



The Impact of Cultural Exposure on EFL Learners' Identity

تأثير الانفتاح الثقافي على هوية متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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ملخص

في ظل العولمة والتحديات التكنولوجية، حظيت العلاقة المتبادلة بين اللغة والثقافة والهوية باهتمام كبير في مختلف مجالات البحث. ونظرًا لكون اللغة ناقلًا للثقافة وجزءًا لا يتجزأ منها، فقد بحث عدد كبير من الباحثين في تأثير الانفتاح الثقافي على هوية متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بهدف تسليط الضوء على بعض التساؤلات المتعلقة بالهوية أو الهويات الجديدة الناشئة. هل يعرف المتعلمون أنفسهم بناءً على "من هم" أم "من سيصبحون"؟ لذلك، تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى تسليط الضوء على تأثير الانفتاح الثقافي على هوية متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم اعتماد منهج نوعي يقوم على وصف وتحليل الأدبيات المتوفرة حول هذا الموضوع مع التركيز على بعض الأبحاث الميدانية لاستنتاج المعايير الجديدة لتحويل هوية المتعلمين. تُظهر النتائج أن معظم الدراسات أقرت بأن إدراج العنصر الثقافي في المنهج الدراسي من شأنه أن يُساعد المتعلمين على تطوير كفاءات لغوية وممارسات ثقافية واجتماعية جديدة مع الحفاظ على الممارسات المحلية، وبعبارة أخرى، فإنضان متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية سيتجاوزون حدود الثقافة لبناء هويات ثقافية متعددة. ومن ثم فإن هذه النتائج بشأن بناء الهوية وتفكيكها وإعادة بنائها ستولد أبحاثًا مستقبلية مثيرة للاهتمام.

الكلمات الدالة: التعرض الثقافي؛ فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ بناء الهوية؛ الهوية الناشئة؛ إعادة بناء الهوية.

Abstract

In the context of globalisation and technological challenges, the interconnectedness between language, culture, and identity has received enormous attention in different fields of research. Considering that language is the carrier of culture and an indispensable part of it, many scholars have investigated the impact of cultural exposure on EFL learners' identity, aiming to unveil some issues related to the newly developed identities: Would they identify themselves as "who they are?" or as "who they become?". Therefore, this paper aims to shed light on the impact of

cultural exposure on EFL learners' identity. To achieve this aim, a qualitative literature review is adopted, based on describing and critically analysing the existing literature on the topic, and focusing on different studies to deduce the new parameters of the learners' identity shift. The results show that most studies undertaken acknowledged that injecting the cultural component into the curriculum would help the learners develop new linguistic competencies, as well as cultural and social practices, while maintaining the native ones. Put differently, the EFL learners would cross the borders of culture to construct multicultural identities. Hence, these findings on EFL learners' identity construction, reconstruction, and deconstruction may continue to generate exciting and innovative research in the future.

Keywords: cultural exposure; EFL classrooms; identity construction; identity shift; identity deconstruction.

Introduction

The identity of learners has been a subject of interest for some time, especially with reference to ESL and EFL settings, due to multiculturalism, multilingualism, and globalisation. In terms of English language specifically, its rapidly growing dominance is leading to an increasing diversity in the way the language is spoken and the way culture is perceived. This may ultimately affect the societal and linguistic landscapes in general, and learners' identity in particular.

Connections between language, the cultural dimension, and the social one have been analysed by a plethora of researchers and educators, such as Block (2007), Kramsch (1998), and Norton (2006), among others, who inquired about the creation of new identities that the teaching of English promotes. The perception of learners' identities and the factors that influence them have changed over time, depending on the researchers' perspectives and the field of study. The multiple shifting identities of the twentieth century are still an issue to be researched even in the twenty-first century, particularly in relation to the changes brought about by learning a second or a foreign language.

The complexities of identity are embedded in its flexibility and changing nature, especially in an era characterised by violent globalisation, where learners are world citizens and form imagined communities (Anderson, 1991). In this context, the EFL learners are confronted with a foreign language that carries new cultural identities and is characterised by divergent principles, attitudes, and values. Hence, the EFL learners move from being to becoming. Throughout this journey of becoming, they will interact using



the target linguistic repertoire as well as cultural beliefs, which may reshape their identities. The parameters of the newly shifted identities differ from one learner to another depending on many factors, such as motivation, investment, and the extent to which the learner's native culture is valued (Norton, 2006). Our major concern then is to depict the change that may occur in EFL learners' sense of self, while crossing the borders of their native culture and meeting different culturally challenging views.

Although the interconnectedness between culture and identity has increasingly been integrated into the teaching and learning of languages, current studies primarily tend to focus on the identity issues in the ESL context, and very few treat learner identities in the context where English is taught as a foreign language. Consequently, the EFL context lacks clarity on how the EFL learners construct a sense of self, and internalise the cultural norms of the target language. There is, therefore, a need to investigate how the learners' identity may shift when meeting a foreign culture. The present paper aims at critically reviewing the literature on the interplay between culture exposure and learners' identity construction, and pointing out the gap in research that may allow us to shed light on the process through which EFL learners move from their native cultural norms, and to adjust or even assimilate or dissimilate the target one. In this regard, this paper is an attempt to review the construct of EFL learner identity, exploring how it is shaped, reconstructed or deconstructed, and transformed during language learning, based on the description and critical analysis of the existing literature on the topic, and by deducing the nature of the newly developed identity. This paper tries to answer two major research questions:

- To what extent does cultural exposure influence EFL learners' identity?
- Does cultural exposure lead to any noticeable transformation in the EFL learners' identity parameters?

In this regard, two hypotheses are listed below:

- Cultural exposure may have an impact on EFL learners' identity
- EFL learners may develop different linguistic and cultural behaviours as two main facets of identity, i.e., individual and cultural.

A full understanding of these two possibilities would affect the language specialists' efforts to equip their learners with the most efficient teaching material and methodologies.



1. Theoretical Background

Understanding the relationship between culture and identity in the EFL context is crucial for developing the learners' intercultural competence in a multicultural environment. Due to the multidisciplinary nature of both concepts, this review of the literature addresses previous research on identity formation and change, the relationship between language, culture and identity, and the concept of learners' digital identities in the virtual world.

1.1 Identity as a general construct and earlier approaches

Due to its complexity and diverse nature, the concept of identity remains a highly debated issue in the modern world. Initially investigated within the realm of social sciences, it was theorised by a plethora of researchers such as Bourdieu (1991), Hall (1996) and Weedon (1997) and was later taken up by other scholars, becoming a subject of interest in education, linguistics, and also in the teaching and learning of languages. Identity as a concept was adopted by many disciplines because it includes a psychological perspective that clarifies the relationship between "individual agency and social structure" (Block, 2013, p.15), trying to merge the field of psychology and that of sociology, meeting half-way on the territory of applied linguistics.

Tajfel's (1974) theory of social identity, which was shaped by intergroup theories, was a real revolution at that time. These approaches received criticism for their presumption of a direct connection between language and ethnic identity, and for the way they perceive individuals as stable, unchanging, and unable to express new social identities (Jenkins, 2007). As a reaction to the notion of the individual's fixed identity, early interactional approaches to linguistic identity, such as those suggested by Gumperz (1982) and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), concentrated on code-switching, accommodation, and language choice. Rather than perceiving identities as fixed, they moved towards viewing them as fluid and locally constructed in interactions. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), for instance, showed how a multilingual speaker may perform "acts of identity" by creating patterns of linguistic behaviour so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which, from time to time, he wishes to be identified, or so as to be unlike to those from whom he wishes to be distinguished" (1985, p.181). For Hall (2012), although this perspective is limited in scope as it sees the individual as a second version of the members of the new community, it acted as an important stimulus to further research into sociolinguistic realm. The latter



began to view identity as produced within social interaction rather than as a pre-existing category to which people or things are assigned.

The socio-cultural perspective abandoned the conventional view and asserted that identity arises from social contexts, being dynamic, continuously evolving, and comprised of a variety of practices and ideologies. Bourdieu (1991) identifies the relationship between language social status and identity, showing how these components are intertwined. An individual's identity is linked to the manner in which they employ language, and this is closely related to that person's social status, representing a position of power. Unlike the traditional linguistic perspective, which viewed language as an ideal form, that of the ideal speaker, Bourdieu (1991) introduced the social perspective that links the speakers' identity to social spaces, social standing, and social power.

Poststructuralist approaches to identity have incorporated many previously overlooked concepts, focusing on a wide array of factors, including the way individuals influence others in social interaction and use language as a symbolic resource. Current research on second language identity posits identity as dynamic, contradictory, and constantly changing over time and place, rather than seeing language learning as a gradual individual process of internalizing a neutral set of rules, structures, and vocabulary of a standard language. This new beginning in the field of research prompted the applied linguists to think differently about language learning. The new theory suggests that second language learners need to struggle to appropriate the voices of others; they need to learn how to command the attention of their listeners; they need to negotiate language as a system and as a social practice; and they need to understand the practices of the communities with which they interact. Drawing on such theory, becoming a "good" language learner is seen to be a much more complicated process than earlier research had suggested (Norton; Toohey, 2001).

The concept of identity as defined by Norton (2000), generally refers to the "who am I?" question. For her, language learning is an identity construction process; that is, whenever language learners communicate, they exchange information, at the same time organize and reorganize a sense of self and how they are socially related to the world around them. Therefore, they construct and negotiate their identity. In this view, individuals' identity would shift according to their social and economic relations. Based upon the context in which it appears, identity may function differently and have



different kinds of impacts on that context. As reported by Anthis and LaVoie (2006), a person begins to change in terms of identity as a result of internal realizations and/or inconsistent external feedback, and one of the main contexts which provides this external feedback is the foreign language learning, where a native culture and a target one meet, causing an internal conflict between ourselves and otherness.

Given these considerations, it can be concluded that one's identity is completely inseparable from the cultural norms of the society.

1.2 Language, culture and identity in the EFL context

In the last two decades, the concept of teaching culture and the impact it has on the learners' identity have been revisited by many researchers aiming at developing a pedagogy that accounts for the learners' linguistic and socio-cultural discrepancies. A successful learning experience in the EFL context relies strongly on assisting the learners in developing their cultural identities in the native and target cultures.

Being a central component in the teaching and learning process, much has been said about the role played by culture in ESL setting. However, several areas of the phenomenon are still unexplored in the EFL context. As a collection of values, norms, and scripts, culture is likely to affect the identity, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of individuals (Singleton, 2000). In this sense, the cultural orientation is related to, but distinct from, types of self-definitions (e.g., individual, relational, and collective). Self-definitions are about oneself, whereas cultural orientation is about an individual's perception of what is normative in the culture. Communication in the target language not only requires proficiency in the social context in which language must be used, but also the socio-cultural rules that govern language and discourse. According to this point of view, one of the main roles of a teacher would be to transform the learner into someone whom a native speaker would consider to have linguistically and socio culturally appropriate behaviour. Hence, teaching culture transforms into the main core of language teaching.

As previously stated, language learning outcomes extend beyond linguistic proficiency and the importance of the cultural component has increased with the aims of "teaching culture for intercultural competence", preparing people to work "in a multicultural setting or in another culture" (Byram; Feng, 2004, p.149). The interest in this research subject is mentioned by the two authors, who observe that: "there is also a growing research interest in the



impact of language and culture learning on the cultural identities of learners in majority groups”, but also studies which refer to problems of identity loss or identity maintenance in the case of minority groups (Byram; Feng, 2004, p. 152).

What we find appealing about Byram (1997) model is the concept of ICC formation, that is, the intercultural communicative competence, as one of the main competences in modern education. This aligns with Freire's (1973) advocacy for “education for critical consciousness”, enabling learners to activate their critical capacities to make their own decisions and to develop an in-depth understanding of one's reality, acting as subjects rather than objects in “a sphere of interculturality” (Kramsch; Byram, 2008, pp. 132-133). It is the educators' responsibility to provide the learners with the essential skills for effectively navigating the complexities of a globalised world by fostering an understanding of diverse cultural perspectives. Intercultural learning, which has become one of the main focuses of education, is analysed in the German space as well through Hallet's (1999) model of “bilingual triangle”, which comprises own culture, the target culture, and the “intercommunity”, defined as “global and universal phenomena independent of a particular context” (Breidbach; Viebrock, 2012, p. 10), all contributing to the formation of intercultural competences in the language learner.

In the same vein, Block's (2007, 2013) main contribution revises the most important issues related to identity research in applied linguistics. He argued that according to the social constructivist approach, which most of the poststructuralists adopt, identity is about the way people position themselves or are positioned, that is, the subjectivities and subject position they occupy or have been assigned within particular social, historical (personal or collective), and cultural contexts. This perspective seems to sum up all the important factors influencing identity, and it should be considered in identity research. Therefore, the significance of elements such as cultural identity, intercultural communication, and intercultural awareness is great in this field of research, with perspectives varying according to the area covered and the interest of the researcher. Whether the perception is sociological, psychological, or comes from applied linguistics or education, the issues are still debated, as the modern world is undergoing changes due to technological progress and AI, which would affect the learners' identities.



1.3 Offline and online EFL learners' identities: challenges

The interconnectedness between language, culture, and identity in the EFL context is still a site of struggle due to the vulnerability of culture and the ever-changing nature of identity. In a modern world characterized by intense technological advancements, the virtual world is rivaling the traditional classroom setting. The challenge now is how to balance the cultural diversity within and beyond the classroom to value the learners' cultural identity (Gay, 2010) and integrate identity into pedagogy. Educators' main concern is the lack of cultural exposure in the curriculum, which hinders the development of cultural competence, one of the most important aspects of language learning. Due to their exposure to various cultural contexts, EFL learners will gain an appreciation for the fluid nature of the language and its significance in intercultural communication (Canagarajah, 2013). In the same vein, incorporating culture in EFL classrooms appeals for culturally relevant pedagogies that account for the learners' different cultural background. As an inclusive approach, cultural responsiveness goes beyond the target culture to understand how the learners' cultural background shapes their diverse cultural identities (Byram et al., 2002). Encouraging the learners to express the beliefs, norms, and principles of both their home culture and the target one would enhance their self-confidence and sense of social and cultural affiliation. This involves activating the learners' critical thinking and fostering an in-depth understanding of "who I am?" and "who are you?" Nevertheless, the lack of teachers' training, teachers' beliefs and biases as well as the one-size-fits-all approach to education may prevent the adoption of culturally responsive teaching (CRT).

The integration of technology in learning in general and in EFL learning in particular would personalise the learning experience, and promote autonomous learning through using digital tools such as platforms, apps, forums, and online discussions, aiming at extending language learning beyond the classroom environment. This move to virtual learning brings about new conceptions of the language learning process, which, in turn, may affect the construction of EFL learners' identities. By changing language and its electronic use (Darvin; Norton, 2015), the concept of learners' digital identity construction comes to the front. This raises a critical question: will researchers investigate this emerging concept using existing frameworks of learners' identity construction offline, taking into account that the virtual learning provides greater opportunities for cross-cultural interactions?



Thus, addressing the role of technology in constructing EFL learners' online identities may illuminate other hidden facets of identity in a digital era.

As a multidimensional concept, the complex interplay between culture and identity in the EFL context remains a rich area of exploration across various disciplines. From being viewed as static and unchangeable overtime to being recognised as highly dynamic and fluid, influenced by the learners' cultural heritage and social interactions, this nuanced concept of identity is, in fact, deeply intertwined with cultural factors. This first part attempts to delve into the core themes and different perspectives of the existing literature on the evolution of the concept of identity, the interconnectedness of language, culture, and identity as well as the emerging concept of the virtual identities, which constitutes a challenge in today's digitally driven era. To move from theory to practice, a corpus of selected studies across different countries has been selected by the researcher, analysed, and discussed thoroughly, providing valuable implications of these concepts in the next section.

2. Methodology

The current paper aims at critically reviewing the literature regarding the impact of cultural instruction on learners' identity in the EFL context. It surveys the existing literature and research pertinent to the topic. The researcher has chosen four case studies from various countries, with a thorough discussion of the results and the suggestion of some pedagogical implications for the EFL context in general and the Algerian context in particular. The major drive behind the selection of these studies is that they all address the same topic and encompass the key themes relating to cultural instruction and identity shift. They are also selected for their relevance to the EFL context at university level. Then, dealing with participants from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds would help the researcher to apprehend the multifaceted nature of culture and identity. Through the analysis and discussion of the findings in light of the reviewed literature, we can unveil the causal mechanism that links the target culture exposure and the EFL learners' identities.

3. Studies on the Impact of Culture on EFL Learners' Identity

The issue of integrating culture into language learning and its significance for the learners' identity construction have attracted the scholars' attention in the recent decades in the ESL education setting. In their empirical studies, scholars such as Norton (2000) focused mainly on immigrants in English



speaking countries. However, very few studies were undertaken in countries where English is taught as a foreign language.

In terms of the cultural identity of EFL learners, Seppälä (2011) looked into how Chinese university learners' cultural identities are impacted by the English language and western culture in China. In his ethnographic research, the data collection methods consisted of a questionnaire, field observation, and a semi-structured interview. The findings demonstrated that learning English had changed the perspective and the attitudes of the Chinese learners towards their culture, and the western one. Moreover, attitudes toward the English language were primarily justified by getting a better job, and coping with the globalisation of the world. The researcher asserted that young Chinese learners were drawn to the independence and freedom of the western way of life. Consequently, this led them to adjust their cultural identity to cope with what they have learned from the English language.

In another study, Hopkins (2014) investigated the attitudes of female Emirati university learners regarding learning English, and the effect of global English on their culture and identity. The case study discusses the attitudes and perceptions of female Emirati learners and female Emirati teachers with regard to global English and its effects on local culture and identity. The main findings from this qualitative study, using open-response questionnaires with thirty-five female informants and twelve teachers, showed both positive and negative attitudes toward the impact of English on their cultural identities. The learners' positive perceptions could be summarised into three main categories: increased independence, self-confidence, and communication skills.

The third study from Iran by Afghari et al. (2012) was an attempt to investigate whether teaching the culture, beliefs, and values of the target society through the medium of language can affect the cultural beliefs and values of foreign language learners, and consequently their identity types. The sample consisted of ninety-eight male and female intermediate EFL learners who were studying English at two language institutes in Shiraz. They were randomly selected from the same proficiency level, and randomly divided into two experimental and two control groups. The participants in the experimental groups were exposed to the target language culture, roles, values, and beliefs for ten weeks in order to observe whether they had moved towards the target language identity based on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1958, 1963). Two versions of the



Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) were administered both at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The difference in mean between the groups involved in the present research was calculated by a T-test. The findings of this study showed that the identity of the learners in both the control and the experimental groups did not change significantly.

Finally, Elouali (2020) investigated the impact of English language learning on the Algerian EFL learners' cultural identities at the university of Tlemcen. The data were gathered using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observation, and recordings in order to guarantee the validity and reliability of the results. The findings demonstrated new competencies and skills developed by EFL learners, reflected in their ways of thinking and even behaving. Therefore, this study confirmed that learning a foreign language does shape the learners' identities, their way of thinking, and even their behaving.

4. Discussion

The permanent interaction between language, culture and identity has been discussed from various standpoints. It is assumed that language is "the observable part of identity" (Joseph, 2016, p.19), and identity is certainly transmitted through language. Reasoning from that, these two concepts are inextricably linked, since language includes both linguistic and cultural patterns, and it is considered as an identity marker at individual and collective levels. At this point, it is interesting to discuss critically whether the primary function of culture, which is to preserve the individual's identity without neglecting the difference with the others, has been maintained.

4.1 Building a sense of self and constructing the learners' multicultural identities

The results obtained from the above cited studies show that the EFL learners in China, Emirates, Iran, and Algeria had the opportunity to examine and understand their own cultural patterns by confronting them with other cultural perspectives. The type of confrontation gives time to compare cultural differences in values, styles, social behaviours, and patterns of thinking, to reduce cultural conflicts between culture one and culture two. Through culture teaching, EFL learners are actively guided beyond their own perspectives, with the premise of returning in a spirit of critical revision and reconstruction. To use Freire's (1973) words "the integrated person is a person as subject. In contrast, the adaptive person is a person by object, adaptation representing at most a weak form of self-defence" (p.04). Being



engaged in the process of identity construction and deconstruction and questioning surface and hidden aspects of the target culture without the negation of their native culture, EFL learners would develop the multicultural style of thinking that escapes the us/them dichotomy.

However, the findings of Afghari et al. (2012) are not in line with the proposed hypotheses, revealing that there is no significant change or shift in the learners' identity after injecting the cultural component into the curriculum. This aligns well with the early pioneering work on identity development from Tajfel's (1974) theory of social identity, perceiving the learners as having one fixed and stable identity that is "them" versus "us" dualism, i.e.: Christian religious identity versus Islamic religious identity. It is interesting, here, to point out that in Iran, policy makers' main concern is to protect the learners from acculturation, and they thus tried to decouple language instruction from culture in schools and language institutes. They believe that teaching culture to the learners will lead them to unconsciously internalise the dominant culture, and consequently devalue their own, viewing it as inferior (Afghari et al. 2012). Put differently, it is the government and its policies that bias the learners' creation of imagined communities of the target language speakers in order to preserve the national and religious identities of its learners.

From a pedagogical point of view, the real challenge is in Kramsch's (1993) metaphor of creating "a third space", an environment whereby cultural differences are objectively presented, managed, and utilised for more effective teaching of the language. The adoption of such an intercultural approach, rather than focusing on developing learners' native-like communicative competence, as suggested by the communicative approach, aims at helping them in the process of developing intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). Through this process, learners are given the opportunity to become familiar with the cultural norms of the target language society, along with that of their own and to adopt and/or adapt to the target culture in a manner that would not deteriorate their understanding and their perception of their own cultural identity but would rather strengthen it.

4.2 Students' perceptions toward learning English and the parameters of the newly shifted identity

In the four studies, the informants spoke positively about how learning English helped them increase their confidence, be independent, be more open-minded, and, most importantly, granted them access to the world's



knowledge. Previous studies mentioned in the literature review section also found mainly positive attitudes towards learning English (Hopkins, 2014; Norton, 2000). Furthermore, for some learners, English was a channel through which they were able to communicate with foreign people, learn about other cultures, and share parts of their own culture with the outside world. Consequently, this intercultural awareness has helped them to adopt some features from the western culture while maintaining their own home culture. This view was mentioned in previous studies such as Seppälä (2011) where the learners perceived the cultural shift as something positive, and changing their own cultural beliefs and values would open new horizons.

The newly established parameters of identity equip the EFL learners with social skills, such as how to be different, less judgemental, and tolerant (Elouali, 2020). Regarding the second hypothesis, the data revealed that the majority of learners opted for the target culture values, habits, and beliefs. This, definitely, explains their practices (linguistic and cultural) in the target language. For instance, they set different models to follow; they tend to value time, respect differences, and favour individual rights. Linguistically speaking, they developed new linguistic practices such as glocalising the English language, that is, critically approach global issues through the lens of their local culture, using English as a medium of communication.

4.3 Technology, globalisation, and the EFL learner identity

In an era of AI and violent globalisation, the learners are offered the opportunity to create virtual communities where the members are different culturally. Besides the formal setting, that is, the classroom where teachers and students meet regularly, and share the same learning experience in terms of input, informal virtual learning, using tutoring advanced systems and applications makes the learning experience more interactive. As an English language teacher in the Department of English, we notice that apps such as Elsa speak and Duolingo are widely used by the students to improve fluency and minimise the social anxiety in daily conversations with native and non-native speakers of English. The permanent contact with foreigners in a virtual environment makes the learners more familiar with and tolerant towards the target cultures. This was well illustrated in the previous study conducted by Elouali (2020), when she dealt with the features of the Algerian students' shifted identity, i.e., being open to otherness and conservative about our local principles and values. On the other hand, the Chinese learners tend to have extrinsic motivation, justified by getting a good job



and affiliating themselves with the western way of life. Being a significant marker of identity Joseph (2016), language helps its users to construct a sense of self while coexisting with otherness.

All these views confirm the stated hypotheses, and show that learning English as a foreign language has a significant impact on students' cultural identities. The findings reveal that EFL learners develop new linguistic, cultural, and social practices. The EFL learners' identity shift is voluntary, and controlled by students' motivation, desire, and choice. The more learners engage in the communities of practice, the greater their desire to learn and to dig deep into different cultures (Breidbach; Viebrock, 2012).

Based on the analysis and discussion of literature related to the topic and the findings of the studies, some pedagogical implications can be deduced for the Algerian context. First, teaching cultural knowledge, both from the native and target backgrounds, should be injected explicitly in the first year of licence through the culturally responsive teaching that emphasises the importance of valuing learners' cultural identities. For Vygotsky (1978), valuing the native environment in comparison to the target culture allows a smoother transition to approaching the target language in the realm of mutual acceptance. In the light of the aforementioned results, the most significant outcome to note is the certainty that our learners develop the intercultural competence to value their identity while they rediscover the target one. Then, like other countries, Algeria has been influenced by the process of globalisation, as this latter touched several domains of daily life. The Algerian learners now have access to the internet and technological tools; this has made them exposed to various cultures mainly the English one. On that account, bringing media to the classroom would be a valuable teaching material to learn in a lively and modern way about big C Culture and small c culture, helping learners navigate diverse facets of culture. Thus, educators should train their learners to develop their critical thinking skills through implementing the (CRT) pedagogy, that brings the world into the classroom to create a culturally rich and effective learning context, where cross-cultural understanding is more than a priority, especially in content modules such as Literature, Civilisation, Reading, and Oral Communication in order to create a third culture, a third space between universal ideologies and their own point of view.



Conclusion

This paper is set out in an attempt to explore and identify the extent to which EFL learners have been affected by the process of learning English and its culture. Hence, it sheds light on the relationship between language and culture, and the impact of target culture on EFL learners' identity construction. Because of the multifaceted nature of identity, various issues were explored while others remained beyond the study's scope.

Considering the above discussion, the cultural influence on EFL learners' identity is evident. However, the influence varies according to the educational context and the characteristics of the learners. The paper revealed divergent findings in the way EFL learners reshape their cultural identity and develop new behaviours and linguistic practices, which confirm the hypotheses suggesting that English learning is not just a process of acquiring a set of language skills and knowledge, but a complicated social practice, in which learners' identities are constantly constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed. It is important to recognise that the modern technologies will change the standards of research regarding the EFL learners' virtual identity.

In this paper, the researcher describes and analyses the impact of culture exposure on the EFL learners' identity. Nonetheless, the research does not fully cover the classroom dynamics, which is the main scenario for this process of identity construction as language learners, and comprises learners, teachers, teaching approaches, and the means through which the learners build up their individual multicultural identity, and struggle to find ways to recreate it within the community of EFL learners.

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