

First-Year University Students' Embryonic Identities Through Foreign Languages: English Language as A Case Study



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ABSTRACT: Language plays diverse significant roles in identity construction. It is not just a means of communication but can also be used to express oneself through a given language in a given community. The English language is essential in shaping first-year university students' identities. This case study explores how these students construct their identities by following a group of first-year university students who attend the English studies at Moulay Ismail University, FLHS, Meknes in Morocco. This study mainly examines the relationship between identity construction and English language learning. It employs Lave and Wenger's (1998) framework of *communities of practice*¹ as the theoretical foundation to investigate how these university students' identities are constructed. It also followed a qualitative research design involving semi-structured data collection interviews. A thematic analysis was used to understand how first-year university students constructed their identities in English language learning in the university context. The study findings indicate that first-year university students perceived English language learning as an investment, displaying a close relationship between English language learning and their identity construction. This paper also suggests that English language learning is a complicated practice of obtaining a set of language abilities and knowledge through which these students' identities are continually constructed and reconstructed. The results of this study have substantial implications for English teaching and learning in Moroccan universities.

KEYWORDS: Communities of Practice; English Language Learning; Investment; Students' Identities

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, identity construction through English language learning has become a concern. Researchers have shifted toward understanding language learning as participation rather than acquisition. Previous studies combining language learning and identities have increased by Block (2008) and Kalaja, Menezes and Barcelos (2008). In this respect, when first-year university students join the university, they experience dramatic transitions in their lives upon their first arrival. This also means a shift from a comprehensive study of arts and science subjects to specialised English language learning and culture education. For these students, the university is a new community of practice where they take language courses, improve their English language skills, and develop their understanding of the cultures of English-speaking nations. At the same time, they make networks and participate in all sorts of social activities, such as joining university students' unions or taking part-time jobs. Engaging with the ever-going English learning process and various students' associations and clubs with social activities, first-year university students of English majors may identify with different roles and keep having new self-understandings.

Identity is a complex research topic because it comprises subjective and deeply personal experiences that are difficult to express and interpret. The current study investigates how first-year university students construct their identities vis-à-vis English language learning trajectories. It mainly looks into how these students construct their identities in relation to their choice of English language learning paths. In this respect, first-year university students' identities are examined from multiple, complex, dynamic, and socially constructed perspectives of the university context. In this regard, Lave and Wenger (1998:215) argue that learning is always a process of becoming someone and thus an identity experience.

This theoretical framework is the foundation for the current research into the relationship between English language learning and the identity construction of first-year university students. This brings to mind that identity construction through English language learning is an ongoing social activity backed by sociocultural and contextual factors. In short, this study aims to inspect

¹ According to cognitive anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1998), *Communities of Practice* is a group of individuals who share a craft and/or a profession. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that the members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally.

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the impact of learning English as a foreign language on first-year university students to see what identities, if any, emerge from their choice of English language learning as an academic major at the university.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Within the great body of literature on language learning and identity (e.g. Norton, 2000; Joseph, 2004, Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), still, there is a scarcity of research on students' identity construction and English language learning at Moroccan universities. In this respect, this study must explore the fitting between English language learning and students' identity construction. How first-year university students cope with the university context and construct their identity when they opt for English language studies is a controversial issue to be addressed in Moroccan universities.

3. THE OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Because learning is always linked to identity formation, it is clear that learning something new causes individuals to change. Learning a language impacts the individual; although it is rarely studied in applied linguistics, learning a language is exhilarating. This study aims to understand how English language learning affects first-year university students' learning and what identities emerge from that learning process. This study describes the experiences and stories of first-year university students' English language learning. In addition, their backgrounds are considered, including their age, gender, parental status, hometown, and parents' educational level. The goal is not to collect detailed identity reconstruction information about first-year university students. Instead, it is about providing an overview of possible emerging identities from the perspectives of these students as learners of the English language at the university.

The research question that guides this study is: How first-year English university students' identities are constructed in the university context? This research query could be divided into the following sub research questions: What changes (if any) are visible in first-year university students after opting for the English language as an academic major? What kind of identities emerges from their experiences and stories? Which factors make first-year university students leave their aboriginal language and choose the English language to construct their identity?

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Wenger (1998), learning always involves becoming because it alters who we are and what we do. As a result, it is worth perceiving that learning is an identity-building experience. Throughout learning, Individuals acquire skills and information that shapes ancient stored knowledge. According to Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), learning a different language has been referred to as having a new identity. This also means that learning a foreign language is a socially and culturally situated process that involves identity work, according to Kaikkonen (2012). This concedes with Huhtala and Lehti-Eklund (2012), who state that learning a foreign language is a complex project that requires continuous identity construction.

Also, Kaikkonen (2012) claims that individuals identify themselves as members of a specific community regarding the learner-language relationship, asserting that they pick up on the group's cultural codes, modes of behaviour, and values. Eventually, they become an integrated, constructive part of the group of people who speak the same language.

As foreign languages are learned, the mother tongue retains its familiar role, but people begin to wonder what role foreign languages will play in their lives and how they will use them Kaikkonen (2012). Ricoeur (1992), cited in Korhonen (2014), also points out that identity construction is an ongoing experience of making sense of oneself. The identity process, according to Korhonen (2014), entails several questions, including: "Who am I as a foreign language learner and user?", "Where do I belong?", "Where do I come from?" and "Where am I going?". This heralds that individuals' experiences with change during their education are always subjective.

Depending on the meaning of the language or linguistic knowledge, similar changes can be interpreted very differently by two or more learners. As a result, language learning entails more than just mastering the language's syntax. The experiences of change that individuals confront during their learning are always subjective. Similar changes can be observed between two or more learners, depending on the language's meaning or linguistic knowledge. Hence, language learning is more than mastering the use of the language.

Language learning necessitates more than just conscious cognitive effort. It's also a process of working through the thoughts and feelings that come along the way Huhtala and Lehti-Eklund (2012). In the same respect, Kalaja, Menezes, and Barcelos (2008) agree that when a learner uses a foreign language, learning becomes a subjective experience involving the emergence of emotions and identities. Thus language learning takes on very personal meanings. To summarise, language learning, like any other learning process, does not occur in a vacuum but is always socially and culturally situated, requiring learners to work on their language identities Kaikkonen, Huhtala and Lehti-Eklund (2012). The language being used or learned takes on meaning depending

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on where and with whom it is spoken. The learner's role in autonomy and agency is first discussed before addressing the significance of the surrounding environment in identity construction.

5. METHODOLOGY

Examining identity is problematic because it is a constantly irregular phenomenon and, most importantly, a personal experience with no clear beginning or endpoint. As a result, it was hard to choose a method for this study that would first and foremost posit first-year university students' personal experiences. Qualitative research favours ways to hear participants' perspectives and voices, according to Hirsjärvi et al. (2009). As a result, it was thought that qualitative data could provide more valuable data for the current study than data gathered using quantitative methods.

The current study's goal of gathering accurate information about English language learning and its effects on first-year university students' identity construction as learners also justified using a qualitative approach. Structured interviews "yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge," according to Patton, 2002, p. 4). These interviews are used primarily when the topics are challenging or sensitive to study Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014).

Except for the first two questions, which dealt with the interviewee's age and educational background, the structured interview enquiries were divided into three shares. The first segment of the interview concentrated on their previous language studies and English language learning experiences. The questions focused on their language skills after high school and their overall experiences and attitudes towards English language learning. The structured interview's second and most crucial section consisted of questions about university students' English language studies and experiences. The questions ranged from why they decided to learn English to list positive and negative experiences they had encountered during their studies. The interviewees were also asked to describe themselves as English language learners and consider whether they had noticed any changes in their language learning.

The third and final segment of the interview aimed to learn about how university students see themselves and their language studies in the future. The interviewees were first asked to consider how the English language might use them in the future and then describe themselves as English language users in a few years. The most challenging aspect of drafting the interview structure was the complexity of the topic under investigation. It was not easy to develop questions that captured the essence of the university students' identities because identity is a complex, changing, and, most importantly, personal experience.

Participants were recruited from Moulay Ismail University, FLHS, in Meknes, Morocco. The snowball sampling method, a non-probability sample, was used to select the participants for this study. In this method, participants with whom interaction has already been made use their social nets to refer the investigator to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study.

In snowball selection, a small number of individuals having the characteristics required for specific research are identified. These individuals will equally help identify others, and the circle may become more prominent Cohen et al. (2007). On the other hand, the final list of participants was relatively short and included the age rate (between 20 and 23). The participants in this study are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Background Data of the Interviewees

Participants	Gender	Age	Father Ed. Level	Mother Ed. Level	Hometown
P1	F	20	No School	Primary School	Khniфра City
P 2	M	20	High School	Master	Azrou City
P 3	M	18	No School	No School	El hajab City
P 4	F	19	No School	Primary School	Meknes City
P 5	M	20	Bachelor	Bachelor	M'rirt City
P 6	M	22	Secondary School	Bachelor	Tawajdat City
P 7	F	18	High School	No School	Meknes City
P 8	F	20	No School	Bachelor	Boufakran City
P 9	F	23	High School	High School	Errachidia City
P 10	M	18	No School	High School	Arfoud City
P 11	M	22	High School	Primary School	Timahdidt City
P 12	F	21	No School	Bachelor	Resani City
P 13	M	18	Primary School	Bachelor	Khniфра City
P 14	F	18	Bachelor	No School	Meknes City

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P 15	F	19	Seconadry School	No School	Meknes City
P 16	M	21	Bachelor	No School	Khnifra City
P 17	M	18	High School	High School	Errachidia City
P 18	F	21	High School	N. School	Ain Eleuh City
P 19	M	22	Bachelor	High School	Zaida City
P 20	F	19	No School	No School	Timahdit City

The meetings for the interviews were held in January, February and March 2020. The discussions took place at the university. Participants were given a written agreement to participate in the study before the interviews began, and they were permitted to ask any questions during the session.

5.1. Structured Interview Questions

1. What is your name? How old are you? Where are you from?
2. How long have you been studying here?
3. Do you find studying at the university different from studying at high school? Why?
4. Why did you choose to study at the University of Moulay Ismail in Meknes? Why did you choose the English major?
5. How do you communicate effectively with your friends and instructors when choosing an English major at the university?
6. What is it like learning in a language different from your home language?
7. How do you think an English major is relevant to your studies in general?
8. What do you think of the university as your learning environment?
9. Do you constantly find yourself part of the group who opted for English studies or not? Why?
10. What do you think needs to take place to support your sense of belonging at the university?
11. How do you see yourself in class? Do you feel you are learning a lot from participating in group discussions?
12. What are the first two things that come to your mind when describing a person enrolled in the "English" major?

The researcher also gave a quick overview of the interview structure and encouraged the respondents to express themselves honestly, regardless of whether or not their responses were correct. The goal was to establish a friendly environment where the interviewees felt at ease and as if they were part of an ordinary conversation rather than a research interview. Transcribing the data was entirely done based on the interviews' substance. About 20 pages of data were inspected after the data was transcribed. Following the parameters outlined earlier, the data analysis in this study began with numerous readings of the transcriptions and taking notes. After reading what the interviewees had written, the responses were organised into specific categories, which Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014) believe is an essential aspect of analysis, especially when comparing different parts of the interview. This phase aided in gaining a broad picture of what the respondents had spoken about while eliminating specifics irrelevant to the current study.

Because each interview was considered a unique and one-of-a-kind case scenario, the participants' comments were kept separate. Different themes shared by all learners developed from the learners' subjective experiences, which were now classified into particular categories. The themes might be thought of as the plot lines of the students' descriptions, revealing how their past and present language learning experiences, perceptions of themselves as learners, and experiences that have changed due to language learning.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

Language is a means of communication; it is by being skilled in a language that successful communication between individuals occurs. To examine how first-year university students became full members of the education community, the researcher focused on how they negotiated identity for competence in the English language learning, their participation in the lectures and how they behaved as members of a particular social group. Concerning first-year university students' experiences of using the English language, data shows that these students had different experiences concerning exposure to the English language. The major challenge that all the participants experienced was the negotiation for competence, participation and membership into the university educational community.

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The data presented in this study displays that students' social identities were constantly changing due to movement between social groups, which means that the students continuously negotiated their identities, consciously or unconsciously (Marx, 2002). For instance, data shows many participants interacted with different people throughout the day. At the university, they interacted with English speaking students and their lecturers. They negotiated their identity in each interaction, constantly switching from Arabic or French to English. They moved easily from one social interaction to the next, quickly reading a situation and continuously negotiating and constructing their identity. This confirms that social identity is not fixed (Norton, 2000) and continually changes depending on the social context or setting. Language learners also adjust or negotiate their identity depending on varying social situations. In this context, "negotiate" describes how a language learner relates to various social groups and how this relationship changes over time.

6.1. University Students' Mutual and Shared Identities and Language Competence

The interview data show that many participants, mainly P3, P7, P9, P13, P14, and P17, negotiated their identities regularly. They "intentionally or instinctively" negotiated their identities continually (Marx 2000). For instance, P9, P13, and P14 were motivated to learn English. However, they strived for English knowledge and practice to change their identity as non-English speakers and change from being students to qualified students. They consistently referred to getting ahead and having a better future through English. In this context, the researcher believes that their desire to change their life situation was a motivating factor for learning the English language. It was also closely related to changing their identity as newcomers. They also successfully negotiated their new linguistic identity because they were determined to become competent English speakers.

P9, P13, P14 involvement in the English language learning process relates to Norton's (1995) idea of 'investment'. The notion of 'investment' in this study shows how people can invest in the target English language. This may enhance their cultural capital and, ultimately, their actual identity; as Norton (2000: p.9) states, investment signals learners' socially and historically constructed relationship to the target language and their ambivalent desire to learn and practice it. This is evident in the P9, P13, and P14 cases discussed above. They perceived learning the English language as an investment. This study's negotiation and construction of identities show how students' social identities change while learning another language. Through identity negotiation and construction, it appears that students will have tremendous economic futures and be able to communicate more efficiently daily. Being accepted into their English academic major in the social university context was very important for all the participants and remained an outstanding lifetime achievement.

Negotiating identity in English language learning first considers these students' classroom context. This is so because classroom participation goes more with the act of identity negotiation. During classroom participation, students may better negotiate their identities as competent or less competent individuals than others. Sometimes, their classmates' perceptions may also contribute to their negotiation of identities, mainly if they are active participants during group presentations and discussions. Almost all three participants negotiated their competence and identities as stated in their excerpts. Some participants also shared that they did not always feel part of the group because they felt different.

It is nobody's fault because I feel different as if others will laugh at my pronunciation or something. I hardly talk during group work, but I do my best when we are given a test or exam because I do not need to speak (P11 interview, 28/02/2021).

In answering the interview question on how their classmates behaved towards them, many participants responded positively, showing collaboration between them and their peers. They all interacted with their respective peers, and one P8 even said she exchanged some cultural ideas with her peers. She stated,

They like pairing up with their chosen friends, but some try to be friendly, especially when they notice I perform well despite my silence (P8, interview, 30/02/2021).

From the above excerpt, P8 seemed optimistic that she could perform well despite her poor English proficiency, and she felt important when she realised that some of her classmates could need her help. Thus, P8 assumed identity as a less competent member, outsider and foreigner. From the above interview excerpts, it could be said that her silence did not necessarily mean that she was an awful student in the class in terms of English language learning. However, she lacked motivation and had low self-esteem to participate in group discussions.

According to Vygotsky (1978), language is a social construct. In the context of this study, local communities in which first-year university students lived could not be separated from the act of English language learning. They could construct and negotiate their identities through daily interactions with classmates, friends, or colleagues. Therefore, identity construction and negotiation occur in different contexts in second language learning. Learning a second language gives learners a new sense of who they are and how to be in the world. In this study, the local communities became sites of identity construction. This implies that language learning and identity construction are closely related, and they can only occur in a given social context

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As stated above, language learning is a social practice. Through interaction, their lecturers moved students to higher levels of competence. The analysed data shows that the lecturers' role was multifaceted: they did not only create and design learning environments that maximised their opportunities to interact with each other, but they also acted as experts, models, guides and facilitators of social interactions. Since students had less experience with the English language, their lecturers sometimes considered that they needed more scaffolding than those with more experience with the English language. This encouraged and motivated them to try even harder to do better in the English language.

6.2. The Impact of Environment on Language Learning and Identity Construction

The environment in the classroom can facilitate language learning. A sociocultural view of identity construction emphasises the importance of social context, interpersonal interactions and learner attitudes. It informs us about sociocultural concepts, which should also be considered when investigating language learning. Language learner identity is deemed to be socially constructed, so the characteristics of the learning context can affect the development and negotiation of language learning identity.

Identity is co-constructed as learners operate in the university context with peer interaction and more capable peers, thus co-constructing their identity. In this way, learners negotiate a balance between individual goals, academic goals, and institutional goals and maintain rapport with their peers. Van Lier (2008) suggests that language learner identity develops as learners participate more fully in the target language culture. He explains that learning a language and becoming engaged in a new culture comprises adjusting one's sense of self and producing new identities to connect the known to the new (Van Lier, 2008: p.177). Students had to adjust to the English language environment and culture while retaining Arabic or French languages for communication with their families and friends.

From the findings, it could be deduced that despite Francophone students' challenges in learning and using English second language for academic and social purposes, English language teaching had a positive outcome. Three of the four participants were proud to say that they could use the English language without feeling considered "foreigners". In the interviews and based on students' narratives, some students' experiences P3, P5 P7 seemed slightly different because they somehow resisted complete immersion in English language culture and considered themselves the "others". They claimed they had an inferiority complex because they felt different from those who could speak English fluently and freely. However, like the other three students, P12 and P20 admitted that they could use English for academic and social purposes

The poststructuralist view supports the different identities that nothing is given or natural about being part of a social category or group. That identity is not in-born or fixed, but it constantly changes. The participants move between various social groups and contexts and continuously negotiate and construct their identities to either be or not be members of a particular group. They must have multiple and changing identities to move from one context to another, which means they negotiate and construct their identities in every social context. Language learners are unique in this sense. In the analysed data, most participants stated the importance of the English language for their future endeavours. They explained that the English language would increase their choices in the market job, and they would also benefit from the language. This goes to support Norton's (2000) agreement with Block (2008) that an individual's identity is the person's understanding of his/her relationship to the world, how this relationship is constructed in time and space, and how the individual comprehends potentials for the future (Norton, 2000: p. 5).

6.3. Language Learning as a Change-Process

Participants' language learning experiences can be understood as fluid flow expeditions with ups and downs, including diverse transformations and, as a result, built identities based on the descriptions. Norton (2000) and Huhtala and Lehti-Eklund (2012) identified alterations closely related to the trajectories and times that are evocative components of their identity creation. Even though language study changed their life and transformed the students, they remained the same. This aligns with Wenger's philosophy (1998). As a result of their new linguistic and cultural skills, the participants did not create an altogether new identity for themselves.

On the other hand, the English language has altered their perceptions of themselves and their place in society. This was especially evident when learners stated that different languages had assigned them additional responsibilities, such as an expert in utilising the English language, implying that other languages have different identities linked to them. They felt like they had become better versions of themselves as their language skills and knowledge improved without losing sight of who they were.

The English language learning at university for P7, P13, P8, P19, and P14 was about obtaining linguistic abilities and discovering and challenging oneself. Huhtala and Lehti-Eklund both agree on this (2012). They pointed out that language acquisition entails not just acquiring the language but also coping with the numerous emotions and attitudes that come with it. In this regard, English language learning has provided pupils with additional opportunities, such as improved linguistic skills and understanding of the English language. Confidence and eagerness were the most powerful feelings associated with the students' foreign language identities; nevertheless, negative feelings such as anxiety and ineptitude regarding their English language abilities were also significant. These emotions demonstrate that the English language played an essential role in their lives inside and outside the classroom. As a result, it may be detailed that the students' English language learning journey has transformed them into the people they are now.

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The respondents' subjective experiences of language acquisition in the past, present, and future shaped their distinct foreign language identities. The results indicate growing foreign language identities, including their future aspirations, talents as learners, changes brought on by English language acquisition, and the many roles and sentiments associated with language. Most notably, the findings of this study reveal that English language learning has resulted in a variety of positive improvements in the students' lives, emphasising the importance of English language learning in generating pleasant experiences and emotions of achievement.

7. DISCUSSION

The current study investigates the identities of first-year university students studying English as a second language. The results are based on students' self-reported English language learning experiences. It was also helpful to compile data on university English language learners in the past, present, and future (Norton 2000, Huhtala and Lehti- Eklund 2012). This also allowed researchers to look at potential changes in university students' identities, such as their prior experiences and intentions for English language study.

This study defines and describes the relationship between English language learning and identity construction within the university educational context, guided by the earlier study findings. The study's general results show that English language students' identity was negotiated and (re)constructed differently depending on the social contexts. Through learning the English language, the students developed certain qualities and attitudes towards the English language, which tended to immerse them in the English language learning environment, thus strengthening their identity construction in the new language. The findings discussed in this study are relevant to how English language learning is perceived as an investment. It also debates the role of interaction and students' voices and agency in identity construction, besides shared identities, language competence, and other environmental resources that may impact English language learning and identity construction.

In this vein, Vygotsky (1978) believes that students can always perform better with collaboration and direction, no matter how complex the tasks are. This shows that more capable peers assisted students in learning or achieving what they could not do independently. This also means that in the English language learning contexts such as the university, peers help one another build knowledge and skills. In this study, students constructed and negotiated their identity as they interacted with other students, debaters and community members in English language learning. Such interaction was necessary to learn the English language. Some participants gradually gained confidence in using the English Language in and out of the classroom. This confirms Van Lier's (2008) suggestion that language learner identity develops as learners participate more fully in the target language culture. He explains that learning a language and becoming engaged in a new culture involves adjusting one's sense of self and creating new identities.

This study investigates emergent English language learning identities using three themes from the data: 1) reasons for learning the English language, 2) university students as English language learners and 3) Students' experiences in learning the English language. The themes, when taken together, give information about the elements that affected the identity formation of first-year university students. The first topic focuses on the motives for studying English and aids in determining students' aspirations to become a specific type of person. The second topic focuses on how university students talk about themselves as English language learners and characterise their personal experiences, attitudes, motivations, and general engagement with the subject. The third and final topic focuses on potential changes in learners due to learning English, which suggests identity-building.

Identity, in this perspective, is always socially produced, according to Lave and Wenger (1998). It is also vital to provide a brief explanation of the emerging identities in the experiences of university students. Identity is separated into categories, as De Fina (2006) recommended. Learner identity, language identity, and personal identity are recognised in this study. Learner identity relates to the learners' linguistic ability to use the language, their cultural awareness of and engagement in the target culture, and their emotions of internationality. In this study, personal identity refers to the connection between the acquired English language and an individual's self-perception when the learner considers the English language learning an essential part of their daily life.

Besides, it is necessary to note that each participant's description, representing their identity, comprises highly subjective experiences. As a result, the emergent identities are my interpretation of what university students said as foreign language learners in the form of narratives, specifically, emergent identities and communities of practice, learning motivations, and learners' shifts. The descriptions' heads indicate the changes learning a foreign language has brought about, suggesting the learners' foreign language identities. Each illustration is unique and begins with a brief introduction to the learner, including age, occupation, language repertoire, current language studies and future perspectives.

Although many participants' explanations were nuanced and distinctive, various identities developed regarding their English language learning processes. Individual, communal, societal, personal, or situational identities, according to de Fina (2006), can be written in various ways. Each university student in this research had at least three identities: language identity, learner identity, and personal identity. Depending on the situation, these can be classified as one of De Fina's identities. However, it is proposed that the learners' foreign language identities are formed by combining the emergent personal, learner, and linguistic identities. The discovered identities are explained by employing the communities of practice in which they were built and then analysed in further depth in the section.

University students' identities were inextricably linked to their motivations for studying English. Each participant had many inspirations for studying English, and they all shared at least two of the bases, as mentioned earlier. Some participants stated that

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learning the English language was more attached to their professional ambitions and, thus, their identity as learners. In contrast, others noted that learning the English language was more of a pleasure connected to their spare time and identity, even though being able to use the English language could be beneficial in their work-life. Both within and outside of the classroom, learners' identities were formed. The motives for learning English were strongly linked to the learners' future visions or defined identities as speakers of English or other foreign languages, as Prusak and Sfard (2005) describe them. Consequently, learning a language was a personal investment (Norton 2000).

As previously stated, the participants' descriptions of themselves indicated different identities linked to their language acquisition processes at various stages of learning, rather than a single identity. For example, Paiva (2011) and Miyahara (2010) both stressed the importance of several identities in people's lives. Work identity, personal identity, learner identity, and language identity emerged as the most distinct of the emergent identities shared by all learners. The learners' foreign language identities were regarded as a whole. Separating the many identities isn't necessarily essential or even valuable, according to De Fina (2006).

The various identities were given names and examined in greater depth better to understand their origins and significance in their learning processes. However, it is clear that the identities were continually overlapping and, as a result, could not be separated due to their interdependence. Although comparable identities evolved in each participant's story, it must be remembered that each had their storyline and, as a result, their own distinct identity that cannot be generalised.

Furthermore, each participant's experience uniquely highlighted the emerging personalities. In contrast, most participants' narratives included some mention of job identity. Most participants' English language learning experiences were primarily centred on their identities. This suggests that learning English was more than a way to advance their jobs. All of the individuals, however, had a similar linguistic identity. Each person talked about their still-poor English language abilities before emphasising their enhanced cultural understanding and awareness. As a result, the participants developed a variety of complicated foreign language identities that matched their multifaceted stories. The diversity of emergent identities emphasises the learners' uniqueness, implying that no two are the same.

8. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has implications for English language learning and identity construction. It is required that professors pay special attention to students in their classes. While planning for the lectures, they should keep in mind that there are students with limited proficiency in the language of instruction. This study was restricted to a small number of participants. The researcher would recommend studying a larger group of Moroccan university students in future studies. This may give rise to more variation, and perhaps clear patterns of identity construction would emerge. I recommend that the participants include other university students from other Moroccan universities like Rabat, Fes and Agadir. Future studies can also take an in-depth look at how the English language is prioritised, how social environments are analysed and how they identify themselves within the milieu of the English language.

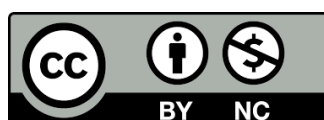
9. CONCLUSION

The role of language in education cannot be over-emphasised. Language is the leading resource used for mediating learning. Identity is a wide-ranging topic that encompasses how people situate themselves in the world and is of interest in many academic fields, including English language learning. Second, English language students' identities are socially and individually constructed. In the context of this study, university students' identities are constructed through interactions with their peers and professors. This illustrates a close relationship between English language learning and identity construction, and that identity is socially constructed. It also confirms that English language learning in practice depends on social and cultural factors. Participants strived to engage in linguistic and cultural negotiations and local communities in this study. In other words, while the participants maintained their Arabic or Amazigh upbringings, they also opened up to constructing new identities through English language learning. Thus, it can be concluded that students in multicultural classrooms construct multiple identities based on the context of their engagement, especially in English language classrooms. Therefore, identity construction is a fluid phenomenon that should be understood vis-à-vis the social context embedded in language competence.

The current research investigates how English language learning impacts university English language students and, as a result, what kinds of identities emerge as a result of English language learning. Twenty (20) English language students from Moulay Ismail University's Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences took part in the study, which was done through theme interviews. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data qualitatively. Participants' tales regarding English language learning were eventually compiled, followed by a typical narrative based on the data: motives for studying English, students as English language learners, and the changing experience. Participants' descriptions were also said to represent their emerging English linguistic identities. This study also revealed that learning English might lead to creating multiple identities. It also found that English language students mainly comprised four identities: job, personal, learner, and linguistic. The identities were inextricably linked to the communities of practice in which they were created in collaboration with others (Wenger 1998).

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