


Research Article

Cultural Identity of Afghan EFL Learners in Iran: A Community of Practice Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Language learning in migrant and minority contexts is closely intertwined with issues of identity, belonging, and social participation, yet little is known about how Afghan EFL learners experience and construct their cultural identity. This study investigated the cultural identity development of Afghan learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) residing in Iran, drawing on the theoretical framework of communities of practice. Recognizing language learning as a socially situated and identity related process, the study aimed to examine how Afghan EFL learners perceived their cultural identity. To achieve this objective, a survey research design was employed. Data were collected through an 18-item cultural identity questionnaire administered to 121 Afghan EFL learners in Iran. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures. The results showed that learners tended to view English not merely as a linguistic skill but as a meaningful social practice that contributes to their sense of self, belonging, and cultural awareness. Moreover, participation in English learning communities played an important role in shaping learners' perceptions of their cultural identity. Interpreted through the lens of communities of practice, the findings highlight the importance of participation, social interaction, and contextual factors in identity construction within EFL learning environments. The study concludes that the cultural identity of Afghan EFL learners in Iran is dynamic and context-dependent. The findings carry important pedagogical implications, emphasizing the need for identity-sensitive approaches in EFL instruction within similar sociocultural contexts.

Introduction

The intricate process of identity development for English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners is influenced by a number of factors, including students' situated institutional system and "hidden" conventional practices, their internal developing sense of professional agency, the asymmetric power dynamic between teachers and students, their investment in identity, and cognitive awareness (the comprehension of a cognitive framework regarding goals and beliefs) (Jia & Sun, 2023). Recent research has explored how broader social and ideological factors shape English language learners' identity and engagement in learning practices. For example, Rahaman (2025) concluded that learners' imagined identities, structural inequalities, and social capital configurations influence their commitment to English learning, highlighting that identity formation in EFL contexts is a dynamic and socially situated process.

In addition, studies focusing on learners' self-perception and cultural identity have shown that English language learning often leads to the development of hybrid identities, as learners negotiate between local cultural backgrounds and global language practices. Haddaoui (2025), for instance, found that Algerian EFL learners experienced significant changes in self-perception and cultural identity through their engagement with English, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between language learning and cultural identity construction.

Prior research on cultural identity has mostly concentrated on second language contexts, frequently involving immigrants in Western nations (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Access to social networks, involvement in activities involving the target language, power dynamics, negotiation, dominant discourses,

and resistance are some of the topics covered in such research studies (Hawkins, 2005; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Previous research has also tried to evaluate how immigrant communities affect students' ability to forge new identities by using new knowledge (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2007).

The cultural identity of Afghan EFL learners in Iran is a crucial yet underexplored area of research. Afghan EFL learners living outside of Afghanistan face a variety of emotional and motivational challenges. Being separated from their families, home country, and economic struggles are all significant factors affecting their lives. With an emphasis on their cultural hybridity between their Afghan ancestry, the prevalent Iranian culture, and the global influence of English, this study examined the complicated identity construction of Afghan EFL learners in Iran. The following research question was formulated to address the gap:

How do Afghan EFL learners construct their cultural identity in the Iranian EFL setting?

Literature Review

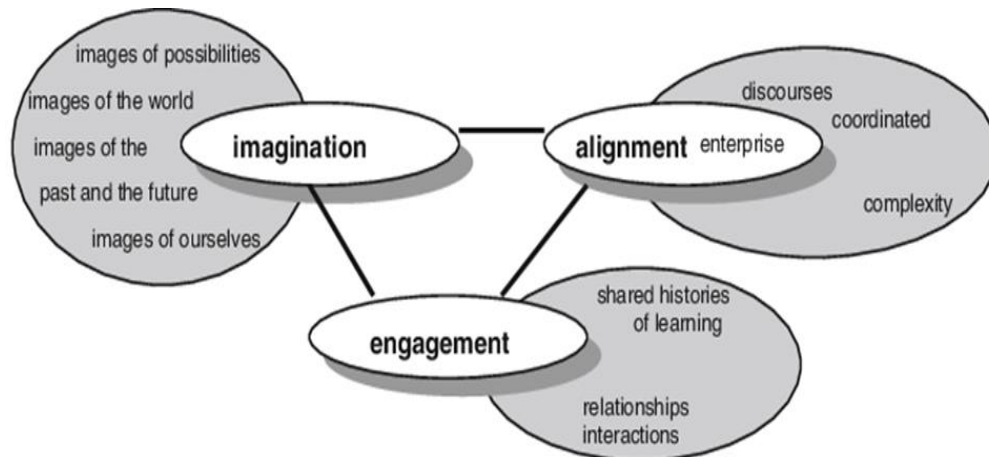
Modes of Belonging: Community of Practice

Figure 1 illustrates Wenger's (1998) framework of modes of belonging in communities of practice, which includes engagement, imagination, and alignment. These modes represent different ways individuals establish and sustain their participation in a community. Engagement involves active participation through relationships and shared histories of learning. Imagination refers to constructing images of possibilities and self-identity beyond immediate experiences. Alignment entails coordinating efforts within broader structures and discourses to achieve shared goals.

Together, these modes shape an individual's sense of identity and belonging within a social learning system.

Figure 1

Modes of Belonging in Communities of Practice



Building on Wenger's (1998) theoretical framework, recent empirical research has highlighted the cultural and interactional conditions that support participation and identity development within communities of practice. Power et al. (2025) demonstrated that collaborative environments grounded in shared norms and professional learning practices strengthen members' sense of belonging and sustained engagement, emphasizing how identity is continuously negotiated through participation in CoP. Detailed information is presented below.

According to Filstad et al. (2019), sense of belonging is essential for human existence, as it is a fundamental human need. The desire to fit in influences human behavior, emotions, and thought processes, as people rely on their social interactions and surroundings to seek acceptance and avoid rejection. Belonging can be experienced in various contexts as Filstad et al. (2019) noted, such as being part of a team, an organization, an activity, or a group. For instance, some individuals may feel a sense of belonging through their involvement in

organizational strategies or projects, while others may derive it from their affiliation with a specific team or group. Ultimately, belonging is conveyed both explicitly through actions and implicitly through interpersonal relationships. Three different modes of belonging can be helpful in understanding this identity development and learning procedures (Wenger, 1998), as discussed below.

Engagement

Engagement is closely linked to learning orientations within a social cognitive framework, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between the learner and their environment (Bryson & Hand, 2007). It is commonly understood to include aspects such as involvement, dedication, passion, enthusiasm, absorption, focused effort, and energy (Schaufeli, 2013). Together, these concepts highlight how engagement drives both the individual's relationship with their learning context and their personal investment in the process.

According to Wenger (1998) description, engagement is a three step process that

involves the combination of the continuous process of negotiating definition, how trajectories are formed, and the development of practice histories.

Engagement fosters belonging and shapes identity when participation, negotiation, and identity formation are interconnected. While mutual engagement is central to the communities of practice, it does not always need to be explicitly tied to specific communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). As a means of belonging, engagement allows individuals to continuously create and redefine their identities through an ongoing process of negotiation (Goodnough, 2010). This dynamic interaction involves how community members define, sustain, and negotiate their involvement, activities, and practices. Through this process, space is created for the formation and reformation of identities (Goodnough, 2010). Wenger (1998) further noted that engagement, as a form of belonging, is defined by its limitations of physical boundaries in terms of time and space, constraints on complexity, and the finite number of people and artifacts with which meaningful relationships can be formed. These limitations, while restricting, also contribute to engagement's strength.

Engagement is one of the key tools for negotiating identities and establishing accountable relationships. It enables individuals to navigate their roles, create competent identities, and transform communities, practices, and artifacts. However, its scope can be limited, as it might not provide broad access to histories or connections with other disciplines. In some cases, a community of practice may even hinder identity development and learning, especially when competence becomes insular (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) noted the

job of engagement involves creating shared objects, handling novel circumstances, and participating in community building activities.

Access to both participation and reification is necessary for engagement in order to promote learning. Interacting with people and being able to support common objectives and procedures are essential components of participation. Access to the instruments, symbols, language, and documents that are utilized in practice is necessary for reification. These two components work together to produce a special setting for education and identity development. Learning is impossible without access to either reification or involvement (Wenger, 1998). In the present study, engagement is explored through Afghan EFL learners' reported experiences of participation and involvement in English learning contexts in Iran.

Imagination

As stated by Wenger (1998), our perception of the world and our sense of location within it are significantly influenced by imagination. It can have a significant impact on how we perceive ourselves and the learning opportunities that come with our actions. As noted by Au (2002), imagination is the process of generating inspiration by connecting past, present, and future communal visions. Filstad et al. (2019) further highlight that imagination involves extrapolating one's own experiences across time and place. To cultivate a reflective perspective on one's circumstances beyond direct interaction, it is essential to create a mental image of oneself, one's community, and the world. Wenger (1998) expands on this by suggesting that imagination broadens our sense of self by transcending time and space, enabling us to connect with the past and recognize shared lessons and challenges across generations. Wenger (1998) defines

imagination as a creative process that shapes the self by forming new relationships and images, not as less real, but as a distinct form of self-work that extends beyond direct interaction with reality.

Wenger (1998) emphasizes that imagination, while involving elements of fantasy, creates meaningful perspectives that enhance our understanding of reality without contradicting facts. Similarly, Jaworski (2006) argues that imagination, combined with a comprehensive worldview, fosters critical inquiry and enriches our understanding of teaching, learning, and the world. Furthermore, Wenger (1998) suggests that while perceptions are shaped by imagined experiences, mutual participation creates a shared reality crucial for identity building. Together, these ideas emphasize imagination's role in broadening perspectives and enhancing engagement with both knowledge and reality. Wenger (1998) explains that the social process of imagination expands reality beyond individual fantasies, cultivating communal imagination and fostering identity and belonging through shared experiences and history. Similarly, Tsui (2007) describes imagination as relating to the world outside our practice community and perceiving experiences within a larger context of broader linkages.

As stated by Wenger (1998), we can place ourselves in history, identify larger trends, and imagine new possibilities thanks to imagination. But it may be dispersed, predicated on beliefs, or divorced from real experience, which puts one at risk of losing identity and social efficacy. As observed by Wenger (1998), imagination entails taking a step back to see things from a different angle, investigating novel ideas, taking chances, forming surprising connections, and

embracing fun in creative thought. Openness, independence, and exploration foster imagination and enable new kinds of participation and reification. Imagination calls for adaptability, a readiness to welcome the unknown, and exposure to a range of customs, cultures, and viewpoints (Wenger, 1998). In the present study, imagination is explored through learners' perceptions of their learning experiences and their reflections on cultural identity within the EFL context.

Alignment

As stated by Wenger (1998), alignment is a sort of belonging that goes beyond reciprocal interaction and incorporates place and time to create larger enterprises. Alignment describes how one's identity can be positively or negatively influenced by the identities of others (Meihami & Rashidi, 2020). It fosters a wide range of actions on a big scale by connecting people through the coordination of energies, activities, and practices. Coordinated activity is not always the result of imagined actions. Wenger's alignment approach entails comprehending the rules and modifying behavior to conform to the values of the group. Peer alignment, utilizing technology to foster unity, and institutional alignment, guaranteeing conformity to standards, are all included (Simpson, 2024).

According to Jaworski (2006), in a community of practice, alignment is the process by which people align with practice circumstances, by frequently using their imagination. It can be a critical process in which people consider the implications and goal. Engagement or creativity are not needed to align with expectations, such as accomplishing goals or adhering to regulations. As demonstrated by repetitive duties or obedience without deeper involvement, alignment demonstrates

belonging but does not always entail insight or innovation. As mentioned by Solomon (2007), alignment with a practice focuses on shared, accepted sets of guidelines, principles, or norms that allow us to interact and feel a part of the practice.

In order to achieve alignment, Johannesson (2022) argued that education and research must be coordinated and improved to complement one another. It is a reciprocal process that links neighborhood endeavors with larger initiatives, guaranteeing that community goals are met. As observed by Nasir (2002), alignment coordinates activities within communities of practice, shaping and reflecting identity. As members align their actions with others, the nature of their participation evolves, influencing their sense of belonging and interaction across communities. According to the findings of Pawłowska (2020), when the individual's identities merge with the community's identity and enterprise, alignment occurs. Multimembership, boundary practices, and participation and reification are necessary for alignment in larger enterprises. While integrating engagement and imagination promotes learning, insufficient participation can result in ambiguous or controversial coordination (Wenger, 1998).

Cultural Identity

Identities are expressed in language in three ways: First, the labels and categories that individuals apply to themselves and others indicate their belonging; second, the indexed speech patterns and behaviors that they use to carry out their belonging; and third, the interpretations of those indices by others. Perceiving and interpreting the indices is a shared cultural skill. Along with identities related to socioeconomic class, sexual

orientation, occupation, and different degrees of sub- and supranational membership, each person possesses a repertory of identities of many types, including some combination of national, ethnic, religious, generational, and gender identities (Joseph, 2013).

Cultural identification is the feeling of being a part of a specific group of people, influenced by common customs, language, conventions, and values. Through socialization and life experiences, it evolves as a phenomenon that affects both individuals and groups. Hall (2015) asserts that cultural identity is dynamic and subject to change based on historical, social, and political factors. Cultural identities are socially constructed and continuously reshaped as individuals navigate different contexts, with scholars exploring these processes through sociocultural perspectives on identity (Norton, 2006). As the globe grows more diverse, the study of cultural identities becomes increasingly important because it offers insights into oneself and others. Joseph (2013), for example, argued that a person's cultural identity is a multifaceted term that includes their views, values, preferences, tastes, customs, and texts that all contribute to their identity.

In cultures that are becoming more interconnected, cultural identity is characterized by diversity and hybridity. Individuals may incorporate aspects of other cultures, resulting in complex, hybrid identities that are difficult to categorize. This is what Bhabha (2012) calls the "third space," (p. 36) a place of cultural negotiation where new identities and meanings are created. For those who frequently live between cultural worlds, such as migrants, transnationals, and bilingual people, this idea is especially pertinent. Unless cultural identities are textualized as national or racial/ethnic identities (with the added 's'), they

rarely possess significant creative power. Joseph (2013) has explained that people do not voluntarily sacrifice themselves for their culture in the same way that they do for their fatherland, their people, or other imagined communities that they believe to be naturally formed rather than merely contingent, arbitrary cultural constructs.

Language is an essential part of cultural identity since it serves as a means of communication and a repository of cultural meaning. People can participate in cultural behaviors and convey cultural norms through language. According to Norton and Toohey (2011), identity development and language acquisition are closely related, especially in situations when people must traverse several linguistic and cultural domains. As a result, learning a language can be a site of identity negotiation as well as an integration tool. The way language and culture interact is a complicated matter. Culture and language interact because they are interconnected. Language conveys cultural components because language can be used to describe, analyze, and assess cultural elements such as beliefs, customs, art, and techniques (Abbasi Talabari & Khatib, 2019).

Afghan Cultural Identity

Afghan cultural identity is shaped through shared historical experiences, cultural values, and prolonged conditions of migration and displacement. For Afghan immigrants living in Iran, cultural identity is not fixed but is continuously negotiated through everyday social interactions and processes of adaptation within the host society (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2008). Empirical research demonstrates that Afghan immigrants actively engage in identity integration by balancing attachment to their cultural heritage with participation in the social

and cultural structures of the host country, often resulting in dynamic and hybrid identity constructions (Zandi-Navgran et al., 2023). This ongoing negotiation of cultural identity influences individuals' sense of belonging, social participation, and positioning within educational and social contexts, particularly for Afghan learners.

In addition, Afghan cultural identity among immigrants in Iran is influenced by emotional and social adaptation processes within the host society, including experiences of marginalization, negotiation of daily social practices, and interactions that shape self-perceptions and belonging. Research indicates that Afghan migrants engage in ongoing negotiation of identity as they navigate emotional challenges and social barriers, which consequently affect how they relate to both their heritage culture and the host context (Zandi-Navgran et al., 2023).

Empirical Studies on Cultural Identity

Previous research on cultural identity has demonstrated that it is a fluid and situation-specific concept that is frequently influenced by cross-cultural encounters. Norton (2013) highlights that EFL learners' sense of self, language skills, social network access, and sense of belonging all have an impact on their cultural identity. It emphasizes how important "investment" is to acquiring resources and establishing oneself in unfamiliar cultural contexts.

According to Gao et al.'s (2008) research, Chinese students studying English in New Zealand negotiated their cultural identities between their home and host cultures. As many participants attempted to uphold their Chinese beliefs while adjusting to Western academic and social norms, they encountered cultural conflict. Through exposure to diverse

ways of thinking and interacting, students were able to reinterpret their cultural identities, demonstrating that EFL learning was a transformative process that went beyond simple language acquisition. In EFL situations, this emphasizes the emotional and psychological aspects of developing a cultural identity.

When examining Omani EFL learners, Al-Issa (2006) found that studying English was frequently linked to Western culture, causing conflict between the learners' sense of national identity and the cultural values that were seen to be ingrained in English. According to the survey study, pupils occasionally objected to elements that went against their sense of place and were conscious of the cultural ramifications of studying English. Nonetheless, some students adopted a hybrid identity that combined aspects of their local and global cultures. This study shows how EFL students actively create their cultural identities by drawing on their sociocultural context and values.

Although some studies have explored the concept of cultural identity among EFL learners in various contexts such as Omani, Chinese, and other international settings, there appears to be a large gap in the literature surrounding the cultural identity of Afghan EFL learners. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no empirical studies have particularly explored this population, underlining the need for more exploration in this area.

More broadly, empirical research in L2 pedagogy has extensively examined cultural identity in relation to language learning, classroom participation, and sociocultural interaction. Studies have demonstrated that learners' identities are shaped through pedagogical practices, power relations, and

opportunities for participation within instructional contexts (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Research has also highlighted the dynamic and negotiated nature of cultural identity as learners engage with multiple communities and discourses in L2 classrooms (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Collectively, these studies confirm that cultural identity constitutes a well-established area of inquiry within L2 pedagogy.

Methodology

Design of the Study

This study employed a survey research design to systematically examine the cultural identity of Afghan EFL learners in Iran. The design enabled the collection of quantitative data from a broad sample, providing measurable and generalizable insights into patterns and variations in cultural identity constructs. Survey-based research is recognized for its efficiency in capturing standardized data from dispersed populations while supporting statistical analysis of trends (Ponto, 2015).

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of 121 Afghan EFL learners residing in Iran. They were male and female between the ages of 20 and 40, holding their BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees in English Language Teaching, English Literature, English Translation, and Linguistics at Iranian universities. This group was chosen because they represented a distinct setting in which the junction of Iranian cultural influences, Afghan background, and the experience of learning English as a foreign language shaped cultural identity.

This study used purposive sampling to select participants, a method recognized in survey research for ensuring the relevance and

accessibility of respondents (Etikan et al., 2016). The sample was carefully chosen to represent key characteristics of the target population—Afghan EFL learners in Iran, thereby supporting the validity and generalizability of the findings within a quantitative descriptive framework.

Instrumentation

This study employed a survey research design to investigate the cultural identity of Afghan EFL learners in Iran. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, designed to capture participants' perceptions of their cultural identity in relation to EFL learning (Abbasi Talabari & Khatib, 2019).

The questionnaire was adopted from a previously developed instrument and used with the permission of the original author. It was employed to gather quantitative data on participants' perceptions of their cultural identity. The instrument included closed-ended items based on a five-point Likert scale to measure factors such as cultural identification, language preferences, and attitudes toward both Afghan and Iranian cultural norms.

The data collected through this instrument provided a measurable and generalizable understanding of the cultural identity dynamics among Afghan EFL learners in Iran.

Procedure

This study examined the cultural identity of Afghan EFL learners in Iran using a survey research design to provide a measurable and generalizable understanding of their perspectives and experiences. The quantitative approach enabled the systematic measurement of cultural identity constructs

and the identification of patterns within the target population through statistical analysis.

The quantitative component focused on measuring standardized variables related to cultural identity, such as affiliation strength, language use patterns, and adaptive attitudes. These dimensions were systematically captured through a structured questionnaire, allowing for statistical analysis of trends and differences within the socio-educational context of Afghan EFL learners in Iran.

The survey captured participants' cultural identity through a structured questionnaire, which measured specific dimensions such as language use, acculturation levels, and sense of belonging. This approach provided a comprehensive and generalizable overview of patterns and trends across the sample.

The questionnaire was constructed and administered online via a secure survey platform. The survey link was distributed to Afghan EFL learners across Iran through digital channels, including Telegram and WhatsApp, enabling nationwide participation. Data collection was conducted entirely through the online questionnaire, and responses were compiled for quantitative analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire designed to measure participants' perceptions of their cultural identity and its relation to English language learning. The survey responses were coded and entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for statistical processing. During the initial stage of data analysis, descriptive statistics including means, frequencies, and standard deviations were calculated to summarize key demographic characteristics and overall response trends.

Results and Discussion

Results

Reliability Estimate

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the questionnaire should be reported before discussing the results. As Table 1 illustrates, the perception questionnaire had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .776, which is regarded as an appropriate reliability index, according to several scholars (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009; Fryer et al., 2018; Harrison et al., 2021; Tseng et al., 2006). As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's alpha value for the questionnaire was .776, which exceeds the minimum acceptable threshold of .70 recommended in social science research. This result indicates that the items of the questionnaire were sufficiently consistent in measuring Afghan EFL learners' perceptions of cultural identity development. Therefore, the instrument can be considered reliable, and the results derived from it are appropriate for further analysis and interpretation.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.776	18

Investigation of the Research Question

This section presents the quantitative findings of the study, derived from the analysis of data collected through the perception questionnaire. The data were analyzed using SPSS, and descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were employed to summarize the participants' responses. The questionnaire consisted of 18 items and was completed by 121 Afghan EFL learners. As can be seen in Table 2, the responses to each item are assigned to six different Likert-type points consisting of "Strongly Disagree",

"Disagree", "Somehow Disagree", "Somehow Agree", "Agree", "Strongly Agree". It should be noted that the frequencies reported in this section refer to the number of responses rather than the number of respondents. As a result, the total number of responses exceeds the actual number of participants. Additionally, the dataset included ten missing responses, which were retained and reported transparently in accordance with accepted academic practices.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Responses to Perception Questionnaire

	Responses	
	N	Percent
Strongly Disagree	86	3.98
Disagree	177	8.16
Somehow Disagree	167	7.70
Somehow Agree	595	27.44
Agree	655	30.21
Strongly Agree	488	22.51
Total	2168	100.00

As presented in Table 2 above, the frequencies and percentages of the responses provided to the perception questionnaire indicate a notably high level of agreement among the participants with respect to the concepts and statements addressed in the questionnaire. The results demonstrate that more than four-fifths of the total responses, exceeding 80 percent fall within the agreement spectrum, suggesting a generally positive perception of the issues explored in the instrument.

More specifically, as shown in Table 2, 30.21 percent of the responses reflect agreement with the questionnaire items, while 27.44 percent indicate somehow agreement. In addition, a substantial proportion of the participants, accounting for 22.51 percent, report strong agreement, pointing to a strong

endorsement of the ideas embedded in the perception questionnaire. Taken together, these figures reveal a considerable degree of consensus among Afghan EFL learners regarding the statements related to cultural identity development.

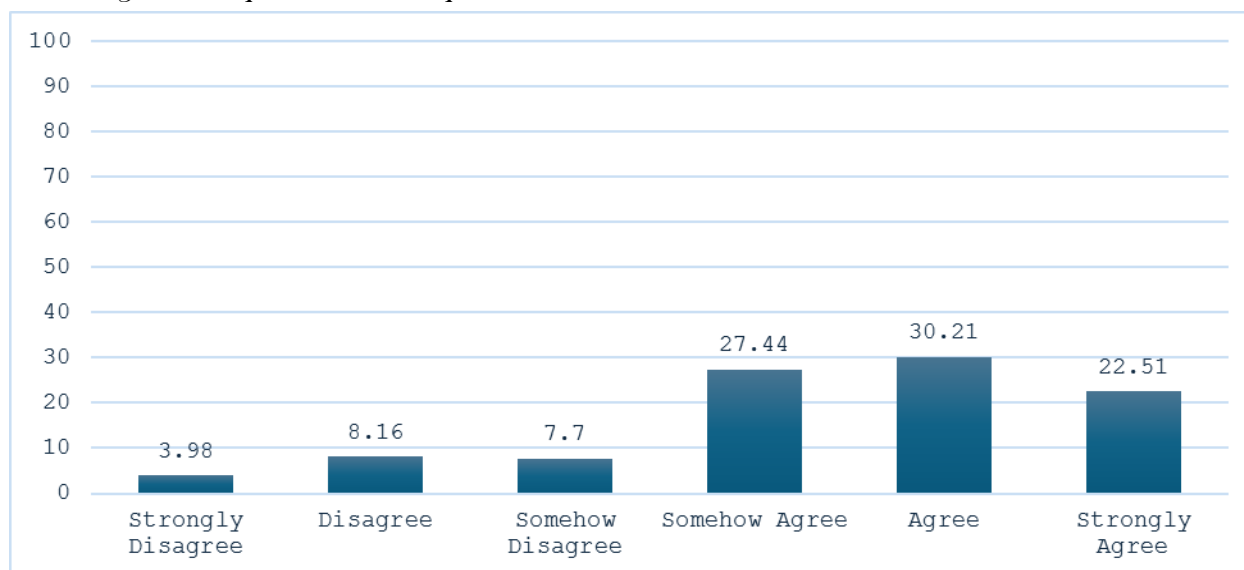
In contrast, the data displayed in Table 2 show that a relatively limited proportion of responses express disagreement with the questionnaire items. Only 8.16 percent of the responses indicate disagreement, suggesting that a small minority of participants do not align with the dominant perspectives represented in the questionnaire. Furthermore, 7.70 percent of the responses fall into the category of somehow disagreement, and an even smaller

proportion, 3.98 percent, report strong disagreement. The comparatively low percentages across these categories highlight that oppositional views are markedly less prevalent among the participants.

Overall, the distribution of responses summarized in Table 2 reflects a clear tendency toward agreement, underscoring the relevance and acceptability of the questionnaire constructs among the participants. The percentages reported above are further illustrated in Figure 2, which provides a graphical representation of the response patterns and visually reinforces the predominance of agreement over disagreement.

Figure 2

Percentages of Responses to Perception Questionnaire.



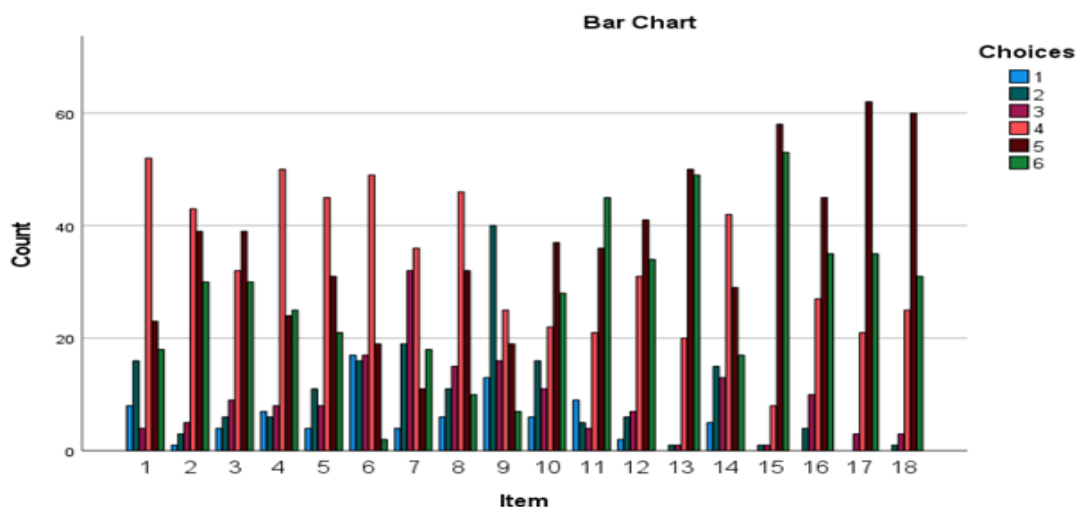
The frequencies and percentages of each questionnaire item are reported. Table 3 presents the distribution of responses for all 18 questionnaire items. For several items, the total number of responses amounts to 121, reflecting the presence of one missing response. To complement the tabular data and facilitate clearer interpretation, Figure 3

visually illustrates the frequency distribution of responses across the individual items.

Table 3*Frequencies and Percentages of Responses to Individual Items of Perception Questionnaire*

		Choices					Total	
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somehow disagree	Somehow agree	Agree	Strongly agree	
1	Count	8	16	4	52	23	18	121
	%	6.6%	13.2%	3.3%	43.0%	19.0%	14.9%	100.0%
2	Count	1	3	5	43	39	30	121
	%	0.8%	2.5%	4.1%	35.5%	32.2%	24.8%	100.0%
3	Count	4	6	9	32	39	30	120
	%	3.3%	5.0%	7.5%	26.7%	32.5%	25.0%	100.0%
4	Count	7	6	8	50	24	25	120
	%	5.8%	5.0%	6.7%	41.7%	20.0%	20.8%	100.0%
5	Count	4	11	8	45	31	21	120
	%	3.3%	9.2%	6.7%	37.5%	25.8%	17.5%	100.0%
6	Count	17	16	17	49	19	2	120
	%	14.2%	13.3%	14.2%	40.8%	15.8%	1.7%	100.0%
7	Count	4	19	32	36	11	18	120
	%	3.3%	15.8%	26.7%	30.0%	9.2%	15.0%	100.0%
8	Count	6	11	15	46	32	10	120
	%	5.0%	9.2%	12.5%	38.3%	26.7%	8.3%	100.0%
9	Count	13	40	16	25	19	7	120
	%	10.8%	33.3%	13.3%	20.8%	15.8%	5.8%	100.0%
10	Count	6	16	11	22	37	28	120
	%	5.0%	13.3%	9.2%	18.3%	30.8%	23.3%	100.0%
11	Count	9	5	4	21	36	45	120
	%	7.5%	4.2%	3.3%	17.5%	30.0%	37.5%	100.0%
12	Count	2	6	7	31	41	34	121
	%	1.7%	5.0%	5.8%	25.6%	33.9%	28.1%	100.0%
13	Count	0	1	1	20	50	49	121
	%	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%	16.5%	41.3%	40.5%	100.0%
14	Count	5	15	13	42	29	17	121
	%	4.1%	12.4%	10.7%	34.7%	24.0%	14.0%	100.0%
15	Count	0	1	1	8	58	53	121
	%	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%	6.6%	47.9%	43.8%	100.0%
16	Count	0	4	10	27	45	35	121
	%	0.0%	3.3%	8.3%	22.3%	37.2%	28.9%	100.0%
17	Count	0	0	3	21	62	35	121
	%	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%	17.4%	51.2%	28.9%	100.0%
18	Count	0	1	3	25	60	31	120
	%	0.0%	0.8%	2.5%	20.8%	50.0%	25.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	86	177	167	595	655	488	2168
	%	4.0%	8.2%	7.7%	27.4%	30.2%	22.5%	100.0%

Figure 3

Frequencies of Responses to Individual Items of Perception Questionnaire**Discussion**

The purpose of this chapter was to examine how Afghan EFL learners develop their cultural identity through engagement with English language learning. The discussion integrates the quantitative trends, situates them within the theoretical framework of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and the broader literature on cultural identity in EFL contexts. Overall, the findings indicate that Afghan EFL learners perceive cultural identity development as an essential and positive dimension of their language learning experience, aligning closely with sociocultural and identity-oriented perspectives on second language acquisition.

Cultural Identity Development and Communities of Practice

The overwhelmingly high level of agreement across the questionnaire items suggests that Afghan EFL learners largely view English learning as more than the acquisition of linguistic skills. Instead, it is perceived as a socially situated process that contributes to identity construction and a sense of belonging. This finding strongly resonates with Wenger's (1998) concept of learning as participation in

communities of practice, where identity is continuously negotiated through engagement, imagination, and alignment. The dominance of agreement responses reflects learners' recognition of English learning as an arena in which cultural meanings are encountered, interpreted, and integrated into their evolving sense of self (Norton, 2013).

The relative homogeneity of responses further indicates that participants share common perceptions regarding the role of cultural identity in EFL learning. This shared orientation may be understood as evidence of collective participation in similar educational and sociocultural contexts, where learners negotiate identity within comparable constraints and opportunities (Peng, 2023). In Wenger's terms, this points to a form of mutual engagement, whereby learners develop shared understandings through participation in common learning practices, even if these practices occur across different institutions or learning environments.

Engagement and Identity Negotiation

The findings provide indirect but clear support for engagement as a central mechanism in cultural identity development.

The strong endorsement of questionnaire items suggests that learners actively relate their language learning experiences to their sense of self, values, and social positioning. This aligns with Wenger's (1998) view that engagement enables individuals to negotiate meaning and construct competent identities through participation in shared practices. In the Afghan EFL context, engagement appears to facilitate learners' awareness of cultural dimensions embedded in language use, allowing them to position themselves within both local and global cultural narratives (Tareen et al., 2024).

This interpretation is consistent with previous studies highlighting the role of active participation in shaping identity among EFL learners (e.g., Norton (2013). Similar to Chinese EFL learners in international contexts, Afghan learners seem to experience English learning as a site of identity work, where cultural meanings are not passively absorbed but actively interpreted. The high levels of agreement suggest that learners perceive this engagement as meaningful and empowering rather than threatening, indicating a positive orientation toward identity negotiation through language learning.

Imagination and the Construction of Possible Selves

The qualitative interpretation of the findings also points to the significance of imagination in cultural identity development. The strong agreement responses may be understood as reflecting learners' ability to envision themselves beyond their immediate sociocultural circumstances. Wenger (1998) emphasizes that imagination allows learners to connect their present experiences with broader histories, global communities, and future possibilities. For Afghan EFL learners, English appears to function as a symbolic

resource that enables them to imagine alternative identities and affiliations, extending their sense of belonging beyond local boundaries.

This finding echoes Bhabha's (2012) argument that imagination links learners' local practices to wider social and cultural contexts. It also aligns with the notion of the 'third space' (Bhabha, 2012), where hybrid identities emerge through cultural negotiation. The learners' positive perceptions suggest that they do not view cultural identity as fixed or exclusive, but rather as flexible and open to reconstruction. Such imaginative engagement allows them to reconcile local cultural values with global linguistic practices, resulting in more complex and hybrid identity formations (Al-Issa, 2006).

Alignment and Sociocultural Integration

The consistency and cohesion of participants' responses further indicate a strong sense of alignment with the norms and expectations associated with English language learning. Alignment, as conceptualized by Wenger (1998), involves coordinating one's actions and identity with broader structures and enterprises. In this study, learners appear to align themselves with the cultural and educational values embedded in EFL contexts, while maintaining a sense of cultural continuity.

This finding supports Nasir's (2002) view that alignment shapes identity by linking individual participation to collective practices. Rather than experiencing English as a force of cultural erosion, Afghan EFL learners seem to perceive alignment as a way to integrate English into their existing cultural frameworks. This interpretation contrasts with earlier findings in some EFL contexts where learners reported cultural conflict or resistance (Al-Issa, 2006). Instead, the present findings

suggest a tendency toward accommodation and synthesis, whereby learners coordinate their learning practices with both local and global cultural expectations.

Cultural Identity as Dynamic and Contextual

Taken together, the findings reinforce the view of cultural identity as dynamic, negotiated, and context dependent, as emphasized by Hall (2015) and Joseph (2013). The strong endorsement of cultural identity related statements indicates that Afghan EFL learners recognize identity as something shaped through interaction, language use, and social participation. English learning, in this sense, becomes a space for ongoing identity construction rather than a unidirectional process of cultural transmission.

Moreover, the minimal presence of disagreement responses suggests that alternative or oppositional views regarding cultural identity are not prominent among the participants. This may reflect shared sociocultural realities and educational trajectories that foster similar interpretations of English learning. From a sociocultural perspective, such convergence underscores the role of common practices and shared histories in shaping learners' identity perceptions.

In sum, the discussion illustrates that Afghan EFL learners perceive cultural identity development as an integral and constructive aspect of their language learning experience. Through engagement, imagination, and alignment, learners negotiate their identities in ways that are consistent with sociocultural theories of learning and identity. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how cultural identity is experienced and constructed within the Afghan EFL context, addressing an important gap in the existing literature.

Conclusions and Implications

The study explored how Afghan EFL learners in Iran develop their cultural identity. The findings reveal a consistent pattern of perceptions across participants, with the majority expressing strong agreement with statements linking English learning to cultural identity development. Based on the study's findings, Afghan EFL learners perceive identity as fluid rather than fixed. The high levels of agreement with identity-related statements indicate that participants understand identity as something constructed and negotiated through social interaction and participation. This perspective aligns with sociocultural and poststructural views that emphasize the context-dependent and evolving nature of identity.

From a theoretical standpoint, the community of practice framework provides a useful lens for understanding how learners negotiate meaning and construct identities. Engagement allows learners to actively participate in English learning practices, imagination enables them to connect present experiences with broader communities and future possibilities, and alignment facilitates coordination with wider cultural and educational structures without necessitating the abandonment of their cultural heritage. Afghan EFL learners generally hold positive orientations towards English learning and cultural identity. The study highlights the influence of shared sociocultural experiences on learners' perceptions. Common educational trajectories, social constraints, and aspirations contribute to a convergence of views, resulting in relatively homogeneous understandings of how English learning relates to cultural identity. Overall, these conclusions emphasize the importance of considering identity to be a central aspect of EFL learning,

particularly in contexts characterized by migration, cultural hybridity, and displacement.

The findings carry several implications for pedagogy and teacher awareness in EFL contexts similar to that of Afghan learners in Iran. From a pedagogical perspective, English instruction should actively acknowledge and support learners' identity-related experiences. Creating classroom spaces that foster reflection, dialogue, and cultural expression can enhance engagement and meaningful participation, allowing learners to view their cultural backgrounds as assets rather than obstacles. Teachers' sensitivity to the sociocultural dimensions of language learning is also critical. The awareness of learners' hybrid identities and the negotiation between local and global cultural influences can inform inclusive teaching practices and help foster supportive communities of practice within the classroom. On a broader level, the findings suggest that EFL learning should be viewed as a socially and identity driven process, particularly for learners from marginalized or migrant backgrounds. Educational institutions and policymakers may enhance learning outcomes by considering how instructional environments can facilitate positive identity construction through engagement, imagination, and alignment.

The following limitations need to be considered for the present research. The number of participants in the present study can constitute the most important limitation. It is difficult to find a large number of Afghan EFL learners in Iran to agree to participate in this research. Another factor that should be taken into account is that most of them are not willing to reveal their culture and identity, and for many reasons they want to be hidden especially in the current situation.

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