Construction and Validation of an Identity Scale for English Language Learners

Zia Tajeddin[1a], Mahmoud Fereydoonfar[2b]

Abstract

Although the language pedagogies of private institutes are sharply different from those of the public curriculum, scant research has been done on the identity formation of English language learners in these institutes. To fill this niche, first, a literature-driven identity scale was developed, which consisted of the eight components of learning, belongingness, expectations, motivations, attitudes, agency, learning activities, and relationships. Next, the scale was administered to Iranian English language learners of a leading private institute. The dataset collected from 338 learners was found to be appropriate for running exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and reliability estimation. The EFA results showed that the items loaded on five factors: (a) linguistic investment, (b) belongingness, (c) expectations, (d) attitudes, and (e) agency. It was also found that the scale had a high level of internal consistency. It is concluded that the construct of English language learner identity has its distinctive context-specific conceptualization within the pedagogical frames of private institutes.

[1] Professor, Email: tajeddinz@modares.ac.ir (Corresponding Author)
 Tel: +98-21-82883669
[2] PhD Candidate, Email: mahmoud.fereydoonfar@gmail.com
[a] Tarbiat Modares University, Iran
[b] Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran
 http://dx.doi.org/ijscl.2022.545507.2506

1. Introduction

The concept of L2 learner identity was introduced into language research after the rise of socio-cultural approaches to second language acquisition (De Costa & Norton, 2016). This socio-cultural trend, as a departure from cognitivism, proposed that language identity is constructed through both self- and other-positioning (Beeching et al., 2018). Accordingly, the L2 learner's desire to affiliate and expand their relationship with the target language community and its culture was brought to light (Hummel, 2013). L2 learner identity was hence defined as "a contingent process involving dialectic relations between learners and the various worlds and experiences they inhabit" (Ricento, 2005, p. 895). This experiential contingency, therefore, implies consideration of multiple social options in a linguistic field for putting together a more vivid picture of the construct. A prime example of this contingency is the linguistic investment of Iranian English language learners in non-state private institutes, which owe their origin to the governmental school privatization plans targeted at tackling a desperate shortage of free education for all (Borjian, 2010). These institutes are concertedly viewed to be the main venue of English instruction in Iran because they have flourished into prestigious learning settings hosting a sizeable fraction of the Iranian society following post-school globally-oriented linguistic pedagogies (e.g., Zarrabi & Brown, 2015). This popularity is due to both the poor quality of English instruction in public schools and the institutes which have globally-oriented learner-centered language pedagogies (Nasrollahi Sharri, 2017). Adherence to such learner-centered pedagogies provides learners with widespread identity options as they can freely negotiate diverse ideas about their learning experiences. Language learners will be, in turn, able to maintain strong epistemic stances in their learning environment through self- or other-positioning (Wenger, 1998). The implementation of social constructivist views underscoring socialization and collaboration has further increased the chances for socialization and identity ascriptions in these institutes (Mohammadian Haghighi & Norton, 2016). These non-state language centers have their distinctive pedagogical frames (Iranmehr & Davari, 2019) and provide learners with a wide range of distinct identity options (Mohammadian Haghighi & Norton, 2016).

The identity options available to English language learners at private institutes are expected to be different from those available at public schools and universities because English instruction in private language institutes follows globally-oriented pedagogies that are missing from the public curriculum (Borjian, 2010), As such, nationwide conceptualizations of the construct that merge identity elements from the public and private educational sectors cannot be representative of the private institutes. This study thus sought to add to the literature on English language learner identity by developing a scale fitting together with multiple identity components within the regulatory frames of a private language institute.

2. Theoretical Framework

The sociocultural views of Lev Vygotsky on the construct of learning redefined it as an entity occurring through socialization. Vygotsky (1978) believed that a clear understanding of an individual's development mostly requires an examination of their social engagement. Vosniadou (2001) similarly asserted that "the way children learn is by internalizing the activities, habits, vocabulary and ideas of the members of the community in which they grow up" (p. 9). These social engagements can, in turn, shape context-specific identities enhancing people's understandings of themselves and their relationships with others (Bourdieu, 1988). Hence, identity research matters because it helps understand how people make sense of themselves, their social world, and their experiences within it (McCarthy & Moje, 2002). In this sociocultural perspective, identity is not defined as a label or personality trait but as a lived experience of belonging. It "involves deep connections with others through shared histories and experiences, reciprocity, affection, and mutual commitments" (Wenger, 2000, p. 239).

Language learning similarly occurs in social contexts and involves constructing identities (Ou & Gu). L2 learner identities were recognized as a prominent research strand after the rise of sociocultural approaches to

SLA (De Costa & Norton, 2016). In this social trend, identities are conceived to be dynamic, multilayered, and different from one language context to another (e.g., Norton, 2000). Block (2007), in a seminal work, underscored the adult-migrant, the second language, and foreign language contexts as the three main language fields for the development of L2 learner identities. Studies on L2 learner identity have been conducted in a wide range of contexts, such as the United States (Barnawi, 2009), Korea (Vasilopoulos, 2015), and China (Gao et al., 2015). These studies have pinpointed unique aspects of language identity particular to the context of language use. For instance, Vassilopoulos (2015), in a study of 10 bilingual Korean-English speakers, reported that the negotiation of L2 identity in EFL contexts is a complex process with its local challenges and options.

The EFL context of Iran has particular ideological and pedagogical features. While English instruction was a modernization tool during the Pahlavi Dynasty from 1925 to 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran redefines English-speaking cultures as an antithesis to certain aspects of Iranian/Islamic identities (Kiany, Mahdavy, et al., 2011), and dictates more inward-looking policies in favor of a joint Islamic-Iranian identity (Borjian, 2013). Until recently, English instruction on the public curriculum has mostly followed grammar-translation approaches (Baleghizadeh & Farshchi, 2009), and the assessment system rarely embraces the communicative requirements of the modern world (Dahmardeh, 2009). Accordingly, many Iranians tend to join post-school private institutes in pursuit of communicative pedagogies (Nasrollahi Sharri, 2017). Although these institutes owe their origin to the school privatization policies aimed at tackling the shortage of free education for all, their growing popularity lies in new generations' strong desires for a global reach (Borjian, 2010). The poor quality of English education on the public curriculum and the learner-centered pedagogies of the institutes have also contributed to this popularity (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016). A sizeable fraction of the Iranian community is investing in these post-school centers. There are more than 7800 registered and many unregistered institutes in Iran (Zarrabi & Brown, 2015).

In a comparison of English instruction on the public and private curricula in Iran, Iranmehr and Davari (2019) stated that private institutes follow the latest standards of communicative pedagogies and mostly use commercial textbooks published in the West. A major characteristic of these institutes is their reliance on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as the pedagogical frame (Iranmehr & Davari, 2019). This framework is a Eurocentric language framework that categorizes language learners into the six proficiency levels of beginner, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced. The use of the CEFR companion piece as the pedagogical frame can heighten democracy and learner agency because it has been designed to prioritize learning over teaching (Council of Europe, 2001). Language learners can hence feel free to exercise agency and negotiate preferences for issues like teaching methods and course content (Little & Erickson, 2015). The implementation of social constructivist views can also enforce socialization, collaboration, and the creation of meaningful real-life contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning, therefore, occurs through interaction and social practice in real contexts encompassing elements such as teachers, classmates, materials, supervisors, and educational managers. Private institutes must be labeled as unique landscapes of practice because they have different course-level, department-level, and institute-level hierarchies of management (Sykes, 2015), implying the co-existence of distinct horizontally and vertically dispersed communities of practice. In these hierarchies, stakeholders such as peers, supervisors, and educational managers can engage in activities with language learners though peers and teachers play the most tangible roles as supporters and negotiators in course-level communities. Their engagement in shared classroom activities creates epistemic boundaries representing joint aims, interests, and problems in the form of course-level communities of practice.

These institutes feature a wide range of identity options for learners (Mohammadian et al., 2016). Their policies for prioritizing and

addressing diverse learner needs (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016) offer up the possibilities for exercising agency in relation to different language-related issues. The practice of learner-centered constructivist pedagogies can also enhance learner autonomy which is defined as freedom for choosing how, when, and what to learn (Holec, 1981). Furthermore, as these institutes address the globally-oriented linguistic requirements of the modern world, language learners can have access to more transnationally-dispersed identity options (Borjian, 2013). One obvious case of these identity options is the prospect of a scientific competition on an international market (Kiany, Mirhosseini, et al., 2011). These features are envisaged to contribute to the development of a context-specific portrait of English language learner identity with its specific dimensions. Despite the substantial role of these language centers as the main venue of English instruction in Iran (Zarrabi & Brown, 2015), to our knowledge, there is no empirical account of how English language learner identity is portrayed within their regulatory frames. There are nationwide accounts of the construct built upon the whole Iranian community as a monolithic identity field, blending identity options of the private and state fields (e.g., Khatib & Rezaei, 2013; Rezaei et al., 2014). As private institutes are unique identity fields, a scholarly attempt is required to shed light on the way an English language learner identity develops within their regulatory frames. Against this backdrop, this study aimed to develop and validate an English language learner identity scale within the regulatory frames of a private institute.

These language institutes are conceived to have their unique context-specific features contributing to the development of a new identity portrait. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the construct of English language learners' identity within the regulatory frames of private language institutes in Iran?
2. What are the psychometric features of the scale measuring English language learners' identity?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and Research Setting

A sample of 400 English language learners from six CEFR levels participated in the study (Table 1). They were following their language studies in a leading private institute hosting more than 15,000 learners. The institute had some staff in charge of registering learning and scheduling courses, many part- and full-time teachers, some supervisors who were responsible for observing language courses and enrolling learners into proper proficiency levels, and educational managers observing and regulating teachers and supervisors' performances. The institute's pedagogical frame was based on the CEFR companion piece, and the *American English File* series, the second edition, was being instructed as the textbook. The institute had been structured to follow learner-centered and communicative teaching pedagogies in response to the learners' demands for globally-oriented requirements.

Table 1
The Participants

CEFR levels	Gender		Total
	M	**F**	
Beginner	26	37	63
Elementary	31	28	59
Pre-intermediate	29	31	60
Intermediate	48	42	90
Higher intermediate	33	35	68
Advanced	26	34	60
Total	**175**	**225**	**400**

3.2. Instruments

Eight steps were followed to develop a literature-driven tentative scale for English language learners' identity, reflecting the main identity options available to the English language learners. In the first step, the existing body of literature on private language institutes and their pedagogical frames were

deeply reviewed to prepare a theoretically-rich list of identity options reflecting different aspects of English language learners' identity. These identity options were found to be learning (e.g., Norton & Toohey, 2011), belongingness (e.g., Finley, 2018), expectations (e.g., Pitts, 2009; Trent, 2016), motivations (e.g., Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), attitudes (e.g., Bradley & Bradley, 2019), agency (e.g., Shuck, 2010), learning activities (e.g., Wenger, 1998), and relationships (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In the second step, the list of identity options was used to generate an initial item pool representative of the target domain of the institute. In six research panels, the items were further redrafted and modified not to be unclear, very lengthy, incomplete, prestige-showing, biased, leading, and double-barreled. In the third step, the scale was designed based on a six-point Likert-type scale, including the options and scores of strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), slightly disagree (3), slightly agree (4), agree (5), and strongly agree (6). A five-point Likert scale, including half-way options such as 'undecided' and 'no idea' was not used because it might encourage conservative responses and hedging (Dörnyei, 2010). The items measuring the same identity options were bundled into separate sections. Then, instructions were added to the beginning of the scale to facilitate its self-administration. In the fifth step, Khatib and Rezaei's (2013) guidelines were followed to further review the items for relevance, redundancy, and clarity. Four experts were asked to rate items from one to four; one for *'not important'* to be included in the measure, two for 'somehow important', three for 'important', and four for 'extremely important'. Only the items rated as 'important or extremely important' by three experts were kept for further analysis. In the sixth step, the scale was translated into Persian so that the whole spread of English language learners from all proficiency levels would easily complete it. To control for the transfer effect from English, the back translation technique was used, which suggested further modifications in diction. In the seventh step, the Persian version of the scale was used for a pilot study with 20 learners from the same sample to ensure that all the items were clear and intelligible. The items were found to be generally clear, and the learners asked only for a few minor lexical modifications. Finally, in the last step, the instructions and headings were highlighted, and type-faced, and enough spaces were left between items and sections. Colour, font size, and margin were also considered for face validity. As to content validity, two identity experts suggested further modifications for content relevance and coverage of the scale. The initial scale was finalized to consist of 53 items for the eight identity components of learning (n = 7), belongingness (n = 4), expectations (n = 9), motivations (n = 3), attitudes (n = 6), agency (n = 11), language learning activities (n = 3), and relationships (n = 10).

3.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis

Due to time and space constraints, the scale was administered to small groups of learners each time, mostly before or after their classes, with the help of teachers. The second author used to teach in the institute, which eased gaining informed consent of the officials and made a deeper understanding of the research context possible. The scales filled out carelessly and/or partially were excluded, and only the data from 338 learners (84.5%) were kept for analysis.

In response to the first research question, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to provide a statistical support for the literature-driven scale. EFA results helped identify the items with enough factor loadings and fewer statistically-supported underlying factors (Byrne, 2016), encompassing the eight identity components of the literature-driven scale. In so doing, first, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's (KMO) test and Bartlett's test were run to check the suitability of the data for running a factor analysis. The dataset was appropriate for running factor analysis because the KMO value was greater than 0.70 (de Vaus, 2014), and Bartlett's test findings showed the correlations between variables were significantly different from zero (Field, 2013). Hence, the principal component analysis (PCA) was used for EFA, and the extracted factors with eigenvalues over one were considered as components of the scale. The items with the factor loadings of .4 and above were kept for further analysis, and the rest were excluded.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then used to provide statistical support for the

validity of the scale (second research question) because the values of skewness and kurtosis showed the data were normally distributed and appropriate for running CFA. When skewness and kurtosis values are between -2 and +2, the data are normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). CFA as a type of structural equation modeling (SEM) (Arbuckle, 2019), was conducted using Amos Version 26. SEM is a multivariate confirmatory research technique that is used to show how far the collected data fit a tentative model. A combination of fit indices was utilized to test the fitness of the model because no strong consensus exists on the advantage of one fit index over the others. x^2/df was preferred over a Chi-square index because Chi-square results are rarely reliable when the sample size is so big. x^2/df was further accompanied by Good Fitness Index (GFI), Confirmatory Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The items with correlation coefficients higher than .3 were decided to have enough explanatory power on a measure. t-values were also used to determine the significance of path coefficients. To calculate the internal consistency of the scale and its dimensions, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used, which is a commonly used indicator of reliability.

4. Results

The results of KMO and Bartlett's test signified that the dataset was appropriate for running EFA on the 53 items. The KMO value was 0.866, which means nearly 87 percent of the variances of the 53 items may be caused by the construct of English language learners' identity. Bartlett's test of sphericity was also found to be significant as its value was smaller than 0.05.

Table 2
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's Test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

KMO	Bartlett's Test		
	Approx. Chi-Square	**df**	**Sig.**
.866	9564.264	1378	.000

As shown in Table 3, five extracted factors had eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 24.99%, 7.60%, 5.09%, 4.15%, and 3.65% of the variances, respectively. Overall, the 5-factor solution explained 45.50% of the variance. Item 38 loaded on the fifth factor, but its loading (.34) was less than .4 and was deleted from the scale. Likewise, items 47, 48, 50, and 53, with the respective loadings of .35, .32, .31, and.30, loaded on the second factor but were deleted. A look at the factor correlation matrix (Table 4) shows that the highest and the lowest correlations were between the first and fifth factors (.42) and the first and fourth factors (.15).

Table 3
Statistics of the Extracted Factors

Factors	Eigenvalues	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings	
		% of variance	**Cumulative %**
1	13.248	24.996	24.996
2	4.030	7.603	32.599
3	2.701	5.097	37.696
4	2.203	4.157	41.853
5	1.935	3.651	45.504

Table 4
Factor Correlation Matrix

Factors	1	2	3	4	5
Factor 1	1.000	0.282	0.352	0.151	0.426
Factor 2	0.282	1.000	0.165	0.252	0.196
Factor 3	0.352	0.165	1.000	0.256	0.346
Factor 4	0.151	0.252	0.256	1.000	0.237
Factor 5	0.426	0.196	0.346	0.237	1.000

Notes: Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring

4.1. Linguistic Investment

Items from the four identity options of learning, motivations, attitudes, and learning activities on the literature-driven scale (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 21, 23, 24, 41, and 42) loaded on the first factor measuring the learners' linguistic investment in English. As Table 5 shows, the highest and lowest explained variances belonged to items 6 and 24 with the explained variances with the values of 0.759 and 0.424, respectively. The average means of individual items ranged from a low of 3.48 to a high of 5.60 for items 24 and 5, respectively. Overall, the participants reported being generally invested in English learning at the private language institute.

Table 5
Statistics of the First Extracted Factor: Linguistic Investment

Items	SD	M	EV
1. I have always wanted to be an English language learner.	0.87	3.72	0.525
2. Being an English language learner gives me a higher social status.	1.13	4.12	0.627
3. Being an English language learner is an important aspect of my life.	1.12	4.17	0.642
4. I'd prefer to spend my free time learning English rather than doing other activities.	0.98	4.01	0.508
5. I decided to learn English voluntarily, not because of external forces.	1.12	3.48	0.740
6. I like to be a better English language learner.	1.05	4.97	0.759
7. I like to learn English inside and outside the language institute.	1.20	4.00	0.539
21. I am highly motivated to improve my English at the language institute.	1.03	4.50	0.501
23. I go to the language institute with enthusiasm and passion.	0.98	4.40	0.491
24. I like to learn a standard American or British variety of English.	0.95	5.60	0.424
41. I like to do language learning activities that reflect my real-life language needs.	0.92	4.52	0.680
42. I like to do language learning activities that include elements of English culture.	0.83	4.12	0.575

Notes: M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; EV=Explained variance

4.2. Belongingness

The items developed for the identity components of belongingness and relationships on the literature-driven scale (8, 9, 10, 11, 44, 45, 46, 49, 51, and 52) loaded on the second factor measuring the participants' senses of belongingness to the institute, its staff, and meta-institutional communities of English language learners. As Table 6 shows, the lowest and the highest explained variances were for items 9 and 44, with the values of 0.417 and 0.556, respectively. The means of individual items ranged from a low of 3.79 for item 11 to a high of 5.12 for item 44. The findings generally show that the participants have a moderate sense of belongingness to not only the institute but also the wider communities of Iranian and international English language learners.

Table 6
Statistics of the Second Extracted Factor: Belongingness

Items	SD	M	EV
8. I feel a sense of belonging to the language institute where I am learning English.	1.03	4.44	0.405
9. I see myself as a member of the English language learners' community in Iran.	0.89	4.20	0.417
10. I see myself as a member of the English language community across the world.	1.11	4.03	0.542
11. I like to join English language learners' online communities.	1.00	3.79	0.528
44. I like to develop a good relationship with my teacher at the language institute.	1.11	5.12	0.556
45. I like to develop good relationships with my classmates at the language institute.	1.18	5.01	0.439
46. I like to develop good relationships with my classmates out of the language institute.	0.79	4.19	0.539
49. The relationships I develop with the staffs of the language institute are important to me.	1.20	3.84	0.473
51. I am aware of the positive consequences of developing good relationships with supervisors and managers.	1.15	4.49	0.537
52. I like to develop good relationships with native English speakers.	1.19	4.38	0.488
Total	**1.06**	**4.30**	

Notes: M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; EV=Explained variance

4.3. Expectations

The items that loaded on the third factor (12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, and 34) were measures of the participants' expectations targeted at different agents of the institute. As shown in Table 7, the lowest and highest explained variances were for items 34 and 17, with values of 0.409 and 0.734, respectively.

Except for item 16, with a mean of 3.66, all the other items had average means higher than 4. The highest means were for item 14 (M = 5.15) and item 19 (M = 4.93). These findings indicate that the participants' expectations were generally aligned with the target expectations of the institute officials, staff, teachers, and learners.

Table 7
Statistics of the Third Extracted Factor: Expectations

Items	SD	M	EV
12. I expect the language institute to consider my educational needs as a language learner.	0.92	4.75	0.581
13. I expect the language institute to consider my emotional and psychological needs as a language learner.	1.04	4.81	0.640
14. I like teachers to teach and manage class in line with my expectations.	1.20	5.15	0.642
15. I expect my relationships with my classmates and teachers to meet my educational needs.	0.84	4.78	0.639
16. I expect my out-of-class communication with the language institute staff to bring me a high level of satisfaction.	0.76	3.66	0.635
17. I expect the language institute environment to help me develop an understanding of who I am and who I want to become.	0.99	4.59	0.734
18. I expect the textbooks and materials taught in the course to be well-matched to my needs.	1.13	4.55	0.419
19. I like the teacher to teach the textbook and materials I prefer to study.	1.16	4.93	0.404
20. I insist that my individual differences be addressed in English class of the institute.	0.82	4.73	0.419
22. I like the language institute to increase my motivation for learning English.	1.19	4.63	0.566
34. I like my teacher to take my suggestions about teaching into account.	0.93	4.20	0.409
Total	**0.98**	**4.38**	

Notes: M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; EV=Explained variance

4.4. Attitudes

Items 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 40 were clustered on the same factor, measuring the participants' attitudes toward the non-state institute and English-speaking countries. They measured the learners' attitudes about the courses, the institute's management, environment, and staff. As Table 8 shows, the highest and lowest explained variances were for items 28 (EV = 0.789) and item 40 (EV = 0.429). The highest and lowest means were for the items 29 (M = 4.92) and 27 (M = 3.45). The learners generally had favorable attitudes toward the institute and the English language.

Table 8
Statistics of the Fourth Extracted Factor: Attitudes

Items	SD	M	EV
25. I have favorable attitudes toward the language institute as a learning environment.	1.20	4.90	0.643
26. I hold a positive view about the way the language institute is managed.	1.16	3.97	0.556
27. I perceive the English class of the language institute as an ideal learning setting.	1.11	3.45	0.650
28. My perception of the staff at the language institute is positive.	0.93	4.81	0.789
29. I hold positive attitudes toward English-speaking countries.	0.92	4.92	0.687
40. The rules and regulations of the language institute provide a safe and relaxed place for learning.	1.13	4.25	0.429
Total	**1.04**	**4.61**	

Notes: M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; EV=Explained variance

4.5. Agency

The items that loaded on the fifth factor (30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 39, and 43) were measures of the agency. The participants expressed their desires to participate in high-stake decision-making, scheduling, classroom management, assessment, teacher selection, and the selection of language learning activities. As Table 9 shows, items 39 and 33 had the highest and lowest explained variances with the values of 0.619 and 0.428, respectively. Except for item 30, which had an average mean of 3.79, the other items had means larger than 4. The highest means were for item 37 (M = 4.91) and item 39 (M = .76).

Table 9
Statistics of the Fifth Extracted Factor: Agency

Items	SD	M	EV
30. I like to have a role in the high-stake decisions made at the language institute.	1.12	3.79	0.478
31. I like to have a role in classroom management along with the teacher.	1.17	4.32	0.459
32. I like to have a role in determining how to learn English at the ınstitute.	0.93	4.23	0.542
33. I like to have a role in determining the teaching method in the classroom.	0.92	4.34	0.428
35. I like to be assessed by myself rather than the teacher.	1.11	4.32	0.519
36. I like to choose the classmates that I want to have rather than those imposed by the institute.	0.92	4.59	0.558
37. I like to set or change the time of class based on my schedule.	0.95	4.81	0.517
39. I like to select my teacher for each term.	1.01	4.76	0.619
43. I like to have a role in the selection of language learning activities based on my needs.	1.12	4.36	0.477
Total	**1.01**	**4.39**	

Notes: M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; EV=Explained variance

The skewness and kurtosis values also indicated that the dataset was appropriate for running CFA as a subset of SEM. The dataset was normally distributed as skewness and kurtosis values of all the five factors were between -2 and +2 (Table 10).

Table 10
Normality of Distribution

Factors	Skewness	Kurtosis
Linguistic investment	-1.307	1.471
Belongingness	-1.105	1.172
Expectations	-1.808	1.244
Attitudes	-1.855	1.868
Agency	0.836	1.307

Table 11 shows the results of CFA for the 48 items. The standard estimates of correlation coefficients were above the critical value of 0.30 for all the items. The t-value analyses also showed all the values were greater than the critical values of 1.96. These findings indicated that all the path coefficients of the identity scale were significant.

Table 11
The Significance of Factor Loadings

Paths	P Value	T Value	Non-Std Coefficient	Std. Coefficient	S.E.
1 → F1	< 0.01	7.30	1.74	0.66	0.23
2 → F1	< 0.01	5.19	0.77	0.35	0.18
3 → F1	< 0.01	7.21	1.91	0.64	0.26
4 → F1	< 0.01	7.05	1.92	0.61	0.27
5 → F1	< 0.01	7.62	1.00	0.33	0.20
6 → F1	< 0.01	4.98	0.63	0.41	0.11
7 → F1	< 0.01	5.71	1.15	0.47	0.18
21 → F1	< 0.01	11.31	1.00	0.74	0.16
23 → F1	< 0.01	9.79	0.71	0.65	0.07
24 → F1	< 0.01	5.65	1.00	0.46	0.11
41 → F1	< 0.01	11.26	1.00	0.74	0.21

42 → F1	< 0.01	9.91	0.99	0.59	0.10
8 → F2	< 0.01	11.25	1.00	0.63	0.25
9 → F2	< 0.01	11.25	1.00	0.73	0.08
10 → F2	< 0.01	11.86	1.30	0.79	0.11
11 → F2	< 0.01	8.89	0.80	0.55	0.09
44 → F2	< 0.01	7.86	1.00	0.48	0.19
45 → F2	< 0.01	6.07	0.91	0.43	0.15
46 → F2	< 0.01	3.04	1.64	0.45	0.54
49 → F2	< 0.01	7.36	2.04	0.59	0.12
51 → F2	< 0.01	7.59	2.22	0.62	0.29
52 → F2	< 0.01	7.67	1.61	0.64	0.21
12 → F3	< 0.01	11.01	1.00	0.62	0.24
13 → F3	< 0.01	9.36	1.23	0.60	0.13
14 → F3	< 0.01	11.52	2.08	0.78	0.18
15 → F3	< 0.01	11.23	1.21	0.66	0.12
16 → F3	< 0.01	7.99	1.10	0.49	0.13
17 → F3	< 0.01	7.15	1.15	0.43	0.16
18 → F3	< 0.01	8.06	1.44	0.50	0.17
19 → F3	< 0.01	8.04	1.50	0.50	0.18
20 → F3	< 0.01	8.44	1.53	0.53	0.18
22 → F3	< 0.01	9.48	0.66	0.62	0.07
34 → F3	< 0.01	4.73	0.45	0.37	0.08
25 → F4	< 0.01	8.03	1.61	0.73	0.20
26 → F4	< 0.01	8.22	2.31	0.77	0.28
27 → F4	< 0.01	8.13	2.04	0.75	0.25
28 → F4	< 0.01	7.89	1.95	0.69	0.24
29 → F4	< 0.01	6.03	1.12	0.43	0.18
40 → F4	< 0.01	6.07	0.45	0.37	0.07
30 → F5	< 0.01	11.29	1.00	0.67	0.21
31 → F5	< 0.01	12.00	1.20	0.76	0.10
32 → F5	< 0.01	12.43	1.06	0.80	0.08
33 → F5	< 0.01	11.56	0.97	0.73	0.08
35 → F5	< 0.01	5.71	0.52	0.34	0.09
36 → F5	< 0.01	11.29	1.00	0.67	0.28
37 → F5	< 0.01	8.46	0.57	0.53	0.06
39 → F5	< 0.01	11.88	1.15	0.85	0.09
43 → F5	< 0.01	12.75	1.42	0.77	0.11

Several model fit indices were used to measure the validity of the identity scale. As shown in Table 12, the results of CFA using the likelihood estimation method show that the contained values are above the threshold levels of 0.90 for the indices of GFI, CFI, and TLI. The values for x^2/df and RMSEA are also smaller than 0.30 and 0.80, respectively. These statistics reveal that all the values are significant, and the measurement model is appropriate.

Table 12
Selected Fit Measures

Indices	Observed level	Threshold
x^2/df	1.63	<3.0
GFI	0.96	>0.90
CFI	0.99	>0.90
TLI	0.97	>0.90
RMSEA	0.03	<0.08
df	2070	-------

The results of Cronbach's alpha coefficients were greater than .70 for all the five factors and the whole identity scale. These findings indicate that the identity scale had satisfactory reliability or internal consistency (Table 13).

Table 13
Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

Factors	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Linguistic investment	12	.82
Belongingness	10	.80
Expectations	11	.83
Attitudes	6	.80
Agency	9	.76
Total	**53**	**.93**

5. Discussion

This study sought to develop a new scale measuring the construct of English language learners' identity within private language institutes. It was found that the construct of English language learner identity has its specific components within the subnational contexts of private institutes. These findings mostly endorse the widely held view that language learning is a social practice and the resulting language identities are complex, multiple, and socio-culturally constructed (e.g., Norton, 2000). Accordingly, a range of factors particular to private institutes contribute to a new context-specific understanding of linguistic investment, belongingness, expectations, attitudes, and agency as identity components.

The recognition of linguistic investment as an identity component signifies that learning English is a central aspect of Iranian English language learners' lives in terms of gaining access to privileged social statuses. In this view, English knowledge is taken as a cultural capital that can be used for occupying various social spaces; social spaces which in turn provide learners with further forms of social capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015). It was further found that the decision to invest in English and becoming a better English language learner was not only voluntary but triggered by a range of external background forces in parallel. These findings reflect the commonly-held view that learning is a process geared by background cultural factors (e.g., Wenger, 1998), and encouraged by historically gathered stores of capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Although private institutes are the main venues of English learning in Iran (Zarrabi & Brown), it was found that Iranian English language learners tend to go beyond the institute's pedagogical frames in pursuit of individual linguistic investment. The notion of investment, which implies agentic participation in the communities of practice and learner-centered pedagogies (e.g., Little & Erickson, 2015), affected the participants' motivations for becoming better learners. These findings clearly mirror the poststructuralist view of identity as becoming someone else across time and space (Norton, 2013). This view of learning as 'becoming' was also reflected in the learners' preference for involving in language learning activities and their desire to complete the institute's language program.

The learners' desires to belong to their English courses and the diverse national and international communities of English language learners pinpointed the concept of belongingness as a further identity component. Shared course-level learning activities with teachers and peers can partly explain this belongingness and can result in the construction of collective identities (Moeller, 2011). The institute's shared nature of enterprises, learner-centered pedagogies, and social constructivist views can further explain the learners' desire to establish and expand relationships with teachers, classmates, supervisors, and other staff members. The expansion of these relationships outside the institute can widen the field for English-related identity negotiation and self-positioning. However, learners can go beyond the course-level communities of practice to belong to the diverse institute-level and meta-institutional 'landscapes of practice' (Pyrko, Dörfler, & Eden, 2019). This desire to go beyond the course-level conventions can be mostly attributed to the fact that Iranian English language learners view private institutes as platforms for a global reach (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016). In other words, private language institutes only provide the grounds for achieving the linguistic capital required for gaining access to diverse academic and occupational opportunities.

The learners' expectations were also found to be the main component of their identity portrait. At a course level, the learners targeted expectations for proper classroom management, materials selection, and emotional needs to teachers and classmates. The institute-level expectations targeted at supervisors and the staff were also found to reflect the learners' identities. Direct contact and engagement in shared classroom activities with teachers and classmates highly illustrate why they are targeted. Collective identities are developed due to prolonged shared enterprises prompted by course-level and institute-level expectations. The expectations are critical identity options as they allow for the expression of community members' intentions (Boyadzhieva, 2016; Vidgen et al., 2013). The implementation of social constructivist views in private institutes allows learners to freely express their expectations. More clearly, the enactment of constructivism in language teaching better creates real-life contexts and addresses the real needs of language learners. The use of CEFR as the pedagogical frame can, in parallel, enable learners to freely express their expectations for issues like objectives, teaching methods, course content, and pace of learning (Council of Europe, 2001). Properly addressed needs and expectations can in turn result in a rise in learners' motivations (Gardner, 2004). More recent accounts of the construct of motivation show that it not only plays a vital role in language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013) but also shape learners' self-perceptions in relation to their experience (Dörnyei et al., 2009). As such, motivation can open up the chances for following imagined aspirational trajectories encouraging alternative self-positionings.

The sets of attitudes raised in the course of language learning are identified as construals for self-positioning when it comes to engagements in social activities (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2013). These language-related attitudes constitute a central part of Iranian English language learners' language ideologies, forming in turn essential parts of their identities (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Such favorable ideologies were moderately reflected in the learners' favorable attitudes toward English-speaking countries. In addition, the learners reported generally favorable attitudes toward the institute as a learning setting. This popularity can be partly attributed to the fact that private institutes' attempts at addressing the learners' needs were mainly overlooked in the public curriculum (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016).

Private institutes have a set of restrictions in their canonical structures. These structures can be challenged and modified by community members over time (Brown & Duguid, 1991). The findings showed that the learners desired to exercise agency in challenging these institutional norms. The desires for exercising agency were mostly manifested in the course-level issues of classmates, teacher recruitment, course scheduling, and course size. Although the learners generally had positive attitudes about the way the institute was managed, they preferred to participate in managerial and high-stake decision-making tasks. These findings can suggest a detailed explanation when compared with the learners' deeper interests in impacting course-level decisions regarding classroom management, learning and teaching methods, and assessment. Even though the learners did not wholly overlook the idea of having their statements in higher-order institutional policies, they mostly underscored course-level pedagogical issues. There are diverse communities of practice within a wider landscape of practice (Pyrko et al., 2019). The hierarchical levels of management in language institutes further underscore the existence of diverse communities of practice within a landscape (Sykes, 2015). It can be argued that course-level communities of practice serve as the main field for English language learners' identity negotiation while higher-stake institutional issues of the whole landscape are less noticed. In practice, learners are mostly involved in shared pedagogical classroom activities and rarely go beyond this, except for short talks with supervisors and other coordinating staff.

Attempts to develop a scale for English language learners' identity within the regulatory frames of private institutes in Iran underscored multiple context-specific identity components. English language learners' linguistic investment in institutes is ascribed to historically and culturally gathered forms of capital. The resulting English knowledge is

also conceived to be used as a form of cultural capital to achieve privileged social statuses and to invest in more social spaces. Deliberate attempts at prioritizing learners' demands, which are largely neglected on public school curricula, generally endorse positive attitudes about these institutes. A parallel individual linguistic investment beyond institutes' pedagogical frames disavows their perfectionist idealization as learning settings, though. Course-level joint enterprises are argued to function as main identity fields compared with lower rates of agency exercise in higher-stake institutional and meta-institutional landscapes of practice. The implementation of social constructivist and CEFR principles can further unleash a free drive on personal interests and needs, which in turn raises motivations and opens up chances for further imagined identity trajectories. Language learning experiences and relevant identity components in all language institutes in Iran follow similar patterns because they rely on similar globally-framed pedagogies mainly in response to the common pitfalls of public school English programs.

Given that a representative scale of English language learners' identity in private institutes draws upon multiple components, a more inclusive and serious consideration of such components within institutes' learner-centered pedagogies can improve the attitudes about institutes and boost the chances for further linguistic investment and agency exercise. It is also suggested that private institutes heighten their awareness of learners' parallel personal linguistic adventurism and desires to push the epistemic boundaries of their identities to broader landscapes of practice in order to offer pedagogical services more fitting to learners' priorities. English programs on the public curricula are also recommended to change their pedagogical focuses in order to address learners' language needs.

Like all studies of the type, the present study had some limitations. It only drew upon quantitative data from the administration of a researcher-made scale. As identity is socio-historically constructed, it is highly suggested that such findings become triangulated with interview data in order to account for social and historical factors. It is also highly recommended to interpret such quantitative

identity data in view of a collection of demographic information like background languages, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. With due attention to the fact that identity is ascribed through both self- and other-positionings (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2013), more studies that focus on data from teachers, supervisors, and other staff can better delineate English language learners' identity portrait. As identity is redefined across time (Darvin & Norton, 2015), a deeper look at the given identity components across proficiency levels can be inspiring as well.

References

Arbuckle, J. L. (2019). *IBM SPSS Amos 26 user's guide*. Amos Development Corporation.

Baleghizadeh, S., & Farshchi, S. (2009). An exploration of teachers' beliefs about the role of grammar in Iranian high schools and private language institutes. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning, 212*, 17-38.

Barnawi, O. Z. (2009). The construction of identity in L2 academic classroom community: A small scale study of two Saudi MA in TESOL students at North American University. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 5*(2), 62-84.

Beeching, K., Ghezzi, C., & Molinelli, P. (2018). *Positioning the self and others.* John Benjamins.

Block, D. (2007). *Second language identities*. Continuum.

Borjian, M. (2010). Policy privatization and empowerment of sub-national forces: The case of private English language institutes in Iran. In higher education and the Middle East: Serving the knowledge-based economy (pp. 58-61). Middle East Institute.

Borjian, M. (2013). *English in post-revolutionary Iran: From indigenization to internationalization*. Multilingual Matters.

Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo Academicus.* Polity Press.

Boyadzhieva, E. (2016). Learner-centered teaching and learner autonomy. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 232*, 35-40.

Bradley, D., & Bradley, M. (2019). Identity and attitudes. In D. Bradley & M. Bradley (Eds.), *Language endangerment* (pp. 64-83). Cambridge University Press.

Brown, J. S., & Duguid, P. (1991). Organizational learning and communities of practice: Toward a unified view of working, learning and innovation. *Organizational Science, 2*(1), 40-57.

Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies, 7*(4-5), 585-614.

Byrne, B. M. (2016). *Structural equation modeling with AMOS: Basic concepts, applications, and programming* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment.* Cambridge University Press.

Dahmardeh, M. (2009). *English language teaching in Iran and communicative language teaching* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Warwick, Coventry, England.

Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 35*, 36-56.

De Costa, P. I., & Norton, B. (2016). Identity in language learning and teaching: Research agendas for the future. In S. Preece (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language and identity* (pp. 586-601). Routledge.

de Vaus, D. (2014). *Surveys in social research* (6th ed.). Routledge.

Dörnyei, Z. (2010). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing.* Routledge.

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2009). *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. Multilingual Matters.

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2013). *Teaching and researching: Motivation*. Routledge.

Field, A. (2013). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (4th ed.). Sage.

Finley, A. M. (2018). Fostering success: Belongingness pedagogy for English language learners. *BC TEAL Journal, 3*(1), 37-48.

Gao, Y., Jia, Z., & Zhou, Y. (2015). EFL learning and identity development: A longitudinal study in 5 universities in China. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education, 14*(3), 137-158.

Gardner, H. (2004). *Changing minds*. Harvard Business School Press.

Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Pergamon.

Hummel, K. (2013). Target-language community involvement: Second-language linguistic self-confidence and other perceived benefits. *Canadian Modern Language Review, 69*(1), 65-90.

Iranmehr, A., & Davari, H. (2019). English language education in Iran: A site of struggle between globalized and localized versions of English. *Iranian Journal of Comparative Education, 1*(2), 70-84.

Khatib, M., & Rezaei, S. (2013). A model and questionnaire of language identity in Iran: A structural equation modelling approach. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 34*(7), 690-708.

Kiany, G. R., Mahdavy, B., & Ghafar Samar, R. (2011). Toward a harmonized foreign language education in Iran: National policies and English achievement. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal, 2*(3) 462-469.

Kiany, G. R., Mirhosseini, S. A., & Navidinia, H. (2011). Foreign language education policy in Iran: Pivotal macro considerations. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, *53*(2), 49-70.

Little, D., & Erickson, G. (2015). Learner identity, learner agency, and the assessment of language proficiency: Some reflections prompted by the common European framework of reference for languages. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 35*, 120-139.

McCarthy, S., & Moje, E. B. (2002). Conversations: Identity matters. *Reading Research Quarterly, 37*(2), 228-238.

Mirhosseini, S. A., & Khodakarami, S. (2016). Aspects of 'English language education' policies in Iran: '*Ourownbeliefs*' or '*outofwhoyouare*'? *Journal of*

Multicultural Discourses, 11(3), 283-299.

Moeller, H. G. (2011). *Luhmann explained: From souls to systems*. Open Court Publishing.

Mohammadian Haghighi, F., & Norton, B. (2016). The role of English language institutes in Iran. *TESOL Quarterly, 51*(2), 428-438.

Nasrollahi Sharri, M. (2017). Constructing a voice in English as a foreign language: Identity and engagement. *TESOL Quarterly, 52*(1), 85-109.

Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Learning, gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Pearson Education.

Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.

Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). *Identity, language learning, and social change*. Cambridge University Press.

Ou, A., & Gu, M. M. (2018). Language socialization and identity in intercultural communication: Experience of Chinese students in a transnational university in China. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 24*(1), 1-16.

Pitts, M. J. (2009). Identity and the role of expectations, stress, and talk in short-term student sojourner adjustment: An application of the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 33*(6), 450-462.

Pyrko, I., Dörfler, V., & Eden, C. (2019). Communities of practice in landscapes of practice. *Management Learning, 50*(4), 482-499.

Rezaei, S., Khatib, M., & Baleghizadeh, S. (2014). Language identity among Iranian English language learners: A nationwide survey. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 35*(5), 527-536.

Ricento, T. (2005). Considerations of identity in L2 learning. In E. Hinkel (Ed.),

Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning (pp. 895-911). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Shuck, G. (2010). Language identity, agency, and context: The shifting meanings of 'multilingual'. In M. Cox, J. Jordan, C. Ortmeier-Hooper, & G. Gray-Schwartz (Eds.), *Reinventing identities in second language writing* (pp. 117-138). NCTE.

Sykes, A. H. (2015). Models of educational management: The case of a language teaching institute. *Journal of Teaching and Education, 4*(1), 17-23.

Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2014). *Using multivariate statistics* (6th ed.). Pearson Education.

Trent, J. (2016). The identity construction experiences of early career English language teachers in Hong Kong: Great expectations and practical realities. *Research Papers in Education, 31*(3), 316-336.

Vasilopoulos, G. (2015). Language learner investment and identity negotiation in the Korean EFL context. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education, 14*(2), 61-79.

Vidgen, R., Sims, J., & Powell, P. (2013). Do CEO bloggers build community. *Journal of Communication Management, 17*(4), 364-385.

Vosniadou, S. (2001). *How children learn.* International Academy of Education.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Weinreich, P., & Saunderson, W. (Eds.). (2013). *Analyzing identity: Cross-cultural, societal and clinical contexts*. Routledge.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Zarrabi, F., & Brown, J. R. (2015). English language teaching and learning analysis in Iran. *International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences, 9*(10), 3485-3493.