

Self-Representation and Identity Formation among Algerian EFL Teachers: A Postcolonial Reading Through Lenses of the Harlem Renaissance

Zoubir AISSANI¹

Ecole normale supérieure de Ouargla, Algeria

aissani.zoubir@ens-ouargla.dz

 0000-0001-5292-4537

Djamel GOUI

University of Kasdi Merbah Ouargla, Algeria

Goui.djamel@univ-ouargla.dz

 0000-0002-1950-6314

Received 23/05/2026

Accepted 28/06/2026

Published 01/07/2026

Abstract

This study investigates the concept of self-representation and identity formation among Algerian EFL teachers within a postcolonial framework, conceptually emphasizing the Harlem Renaissance as a historical and cultural lens of the respective analysis. As a matter of fact, the Harlem Renaissance is not used in this context as a direct comparison, but as an interpretive framework highlighting cultural affirmation, resistance, and identity negotiation in marginalized communities. In the Algerian context, English language teachers operate extensively within a complex multilingual environment shaped by Arabic as a signifier of national identity, French as residues of colonialism, and English as a language of global and professional discourse. These intermingled linguistic and cultural forces situate teachers between conflicting positions where identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed. This study, using a qualitative, interpretive approach, attempts to explore how Algerian EFL teachers perceive and articulate their professional and cultural identities. The findings suggest that teacher identity is fluid, hybrid, and shaped by ongoing negotiations between local belonging and global engagement. By considering these dynamics within a sophisticated reality of a postcolonial reading inspired by the Harlem Renaissance, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about identity, language, and representation in educational contexts shaped by linguistic and historical divisions.

Keywords; Algerian EFL teacher; cultural hybridity; Harlem Renaissance; post-colonialism; self-representation; teacher identity.

¹ Corresponding author: Zoubir AISSANI/aissani.zoubir@ens-ouargla.dz

Journal of Languages & Translation © 2026. Published by University of Chlef, Algeria.

This is an open access article under the CC BY license <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Introduction

The idea of teacher identity has become very important in language education, especially in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. This is particularly true in countries with a colonial past and a multilingual reality. However, much of the research on this topic still looks at identity in rather simple terms, focusing mainly on how well a teacher performs their job or how they grow professionally. It often overlooks the deeper influences of history, power relations, and the unequal value placed on different languages.

In Algeria, this complexity is very clear. Teachers of English work within a layered linguistic environment. Arabic is the language of the nation and carries strong cultural and symbolic meaning. French remains present because of the country's colonial history and continues to be used in many official and institutional contexts. English, on the other hand, is often seen as a gateway to global mobility, education, and career opportunities. Yet these languages do not exist on equal footing; they form a kind of hierarchy. This creates tension between maintaining a connection to local culture and engaging with the global world.

Because of this, a teacher's identity in Algeria cannot be reduced to professional competence or institutional roles. It is shaped by the constant negotiation of cultural, historical, and ideological forces. Teachers are not simply practitioners; they are individuals positioned within a complex network of meanings and expectations.

Many existing approaches to teacher identity are not critical enough of the conditions that shape it. Some perspectives do recognize that identity is formed through social interactions and specific contexts, but they often fail to fully account for the impact of colonial history and global inequalities on how languages are valued. In Algeria, teachers are not only members of a professional community; they are also shaped by broader historical and political realities. This makes their identity more complex—something fluid and continuously negotiated within cultural and linguistic systems.

Thus, the way teachers represent themselves becomes central in this context. It is not just about how they perform their role in the classroom, but about how they actively construct, express, and sometimes challenge their professional and cultural positions. Teaching English in Algeria is not merely a technical task; it is a meaning-making practice where teachers constantly balance different languages and cultural expectations. This balancing act raises important questions about authority, legitimacy, and voice. How do teachers position themselves in relation to dominant norms of English? How do they make sense of these norms in their own context? And how are they perceived by their communities and institutions?

From this perspective, being a teacher is not a fixed identity but an ongoing process shaped by cultural and ideological struggles. Teachers in Algeria, and in similar contexts, navigate these complexities every day. Their identity becomes a space of negotiation and contestation, influenced by the languages they speak, the cultures they belong to, and the ideologies they engage with. Recognizing this is essential for understanding their experiences and for finding more meaningful ways to support them.

The significance of self-representation in teaching resides in its capacity to shape teachers' pedagogical decisions and classroom practices. Instead of seeing teachers as simply following rules set by others, self-representation positions them as active agents who can make their own choices about language and teaching. This is especially important in contexts like Algeria, where the education system still reflects the effects of colonial history and cultural inequality. Through self-representation, teachers can develop their own ways of teaching and constructing cultural meaning, rather than just reproducing dominant language norms. In this sense, teachers can move beyond simply following prescribed methods and begin to create more meaningful and context-sensitive practices. They also become participants in shaping alternative forms of teaching and cultural expression. However, it is important to recognize that teachers still operate within institutions that often privilege English and may limit their ability to fully exercise this agency.

To better understand this dynamic, this study draws on the Harlem Renaissance as a framework for thinking about self-definition. The Harlem Renaissance was a major cultural movement in the early twentieth century, during which African American artists and intellectuals challenged dominant narratives that had marginalized their community. Through literature, music, and art, they worked to reclaim their voices and redefine their cultural value. The movement was not only about artistic expression; it was also a form of resistance against systems of inequality and a way for African Americans to assert control over their identity and representation. Key figures such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston emphasized the importance of drawing on one's own language and cultural experience to create new and authentic forms of expression.

This historical perspective offers useful insights for understanding the situation in Algeria, where English often functions as a dominant global language. Similar to Harlem Renaissance intellectuals, Algerian EFL teachers navigate a system in which their own language and culture are not always equally valued. In this context, language becomes both a site of struggle and a means of self-expression—it can empower individuals, but it can also be used as a tool of control.

The main aim of this article is to compare the self-representation strategies developed during the Harlem Renaissance with the ways Algerian EFL teachers construct their cultural identity. By bringing these two contexts together, the study seeks to show how identity is shaped through linguistic and cultural representation in environments marked by inequality.

The study is guided by the following questions: How can the Harlem Renaissance inform our understanding of EFL teacher identity in Algeria? How do self-expression, agency, and resistance appear in identity formation in postcolonial contexts? And how can comparing these two settings help us develop more critical and culturally responsive approaches to language teaching?

By addressing these questions, the article contributes to ongoing discussions in applied linguistics, postcolonial theory, and teacher education about the relationship between language, identity, and power in educational contexts..

1. Methodology

This study takes a conceptual approach that focuses on ideas and meanings rather than collecting data from real-life settings. Instead of relying on classroom observations or interviews, it aims to build a framework for understanding how Algerian EFL teachers form their cultural identity by looking at the issue from a specific theoretical perspective.

To do this, the study draws on existing work in applied linguistics, postcolonial theory, and cultural studies. It also uses the Harlem Renaissance as a reference point to explore how individuals can represent themselves in contexts where they do not hold power. This historical example highlights how language and creativity can be used to shape identity and challenge dominant narratives.

The analysis is mainly interpretive, focusing on how meaning is constructed. It brings together ideas from scholars such as Etienne Wenger (Wenger, 1998), Bonny Norton (Norton, 2013), and James Paul Gee (Gee, 2000), who examine how identity develops in language learning contexts. It also draws on postcolonial thinkers like Homi K. Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994), Stuart Hall (Hall, 1996), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak, 1988), who explore issues of representation, voice, and power.

Rather than approaching these perspectives in isolation, the present study brings them into dialogue in order to construct a more comprehensive understanding of identity. Particular attention is given to the role of language in shaping issues of legitimacy, authority, and recognition, specifically in determining whose voices are acknowledged, whose contributions are valued, and who possesses the discursive power to define meaning.

Several key concepts guide the analysis, including self-representation, voice, agency, and cultural identity. These concepts are used to explore and compare two contexts: the Harlem Renaissance and the experience of Algerian EFL teachers. In this study, the Harlem Renaissance is not treated only as a

historical case, but as a conceptual lens that helps explain how identity can be constructed and expressed under unequal conditions.

By comparing these two contexts, the study shows how identity is formed in situations where people may not have equal power or recognition. At the same time, it acknowledges the limits of this approach. Because it does not rely on real-life data, it cannot fully reflect what happens in actual classrooms. However, the aim is not to describe reality directly, but to offer a theoretical framework that can guide future research.

Overall, this study contributes to the field by offering a more critical way of understanding teacher identity. It shows that identity is not only about personal development or cultural belonging, but is also shaped by broader historical, social, and ideological forces.

2. Theoretical Background

To clarify the scope of this study, the theoretical background foregrounds three interrelated domains: identity formation in EFL teaching, self-representation and voice, and the Harlem Renaissance as a cultural model. First, the review of identity formation examines how language teachers construct professional and cultural selves within multilingual and postcolonial settings, with attention to the cognitive, affective, and socio-political processes that shape teacher subjectivity. Second, the section on self-representation and voice interrogates the ways teachers narrate, perform, and negotiate their positionalities in classroom discourse and institutional practice, emphasizing agency, narrative strategies, and modes of resistance. Third, the Harlem Renaissance is introduced as an interpretive model that illuminates processes of cultural affirmation, aesthetic negotiation, and collective identity work in marginalized communities; it is employed here as a conceptual lens rather than a direct point of comparison. Together, these strands provide the conceptual apparatus for analysing how Algerian EFL teachers articulate and perform identity amid competing linguistic and historical forces.

2.1 Identity Formation in EFL Teaching

The study of teacher identity has become an important area of language education research, as teaching is increasingly understood as more than just a technical job. It is now widely recognized as something deeply connected to cultural, social, and historical contexts. However, despite this shift, a key limitation remains in much of the literature: many studies discuss how teachers form their identities without fully considering the political and power-related factors that shape this process. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers are a clear example of this. Their identities are shaped not only by classroom practices, but also by broader power relations and social expectations within their communities.

A central idea in this field is the concept of Communities of Practice, introduced by Etienne Wenger (Wenger, 1998). This theory suggests that identity is formed through participation in shared social practices. In other words, identity is not something fixed that people simply have; rather, it develops over time through interaction with others. While this perspective has been very useful in understanding teacher identity, it also has limitations. In particular, it does not fully address how larger social forces—such as colonial histories, institutional hierarchies, and power inequalities—influence identity formation.

Another key concept is identity as investment, developed by Bonny Norton (Norton, 1997, 2013). This idea proposes that when people learn a language, they are not only acquiring linguistic skills but also investing in a social identity. This approach is valuable because it highlights the connection between language learning and power relations. However, it still has limitations, particularly in how it engages with historical and structural conditions that shape language learning environments.

James Paul Gee's discourse-oriented theory of identity is also highly relevant. Gee (2000) argues that identities are constructed through language use and social interaction. This perspective helps explain how teachers continuously negotiate their identities in classrooms and wider social contexts. However,

like the previous theories, it does not always fully account for the broader structural forces that influence these interactions.

When these theories are applied to the Algerian context, their strengths and limitations become clearer. Algeria is a multilingual society where Arabic, French, and English coexist, each carrying its own historical and social meaning, Goui(2015). Arabic is closely tied to national identity and cultural belonging, French is associated with the colonial past and institutional practice, and English is linked to global mobility and economic opportunity. Algerian EFL teachers must navigate this complex linguistic environment on a daily basis.

In this context, identity formation is not a simple or linear process. It is shaped by multiple factors, including institutional expectations, social norms, and historical influences. Algerian EFL teachers often find themselves balancing the desire to participate in the global English-speaking community with their own local cultural and linguistic realities. This balancing act can create both tension and uncertainty as they move between different linguistic and cultural worlds.

To better understand this process, the concept of the “third space,” introduced by Homi K. Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994), is particularly useful. This idea suggests that identities are formed in the space between cultures and languages. However, this space is not neutral or easy to navigate. It can be a site of tension, conflict, and negotiation, but also of creativity and hybridity. Algerian EFL teachers operate within this space as they negotiate between competing languages, cultures, and social expectations.

In conclusion, the theories of Wenger, Norton, and Gee provide valuable insights into teacher identity, but they need to be complemented with perspectives that take into account historical power relations and linguistic inequalities. The concept of the “third space” helps to further understand the complexity of identity formation in the Algerian context, but it must also be interpreted in light of the power structures that shape it. Overall, teacher identity is not a fixed or stable category; it is an ongoing process of negotiation shaped by discourse, history, and power.

2.2 Self-Representation and Voice

Self-representation is an important idea in postcolonial theory and cultural studies. It is used to describe how people construct their identities and how they negotiate power. Stuart Hall (Hall, 1996) argues that self-representation is not simply about reflecting who you are, but about actively producing identity. For him, identity is never fixed; it is always changing and being reshaped. This idea is important because it highlights that people are not singular or stable—they are multiple, shifting, and complex.

If identities are always changing, the question then becomes: how much control do we really have over who we are? This is where Paul Gilroy (Gilroy, 1993) becomes relevant. He argues that identity is formed through a combination of culture, history, and social interaction. Through his concept of the Black Atlantic, he shows how identities are shaped across movement, exchange, and connection rather than fixed origins. For Gilroy, self-representation is not only about what is said, but also about how people move, interact, and position themselves in relation to others.

In postcolonial theory, self-representation is also closely linked to the idea of voice—who has the right to speak, and whose voices are heard. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak, 1988) raises an important question: can marginalized people truly speak? She suggests that even when they do speak; their voices may not be fully recognized because dominant systems decide what counts as meaningful or legitimate. From this perspective, self-representation is not only about expression, but also about recognition and being heard.

When applied to education, these ideas show that teachers are not just transmitters of knowledge. They also play an active role in shaping identities. Suresh Canagarajah (Canagarajah, 2013) explains that teachers in multilingual contexts constantly navigate different languages and cultural expectations. They must find ways to teach English in meaningful and locally relevant ways, even though English itself is often associated with global power and privilege.

In Algeria, this complexity is particularly visible. The country’s linguistic landscape is shaped by Arabic, French, and English. Arabic is strongly tied to national identity and cultural belonging, French reflects

the colonial past, and English is associated with global communication and opportunity, Goui (2020). Teachers must navigate these layers when teaching English, while also thinking about how they represent themselves and their students in culturally meaningful ways.

This is not a simple task, because teachers are not only representing themselves—they are also representing their students, their communities, and their cultural context. In doing so, they perform identity in ways that must be both meaningful and socially acceptable. This is what Stuart Hall (Hall, 1996) refers to as articulation: the process of producing meaning and identity through language and cultural practice.

However, this articulation is not completely free. It is shaped and limited by institutional systems and global standards of English. Teachers are often expected to follow specific curricula, rules, and expectations, which means that self-representation is not only about expression, but also about negotiation within constraints.

Teaching English in Algeria also involves mediation. Teachers interpret and translate meanings for their students, helping them understand not only language structures but also cultural contexts. This process is complex, as meaning is never fully transparent and often carries cultural nuance.

In conclusion, self-representation is a multidimensional concept. It involves identity, voice, and power, as well as the ways people construct meaning and express themselves. At the same time, it is shaped by constraints, inequalities, and institutional pressures. Teachers in Algeria must navigate these tensions as they teach English. In doing so, they represent not only themselves, but also their students and their broader cultural context. Ultimately, self-representation is not an individual act alone; it is a social and cultural process through which meaning is continuously created and negotiated.

2.3 Harlem Renaissance as a Cultural Model

The Harlem Renaissance was an important cultural movement in American history. In a broader sense, it can be seen as a collective project through which African American communities sought to change how they were perceived and understood. This took place during the early 1900s, a period when African Americans faced severe racial discrimination and were denied equal rights compared to white Americans. The Harlem Renaissance was not only about art and literature, but also about challenging dominant perceptions and reshaping identity at a social and cultural level.

Alain Locke (Locke, 1925) was a central figure in this movement. He introduced the idea of the “New Negro,” which reframed African Americans as modern, intelligent, and capable individuals rather than inferior subjects. Locke’s idea was not simply descriptive; it was transformative, aiming to change how African Americans were viewed by society. However, some scholars have argued that his approach had limitations, particularly because it often emphasized respectability and middle-class values.

Langston Hughes (Hughes, 1926) also played a key role in the Harlem Renaissance. His poetry used the rhythms, expressions, and lived language of African American communities rather than conforming strictly to Standard English. In doing so, he challenged the idea that Standard English was the only “correct” form of expression. Hughes demonstrated that African American language varieties were meaningful, expressive, and capable of producing powerful artistic work.

Similarly, Zora Neale Hurston (Hurston, 1937) drew heavily on African American oral traditions, stories, and everyday language in her writing. Her work emphasized the cultural value of Black life and challenged the idea that some languages or cultural forms are more legitimate than others. Through her writing, Hurston highlighted the richness and complexity of African American cultural expression.

Overall, the Harlem Renaissance can be understood through three main ideas: reclaiming control over representation, valuing African American language and culture, and challenging dominant cultural hierarchies. African Americans during this period worked to present themselves as complex, intelligent, and diverse individuals who deserved dignity and respect. At the same time, they emphasized that their language and cultural expressions were valuable in their own right.

The Harlem Renaissance remains relevant today because it shows that identity is not fixed or given, but something that is actively constructed and negotiated over time. It also demonstrates how language can be used both as a tool of resistance and as a means of creating new meanings and perspectives.

This framework can be compared to contexts where individuals navigate complex linguistic and cultural systems. For example, Algerian EFL teachers operate in an environment where Arabic, French, and English carry different social and symbolic values. Like Harlem Renaissance writers, these teachers often seek ways to express themselves and assert their professional and cultural identities within systems that are not always equal or balanced.

In conclusion, the Harlem Renaissance shows that identity is not stable or predetermined, but something that is continuously shaped and reshaped. It also highlights the power of language as a tool for challenging dominant cultures and producing new meanings.

3. Discussion

This study addresses three interrelated analytical angles: comparative insight, reclaiming voice and agency, and toward a postcolonial pedagogy—each serving as a distinct but overlapping lens for examining Algerian EFL teacher identity.

Comparative insight: this strand employs cross-contextual analysis to illuminate parallels and divergences between the Algerian case and other historical or cultural formations, thereby situating local identity work within broader transnational and historical patterns.

Reclaiming voice and agency: this angle focuses on how teachers articulate, perform, and negotiate their voices within institutional and classroom settings, emphasizing processes of resistance, self-representation, and the exercise of professional agency.

Toward a postcolonial pedagogy: this perspective explores pedagogical implications, advocating for instructional approaches that critically engage with colonial legacies, linguistic hierarchies, and the politics of representation to foster more reflective, equitable, and contextually responsive language education.

3.1 *Comparative Insight*

When we compare the Harlem Renaissance with the way Algerian EFL teachers form their identities, several similarities become clear. In both contexts, language is not simply a tool for communication; it is also a space where power relations are negotiated and where struggles over recognition take place. The Harlem Renaissance emerged as a response to the marginalization of African American language and culture, which pushed artists and writers to find new ways of expressing identity and asserting their presence (Locke, 1925; Gilroy, 1993).

For example, Langston Hughes (Hughes, 1926) used every day spoken language and rhythms in his poetry as a way to challenge the dominance of standard English. In a similar way, Algerian EFL teachers work within a system where certain languages are valued more than others. They must engage with English as a powerful global language while also maintaining their own cultural and linguistic identities (Canagarajah, 2013).

However, it is important to be cautious when making this comparison. The two contexts are not identical and should not be treated as the same. The Harlem Renaissance took place in a specific historical and social context in the United States, while Algerian EFL teachers operate within a postcolonial educational system shaped by colonial history and the global dominance of English (Bhabha, 1994).

Despite these differences, both contexts show how individuals who are not in dominant positions use language as a means of seeking recognition. Hughes used poetry to challenge linguistic hierarchies, while Algerian EFL teachers often navigate expectations about how English should be taught, while still trying to preserve their own cultural and linguistic identities.

This is not simply a personal issue; it is a structural one. Teachers operate within institutional systems that shape what is considered legitimate language use and professional practice. As a result, they must

constantly negotiate between global expectations of English and their local cultural realities (Gee, 2000; Norton, 2013).

In this sense, the classroom can be understood as a space where teachers perform and construct their identities. Teaching is not only about transferring knowledge, but also about expressing values, positioning oneself, and negotiating meaning. This is similar to artistic practice, where creators use their work to express identity and communicate cultural meaning (Hall, 1996).

Overall, the comparison shows that language is closely linked to identity and self-perception. Whether in literature or in education, language becomes a way of positioning oneself in the world and negotiating recognition, particularly in contexts marked by inequality.

The key point is not that the Harlem Renaissance and Algerian EFL teachers are the same, but that they share similar dynamics in how language is used to challenge dominant structures and create space for self-expression. Both involve struggles to be seen, heard, and recognized.

At the same time, these struggles are complex and do not always lead to full success. Identity formation in such contexts is ongoing and uncertain. However, it remains an essential part of human experience, Goui (2017).

In conclusion, the comparison highlights that language is deeply connected to identity and the way individuals understand themselves. It is a tool for negotiating position in the world and for seeking recognition. This is especially significant in contexts where inequality shapes access to voice and visibility. Both the Harlem Renaissance and Algerian EFL teachers illustrate how language can be used to challenge dominant systems and open up new possibilities for identity formation.

3.2 Reclaiming Voice and Agency

When we look at the Harlem Renaissance and how English is taught in Algeria, we can see that ideas of voice and agency are central. This is because language is not simply a tool for communication; it is also deeply connected to power and identity. From this perspective, voice is not something people naturally possess—it is something that is constructed in contexts where some voices are valued more than others (Spivak, 1988; Hall, 1996).

In Algeria, where English is taught as a foreign language, this idea becomes very important for teachers. Instead of simply following externally imposed rules, they can be understood as active participants who interpret, reshape, and make sense of language in their own ways. This connects to what Suresh Canagarajah (Canagarajah, 2013) calls “appropriation,” which refers to how teachers and learners in postcolonial contexts adapt English to suit their own communicative needs, even if it differs from dominant or “standard” forms. This view emphasizes that English is not a fixed system, but something constantly reshaped through use.

This is similar to what happened during the Harlem Renaissance, where artists and intellectuals transformed experiences of marginalization into powerful forms of expression. They challenged dominant representations of Black identity and created new ways of speaking, writing, and being. In Algeria, teachers also work within a system where English is often positioned as more valuable than local languages and cultures. However, unlike Harlem Renaissance artists, they must operate within institutional structures governed by rules, curricula, and standards, which can limit their freedom of expression.

In this sense, the teacher is not only a transmitter of knowledge but also a producer of meaning. Teachers navigate between dominant models of English teaching and local ways of knowing and being. Instead of simply applying standard methods, they interpret and adapt English in ways that are meaningful for their students and communities. This relates to Homi K. Bhabha’s (1994) idea of the “third space,” where meaning and identity are created through the interaction of different cultures and languages. However, this space should not be seen as entirely open or neutral, since it can also be shaped by unequal power relations.

More recently, scholars in applied linguistics have emphasized the importance of teacher agency. For example, Mahboob (2014) argues for moving beyond the dominance of the native-speaker model in English language teaching and for recognizing multiple legitimate varieties of English as well as diverse teaching practices shaped by local contexts. This perspective challenges traditional approaches that often ignore local contexts and learner realities. At the same time, curriculum reforms in many contexts have begun to emphasize communication, intercultural awareness, and critical thinking, which can open up more space for teacher creativity and reflection.

However, these changes are not evenly distributed. They are often constrained by institutional policies and educational systems. Assessment frameworks and proficiency standards frequently prioritize “standard” forms of English, which limits teachers’ ability to exercise full autonomy. This creates a tension in language education: while discourse promotes teacher agency, institutional structures often restrict it in practice.

In this context, reclaiming voice and agency is not something that can be achieved by individual teachers alone. It requires a critical understanding of the institutions and power structures that shape language education. The Harlem Renaissance is useful here because it shows how marginalized groups used language and culture to reconstruct identity and assert visibility. Similarly, teachers in Algeria can use language creatively to develop their own pedagogical identities, even within constrained systems.

Ultimately, agency is not about complete freedom, but about the ability to make meaningful choices within existing structures. Teacher agency always operates within institutional, cultural, and global constraints that shape what is possible. This does not diminish its importance; rather, it highlights that agency is always negotiated and context-dependent. In both the Harlem Renaissance and Algerian EFL teaching contexts, voice emerges through the ongoing interaction between structure and individual action, between constraint and creativity, and between dominance and resistance.

3.3 Toward a Postcolonial Pedagogy

The framework developed in this study points toward pedagogy of self-representation. This pedagogy is based on the idea that a teacher’s identity is not something fixed or something simply acquired through training. Rather, it is an ongoing process shaped by history, language, power, and knowledge.

Teaching, from this perspective, is not about following a set curriculum in a mechanical way. It is about creating meaning and negotiating power through language and knowledge. A postcolonial pedagogy challenges the assumption that there is only one “correct” way to teach English. Instead, it questions the historical and ideological foundations that shape dominant teaching methods.

A key aspect of this pedagogy is the need to rethink how English is taught in different contexts. English language teaching is often based on models that assume a single standard form of English. However, this approach overlooks the historical and political forces that have shaped these norms. A postcolonial perspective encourages educators to critically examine these assumptions rather than accepting them as neutral or universal.

This pedagogy can be organized around three main principles: reflection, cultural recognition, and creative agency. Critical reflection involves examining the history of English language teaching and its connections to colonialism, inequality, and global power structures (Canagarajah, 2013). It encourages teachers to question taken-for-granted assumptions about language and pedagogy. Cultural recognition refers to valuing local languages, cultures, and knowledge systems as legitimate and meaningful forms of understanding. It challenges the hierarchy that often places English and Western knowledge above other ways of knowing. Creative agency emphasizes that teachers are not simply implementers of curriculum. Instead, they are reflective practitioners who can adapt, reinterpret, and innovate in response to their contexts (Norton, 2013). These principles are particularly important for teacher education and professional development in contexts such as Algeria. Currently, teacher training often prioritizes technical skills and procedural knowledge. A postcolonial pedagogy, however, would place greater emphasis on critical awareness, reflection, and identity awareness. Teachers would be encouraged to

engage with their own histories and to understand how they are positioned within global language hierarchies.

The Harlem Renaissance offers a useful example of how cultural and intellectual production can function as a form of resistance and self-definition. This historical movement can therefore inform how we think about self-representation in education and pedagogy. A postcolonial pedagogy of self-representation ultimately challenges the idea that education is neutral or objective. Instead, it highlights that teaching is always connected to power, ideology, and historical context.

Within this framework, teacher identity is not fixed. It is continuously constructed and reconstructed through practice, interaction, and reflection. The insights from the Harlem Renaissance further reinforce the idea that identity is produced through ongoing processes of resistance, creativity, and critical engagement.

Conclusion

This study explored how Algerian English teachers construct their cultural identities by drawing on ideas from the Harlem Renaissance, identity theory, and cultural history. The findings suggest that teacher identity in Algeria is not fixed, but rather dynamic and constantly evolving, shaped by multiple languages, histories, and ideological forces (Hall, 1996; Norton, 2013).

In Algeria, Arabic, French, and English coexist, but not on equal terms. This unequal linguistic landscape creates ongoing tension between cultural belonging and participation in global communication. As a result, teacher identity is not singular or stable, but something that is continuously negotiated in everyday professional practice (Canagarajah, 2013).

This study demonstrates that the Harlem Renaissance offers a productive interpretive lens for examining identity formation among Algerian EFL teachers within a postcolonial milieu. Both contexts reveal how language functions as a site of power and representation, and how identity is constructed under conditions of inequality. Harlem Renaissance artists and writers sought to redefine Black identity in the United States through cultural affirmation and resistance; similarly, Algerian English teachers negotiate professional and cultural selves amid the competing legacies of Arabic, French, and English.

A central finding concerns voice: in both settings, voice operates as a contested and performative resource. For Harlem Renaissance figures, reclaiming voice entailed contesting dominant narratives and asserting cultural presence; for Algerian EFL teachers, voice is continually negotiated in classroom interactions, institutional expectations, and broader sociolinguistic constraints. Teaching English thus emerges as a performative practice through which teachers position themselves relative to local norms and global demands. Belonging also emerges as an important part of identity. While Harlem Renaissance thinkers sought recognition within society, Algerian teachers often experience a sense of partial belonging, positioned between their national cultural ties and broader English-speaking transnational communities.

The analysis also highlights structural limits: global language hierarchies and institutional frameworks circumscribe pedagogical autonomy and shape the possibilities for enactment of self-representation. These constraints do not, however, eliminate teacher agency; rather, they frame the terrain within which teachers exercise negotiation, adaptation, and resistance.

Methodologically, the study is conceptual and interpretive; its reliance on theoretical analysis rather than empirical fieldwork constitutes a limitation. Future research should incorporate qualitative empirical methods—such as interviews, ethnographic observation, and discourse analysis—to capture teachers' lived experiences and to validate and extend the conceptual claims advanced here.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to scholarship on language, identity, and postcolonial pedagogy by demonstrating the analytic value of cultural-historical frameworks. By foregrounding the dynamic, negotiated, and ideological nature of teacher identity, the study encourages more critical, reflective, and culturally responsive approaches to language education in postcolonial contexts.

References

- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. Routledge.
- Drahamane, S., & Goui, D. (2026). The relevance of training translators and interpreters in Mali and Niger organizations. In D. Goui (Ed.), *Insights on teaching translation and interpretation in Africa: The state of the art and perspectives* (pp. 259–267). Springer Nature.
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. In W. G. Secada (Ed.), *Review of research in education* (Vol. 25, pp. 99–125). American Educational Research Association.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Harvard University Press.
- Goui, D. (2015). An overview on interference. *Cahiers de Traduction*, 79–94.
- Goui, D. (2017). Translating gender between Arabic and English. In *Translation across time and space* (pp. 65–79). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Goui, D. (2020). Translation and interpreting difficulties of immigration issues in Algeria. In *Conceiving migration and communication in global perspective* (Vol. 8, pp. 93–101).
- Goui, D. (2025). Exploring translator choices facing the possible death of truth in translating family law of Algeria. *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*, 38(6), 1935–1950. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-025-10280-1>
- Goui, D. (Ed.). (2026). *Insights on teaching translation and interpretation in Africa: The state of the art and perspectives*. Springer Nature.
- Goui, D., & Chetoui, O. (2026). Teaching translation in Algeria. In D. Goui (Ed.), *Insights on teaching translation and interpretation in Africa: The state of the art and perspectives* (pp. 71–100). Springer Nature.
- Goui, D., & Kefali, W. (2020). Hollywood goes to the classroom: The prospects of using movies as authentic materials to teach English between educational benefits and cultural menace. *Almodawana*, 7(1), 541–564.
- Hall, S. (1996). Who needs “identity”? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 1–17). Sage.
- Hughes, L. (1926). The Negro artist and the racial mountain. *The Nation*.
- Hurston, Z. N. (1937). *Their eyes were watching God*. J. B. Lippincott.
- Kerrache, B., & Goui, D. (2025). The concept of health in the philosophy of medical sciences. *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, 26(1), 53–69.
- Locke, A. (1925). *The new Negro: An interpretation*. Albert and Charles Boni.
- Mahboob, A. (Ed.). (2014). *Beyond the native speaker in TESOL: Identity, pedagogy, and power*. Springer.
- 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* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.