual not invested in language.

### *2.1 Research Questions*

Based on the objectives, following research questions have been constructed:

*RQ1*: How the English language reconstructed the learners' identity which results in EFL investment in O' level English Classroom?

### *2.2 Research Objectives*

The study aims to investigate the construction of identity of L2 learners within English-only ideology in O' level classroom and its impact on EFL Learning Investment. The following objectives are set:

- To investigate if the learners' identity is reconstructed through English language in O' level English classroom in Sindh Pakistan.

## **3. Methodology**

This research study is qualitative study. According to Gentles et al., 2015 qualitative research is the observation and interpretation of people's perception of different events.

### *3.1 Population and sampling*

This study focuses on the four participants of primary (O1) year and secondary (O2) year who shared their experiences with the researcher. So, they were my storytellers. As Chase (2005) declared that narrative researchers are quite different from the other qualitative researchers because they devote much more space in written document to fewer individuals as compare to other qualitative researchers. She further added that many anthropologists and other psychologists and sociologists have the small number of narratives in their work.

According to Polkinghorne (2005) he said that to understand experiences purposive sampling is an appropriate approach. In qualitative research as my study is based on this, in this type of researches in social sciences are quite holistic in nature and inductive where aim is to explore complex human issues.

### *3.2 Procedure: Narrative Inquiry*

It is a suitable device for social sciences. As Czarniawska-Joerges (2004) believes that it is an approach in which researcher investigate about learners that how learners perceive themselves and do various actions in terms of investment within classroom. As the name suggest "narrative" here researcher need to identify identities through stories to live by. Different experiences by learners like a story can help out researcher by any mean.

Furthermore Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014) suggested that by having different narratives from learners, researcher may get various identities which are emerging from an individual social practice. This is mainly used as a method in order to construct meanings from the stories of learners which can actually tell learner's experiences of learning within classroom as related with the social practices.

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) both suggested that narrative inquiry means to inquire the experiences from participants and of course with the collaboration with them. Moreover, storytelling is somehow the best way to ask them their experiences as they are young participants so they found themselves comfortable while telling their stories. In the Graham Swift's novel, one of the characters said "but man is the storytelling animal. Means this reflects the idea of Aristotle who said in terms of society that "Man is a social animal" which is depicting the idea of enjoyment and pleasure which comes out from stories. Similarly, learners might have other stories within themselves. According to Polkinghorne (1988) who believes that life itself does not exist without narration. We live within the stories.

Similarly, my study grounded on this narrative tool where participants shared their experiences

With multiple question answers based on unstructured interviews as they belong from the higher secondary (O level) context so it was easier for them to participate and to share their life experiences with me in the both circumstances inside and outside the classroom.

### *3.3 Data Analysis*

According to Patton (2002) the voluminous data will drive from the qualitative approach and in especially narrative inquiry which gives the detail insight to the learner and the researcher as well. In addition to this Connelly and Clandinin (1990) stated that the narrative inquiry gives the whole sense of the data because before conducting analysis the sense of whole is significant. This sense will let the researcher to drive reading and writing of narratives. Before analyzing the data, I preferred to collect all the data and after collecting I keep all the data into one computer file which includes questionnaire, the audio recordings with their transcriptions.

My study analysis has two phases in total firstly I construct the English learning stories of my participants secondly, I will identify the themes that emerged from all participants stories. This procedure will describe in the following headings.

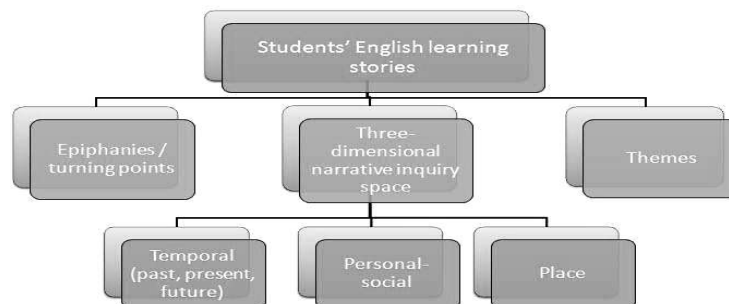


Figure by Creswell (2007)

In this phase of data analysis, I have done the thematic analysis in order to explore the individual viewpoint towards the English learning environment. So, the thematic analysis would be conducted across fifteen participants. According to Gibbs 2007 thematic coding is the approach to get the ideas through the intensive reading from the text give whether it be of recording or identifying passages of text. First, I will read each data file of each learner to make coding categories manually by follow the simple steps of thematic analysis. Secondly, data categories formed by literature and through English learning experiences.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Story 1

"Language is a basic thing which everybody needs to focus on"

Participant's motivation and prediction will be a prominent feature in the advancement of a human being in the foreseeable future and a major component required for a good first impression. Further he claimed that English is not necessarily bring a change in his attitude but his personality as it made him feel proud of himself knowing that he became a bilingual. He plans to pass this knowledge to the younger ones out there so that they can inherit it, process it, carry out a full thinking process, and pass it in even a better standard to their future generations. He wondered how he developed his language skills and surely, he attempted some extra activities to improve it.

He agreed that "I did indeed carry out some extra activities to improve my English language which included regularly talking in English with my friends and family, a proper schedule of English book reading and reading English newspapers and watching documentaries."

"It's a most important and an international and it give me advantage to be a bilingual participant and many of the benefits are associated with this only Language." Moreover, he said "I have bit feel change outside the classroom after having multiple classes due to the social media because our main stream media itself is in English language and most of the things has been translated in English and still is in the process of translation with many other languages."

### 4.2 2<sup>nd</sup> story

I interviewed a female student who was too enthusiastic about learning English as she attaching many live examples in her which make her realizes the importance of this language. Moreover, she felt like after getting fully skilled she might get revolves around the world and will groom her by communicating with other people of the other countries that's the only aim of her life. In addition to this she was curious to know about bit-by-bit thing of English language. Likewise, she was struggling to improve her English so that she can communicate with people. Moreover, there are a heap of opportunities out there for one's who can speak English.

As she give an example that "For instance if you go in a country where people don't speak Urdu then how would you converse with them? There must be a mean of communication and that is obviously English. It's an international language and when you start talking in English it would not sound weird."

She got so intimated with the English language that she knew the significance in her words that

"I read somewhere that quote of Nelson Mandela he said "If you speak to a person in language that he understands that goes to his mind but if you speak in his mother language that directly goes to his heart". This hit me so hard. Even she pointed out the scenario of interview that "If you start taking the interview in Urdu then I'll be more confident and comfortable because Urdu is language that goes to my heart according to the quote and it's 100% true."

Apart from significance she believed that learning a language is not a harm we should learn multiple languages so to involve with the other people all around the world.

She shared in a way "by learning a language you come to know the new culture, custom and their life style. A person must be multilingual. And I am proud to be as a English learner."

She feels like more confident and now more upgraded. And she was pretty sure that she can talk to anyone in English, even to native speakers. She confidently made effort to teach others the English so to improve her own.

Her perceptions related to English are far beyond learning because she feels differently different within her own self in terms of her speaking and her way of adopting things in society.

#### 4.3 3<sup>rd</sup> story

My 3<sup>rd</sup> female participant has a diverse experience about learning language were making her effective communicator. That was enhancing her understanding for the world, she got the knowledge of English language through reading animated books and animated movies. It included not only the knowledge but the way they used their accent, grammatical structure, humor, different affairs of the world, their cultures, their values, the way they live with each other and much more. These things influenced her a lot.

“To English classes I've got a wider view about the knowledge of the world and to comprehend it through my own understanding and language.”

For her one can get all the knowledge of the world through English language because English is not only the medium of instruction here in Pakistan but it hold the knowledge of every field like Business, Medical, Engineering, Information technology and others. For instance, if one gets fully skilled in any field so one needs to be skilled in English language to keep the future safe.

“Moreover, Improving English simply means to look for the better understanding of world affairs knowledge politics advanced Sciences and getting the opportunities to get your hand on the better prospective of knowledge science and life.”

“English classroom always provides the whole environment to speak, write, listen and read English it is much easier to interact in English in the classroom rather than outside the classroom because of the resources present and the whole English learning community”.

While performing any activity in the classroom always proved as a motivation for her, that was a place where the changes occur within her personality because there are a number of people who are doing it as all are in the same learning environment these activity proved to be very beneficial and easy to adapt because of the resources and the guidance of the supervisor they always help her to learn something new and motivated her to carry on with learning of the language through interactive activities in learning environment.

#### 4.4 Discussions

This study aimed to investigate the construction of identity of L2 learners within English-only ideology in O' level classroom and its impact on EFL Learning Investment. The words had spoken by Teng (2018) who claimed development of identity is based on participation within the specific community. So the participants of this study depicted accordingly. Moreover, the study also aimed to explore EFL learners' perceptions about English Language as an investment as a result of their learning experiences in O' level classrooms in Sindh, Pakistan and to investigate if the learners' identity is reconstructed through English language in O' level English classroom in Sindh Pakistan. This study is pure qualitative so questions were designed to investigate the perceptions, investment by learners and transformations of learner's identities.

As revealed in the data that many responses were at the side of their own efforts with the correlation of a language teacher who assigned them different task and make the whole environment of the class like a British School. For instance, few participants had a primary experience of overseas where they already had a good command in English language therefore, they demanded high from a teacher as they feel different from other background students. It is clear that if one could have adequate English resources so the person could achieve desirable aims in his or her life. This study participants were highly competent learners and the majority of them studied in elite private schools of Hyderabad, Sindh so they all are already equipped with the English attitudes, full of confidence and highly motivated in English learning.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

It's undeniable to separate English learning from the lives of people in Pakistan. The occurrence of its importance since the beginning of British colonialism was undoubtedly there with the people across the country. But in present scenario it has a greater impact on everyone around the world. Beside historical evolution of this language relates through the importance of this language. This study aims to examine the English learning experiences of O level students of Rockford Cambridge School, with the specific focus on their perceptions about language and how it turns into the formation of their identities in the different environment which is provided by the Cambridge system.

The first finding of this study which is influencing every part of the study is that the participant's perception towards English language and its learning and their identities were informed or shaped by their utmost prior learning experiences. Moreover, it depends on their background like Urdu, Sindhi, and Punjabi under the O level education system. From the beginning students were aware about the significance of English language therefore they took seriously English as a subject and their weapon was to get good grades in this subject. This survival need fulfilled by each student till their eighth grade and then they came to O1 (O level senior 1) so they felt that

pressure which emphasized them to work harder especially in English. For instance, if their background had a good support so the results were amazing otherwise many students suffered a lot in this journey of learning.

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