



<https://doi.org/10.22077/ali.2026.10561.1222>

How EFL Learners Navigate Language-Learning Complexities Through Their Imagined Communities and Imagined Identities: Cases of Spanish and Iranian Learners

Melika Mobaraki¹ 
 Seyyed Mohammad Reza Adel^{2*} 
 Saeed Ghaniabadi³ 
 Andreea Rosca⁴ 
 Mohammad Davoudi⁵ 

¹Ph.D. Candidate in Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language and Literature, Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar, Iran

^{2*}Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language and Literature, Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar, Iran/Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

³Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language and Literature, Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar, Iran

⁴Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English and German Philology, University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

⁵Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language and Literature, Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar, Iran

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 24 November 2025

Revised: 19 December 2025

Accepted: 20 February 2026

Published: 30 March 2026

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

E-mail: sm.adel@hsu.ac.ir; m.adel@um.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

Learning language as a social process can be shaped by learners' imagined communities and imagined identities. This study explores the strategies EFL learners use in navigating the complexities of language learning in a foreign cultural context. The participants were sixteen senior university students (eight from Spain and eight from Iran). The instruments used to collect the data were semi-structured interviews, written narratives, and focus groups. After applying qualitative content analysis, three themes emerged: intercultural negotiation and communicative adaptation; identity construction and transformation; and strategic resource use to build imagined communities and future opportunities. It was found that the participants exercised different strategies to navigate their identity-related challenges. Spanish learners mainly used pragmatic and stylistic adaptations based on cultural interests, whereas Iranian learners engaged in deeper identity construction shaped by professional aspirations. This highlights that language education should be culturally sensitive considering learners' imagined communities and identities to enhance sociocultural adaptability.

KEYWORDS: Imagination; Intercultural negotiation; Identity construction; Learner agency; Language learning strategies

1. Introduction

Language education has increasingly highlighted the social and psychological dimensions of language learning, specifically with regard to how learners envision themselves in relation to the target language and its community. For many learners, the quality of the process of their language learning is connected to their future goals, which can be examined through the lens of their

imagined identities and imagined communities, that is, how they see themselves in the future communities they want to join, whether academic, professional, or cultural in nature (Norton, 2013). One such imagination does not remain abstract; rather, it influences the strategies learners use to navigate the complexities they encounter through their language learning process.

Since imagination, in both social and educational contexts, is crucial for a meaningful learning experience (Gelmi, 2024), it can be regarded as a social experience that allows learners to envision themselves in future worlds and participate in their imagined communities. This highlights that imagination enables learners to look beyond their actual experiences (Hjultrom, 2025) and should be seen as a powerful motivating force in language learning contexts. Wenger (1998) emphasizes that learning is a situated process, often tied to one's participation in communities of practice, communities that may not always exist in the learners' immediate environment but can be constructed through hopes, long-term goals, media exposure, or online interactions. More recent work extends this idea, showing how imagined or virtual communities shape learners' participation and identity formation (e.g., Liu et al., 2024; Tajeddin, 2021). It is through these imagined communities that learners form emotional and cognitive investments in their learning (Norton, 2001).

At the same time, not all learners are equally supported in realizing these imagined futures. When there is a disconnect between learners' classroom experiences and their imagined identities, motivation may decline, and various forms of non-participation can emerge (Soltanian, 2025). In this sense, recognizing the imagined aspects of learner identity, as a framework of interpreting learners' experiences, is crucial for figuring out the reason students feel engaged or disengaged with the meaningful ways of language learning (Goharimehr, 2018; Norton & Pavlenko, 2019). Additionally, since the scope of imagined communities is constantly expanding and redefining—for example, through digital technologies that allow learners to connect with broader cultural networks (Darvin & Norton, 2015)—it is crucial to investigate how learners navigate the complexities of language learning by considering their imagined identities and imagined communities. The present study attempts to address this issue by focusing on learners' distinct cultural backgrounds and how such complexities can shape their learning experiences.

1.1. Complexities in language learning

Individuals may inevitably face various difficulties and complexities through the process of language learning, not only in the main four skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing, or the linguistic features such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation but also in broader aspects such as cultural and environmental issues, cross linguistic effects of first language (Al-Mohanna, 2024), and sociolinguistic competence (Al-Seghayer, 2019). Moreover, psychological dimensions, including identity conflicts, anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence, would possibly fit into the broad category. For example, a recent research by Komala and Hudiyo (2025) indicated that there are common psychological barriers for second language learners (lack of motivation, anxiety, fear of mistakes, and embarrassment). In other words, learning a new language is about getting engaged with cultural knowledge and feeling involved in the target society, and thus it is far beyond just acquiring linguistic features. Learners with different backgrounds and experiences bring unique ideologies to the process of language learning, creating communication challenges and cultural conflicts (Dong, 2024). This also highlights the sociocultural aspects, which entail dealing with various norms, values, and perspectives and underscore the importance of comparing different educational settings in foreign cultural contexts (e.g., Iran vs Spain).

In a recent study carried out by Ubaidillah (2024), the researchers discovered that community involvement and prior experiences of learners can mediate their identity construction. This reveals an intricate relationship between language learning and identity construction. Although learners may face tensions between their native cultural identity and the imagined identity they aspire to build through English (Early & Norton, 2012), a lack of confidence in future identity construction can reduce their engagement in the learning process (Goharimehr, 2018). Conversely, those who successfully integrate imagined identities and communities into their learning goals demonstrate higher motivation (Goharimehr, 2018). From a critical perspective, research on EFL learning highlights the complex negotiations between belonging, marginalization, and identity formation within imagined communities. Imagination can both empower and marginalize EFL learners, underscoring the dual nature of community membership in identity formation (Kharchenko, 2014). Imagined communities create spaces for identity negotiation while preserving cultural values (Luong & Tran, 2021). As Norton and Pavlenko (2019) argued, learners' actual and desired memberships in imagined communities significantly influence their learning trajectories, shaping their agency, motivation, investment, and resistance across diverse identity clusters, including postcolonial, global, ethnic, multilingual, and gendered identities. These complexities are therefore not merely technical but deeply intertwined with learners' imagined communities and imagined identities.

1.2. Imagined communities

In Norton's (2013) words, imagined communities are defined as people with whom we feel connected through our sense of imagination, even people who are not accessible or physically available. We engage with many communities in direct ways, like neighborhoods and workgroups, but we also connect with imagined communities—people we have never met but envision interacting with in the future. Imagined communities connect us to people across time and space (Kanno & Norton, 2003). It represents aspirational spaces where language learners envision themselves as future members of target-language communities, extending far beyond their immediate learning contexts. Imagined communities of practice in English as an international language allow learners to negotiate identity, communicate globally, and exercise agency beyond their immediate context (Sabouri, 2025; Tajeddin et al., 2021). Research demonstrates that imagined communities significantly influence language learners' motivation, participation, and learning practices rather than remaining abstract concepts. Japanese EFL learners who

incorporated imagined identities and communities into their learning goals showed greater motivation compared to those lacking confidence in future identity construction (Goharimehr, 2018). Tajeddin (2021) identified that imagined communities of practice enable learners to negotiate identity, communicate globally, exercise agency, and practice coordination in English as an international language. Heidt's (2022) empirical study on middle-school German students showed that an imagined communities curriculum helped 36 of 41 students feel greater connection with German speakers compared to conventional approaches.

Research on EFL learners' imagined communities reveals their significant impact on identity formation, learning motivation, and strategic choices. Xu and Kim (2022) found that Chinese EFL students' imagined professional and social identities directly influenced their learning agency and motivation, with earlier establishment of clear imagined identities correlating with stronger target language commitment. In a study by Shahidzade and Mazdayasna (2022), imagined communities are determining factors in whether learners approach English as an investment for future social/professional participation or as cultural consumption. However, research examining English language learning reveals significant tensions between learners' local cultural identities and their imagined participation in global English-speaking communities. These tensions manifest through what Vinall and Shin (2019) term a tourist gaze, where learners simultaneously view their own culture from an outsider's perspective while preparing to explain it to others in English. Bilinguals experience ideological tensions between instrumental English learning focused on local competitiveness and broader cosmopolitan aspirations, highlighting the need for teaching approaches that emphasize identity negotiation over rigid linguistic structures (Ruane, 2025). Recent empirical work demonstrates that local-global tensions shape learners' strategic investment (Marzban, 2025). Intensive English learners experience tensions between their local cultural identities and the global English-speaking community they imagine (Lee, 2014). This tension is particularly relevant to the present study because Spanish and Iranian EFL learners likewise navigate competing cultural orientations as they construct their imagined communities (Prieto-Arranz & Jacob, 2019; Soltanian & Ghapanchi, 2024). Since Spanish and Iranian EFL learners might navigate distinct sociocultural contexts that shape how they envision their future participation in English-speaking communities, this study explores strategies they employ to deal with the local/global complexities of language learning with regard to their imagined communities and identities.

1.3. Imagined identities

To enter imagined communities, one needs to construct an imagined identity (Darvin & Norton, 2015); thus, the two concepts are considered as inseparable variables in language learning (Luong & Tran, 2021). Norton (2001) defines imagined identities as a perception of the future self that language learners aspire to become. This identity is forged by conflicts, transitioned across time and space, reshaped amid shifting between contexts, and reconstructed through situated practices and social exchanges (Teng, 2017). In an empirical study, Wu (2017) revealed a direct relationship between imagined identities and learning investment by suggesting that identity negotiation is essentially dynamic and that learners are constantly building and rebuilding their possible futures through strategic learning investments. This was further confirmed and reinforced by Fan (2025), stating that imagined identities, motivation, and investment are interrelated through individual agency and surrounding context. By setting a clear and academic imagined identity, students will get more involved and motivated in learning a target language (Xu & Kim, 2022). Similarly, learners who lacked confidence in imagined identities showed less motivation in comparison to those who integrated it within their learning goals under similar circumstances (Fan, 2025; Goharimehr, 2018). It can therefore be concluded that fostering personalized imagined identities ignites intentions and incentives in learners and helps them transcend cultural barriers while encouraging them to invest more thoroughly in language learning (Crosby, 2025).

When learners' imagined identities align with their learning context, their motivation to engage with the learning increases, and when misalignment occurs, learners may show resistance toward learning (Lund Dean & Jolly, 2012). Additionally, language ideologies, which are constructed from sociocultural expectations, can shape what identities learners can imagine (De Costa, 2016). This shows that sociocultural factors can shape the imagined identities that learners construct along their language learning path. For instance, Spanish learners may view English as a tool for professional development (Seijas & Parra, 2021), whereas Iranian learners view the English language education environment in Iran as a political one that shapes identities (Foomani, 2024). Learners may use various strategies to deal with the difficulties of language acquisition and the conflicts between their imagined and real identities since they develop emotional and cognitive investments in their education through their imagined communities (Norton, 2001). Thus, by examining such strategies, it is possible to deepen our understanding of how language learners shape their imagined identities in a foreign cultural context.

1.4. The present study

Extensive research has been conducted to examine imagined communities and identities; however, few have responded to how learners strategically navigate their language learning challenges through these constructs. The majority of the studies carried out in this field dealt with single socio-cultural contexts, but the current study holds a cross-cultural perspective and explores learners' strategic engagement with imagined communities and identities across two different socio-cultural contexts (i.e., Iran and Spain). This is regarded as a meaningful comparison since the two countries provide contrasting yet complementary contexts, while significantly varying in educational systems, social beliefs, political views and possessing distinct approaches towards English and its global use. To this end, the present study aims to investigate how EFL learners from Spain and Iran navigate the complexities of language learning with respect to their imagined communities and imagined identities.

This study provides insights into both theory and practice by adopting a strategic perspective on learners' imagination and identity. This might provide a clearer understanding of how language learners bridge the gap between imagined communities

and imagined identities. By exploring learners' experiences of their language learning journey, it examines the strategies they use to navigate the complexities of their language learning. Additionally, by engaging in a cross-cultural comparison, it seeks to shed light on the context-specific strategies that reflect how learners navigate different dimensions of the challenges (from linguistic to sociocultural) they encounter in envisioning their imagined communities and shaping their imagined identities while learning a foreign language. Hence, this study addresses the following research question:

What strategies do EFL learners from Spain and Iran use to navigate the complexities of language learning in a foreign cultural context regarding their imagined communities and imagined identities?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

A total number of 16 senior EFL students from two different cultural/national groups participated in this study, including 8 Iranian and 8 Spanish students. Their ages ranged from 19 to 23, consisting of 4 male and 12 female participants. They were selected voluntarily but purposefully, as all met the necessary language learning experience requirements and had adequate English proficiency to express their thoughts, articulate experiences, and reflect on imagined concepts. All participants were senior university students enrolled in English studies with an advanced level of English.

Before selection, a consent form was distributed to two classes of English studies (in each context), containing detailed information about the study, including a brief introduction, its purpose, research questions, data collection methods, number of interview sessions, and estimated time required. At the end of the consent form, they were assured that anonymity and confidentiality of the provided data were to be maintained and that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Initially, 21 participants (11 Spanish and 10 Iranian) were selected; however, 3 Spanish and 2 Iranian individuals did not continue with all the interview sessions due to some personal issues and were eventually dropped out of the study. The whole process of data collection lasted three months for each group separately, and the data regarding the interviews were gathered through face-to-face sessions and written narratives via social media (WhatsApp).

2.2. Instruments

In this qualitative research, we employed three instruments, including individual interviews, written narratives, and focus group interviews. Utilizing different instruments could provide us with a broader perspective on the research issues and help to achieve rich, triangulated data. By consulting with colleagues and previous studies on identity and imagination (e.g., Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton, 2013; Xu & Kim, 2022), we developed the instruments in a way that allowed us to explore participants' strategies, experiences, and thoughts with regard to their imagined communities and identities. Additionally, all the instruments were conducted in English. To achieve comparability between the two cultural groups, equivalent instruments and procedures were used across both contexts, and to ensure the clarity and content validity of the research instruments, two university professors reviewed the interview and written narrative questions. As a result, the necessary revisions were applied. The interviewer's (one of the researchers) presence during all the data collection procedures (except the written narrative) ensured the clarification of any ambiguities or misunderstandings that the participants might have faced. Besides, the definitions of the key terms, namely, imagined community and imagined identity, along with some examples, were given to them prior to the interview sessions. Moreover, the data collection sessions were conducted with a one-week time interval.

2.2.1. Individual interviews

We utilized individual interviews to gain deep insights into the participants' language learning experiences, imagined communities, and imagined identities. These interviews helped us to explore individuals' background of language learning, motivational factors, and strategies developed to cope with language learning complexities. The type of individual interviews was semi-structured, including 7 open-ended questions, which maintained a balance between structure and flexibility and helped the interviewer follow up with the emerging prompts and topics of relevance (e.g., How do you balance your native cultural identity with foreign language expectations and overcome language barriers in different cultural contexts?). The individual interview sessions did not have a fixed duration, meaning that they depended on the participants' responses so that the participants were free to express their thoughts and experiences as long as it took. However, on average, each lasted 25 to 30 minutes. Moreover, all interviews were recorded with the participants' permission and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.2.2. Written narratives

The other instrument used for this research was written narratives, which required the participants to reflect independently and answer 6 questions introspectively (e.g., Can you recall a specific instance when your imagined community, imagined identity, or professional identity clashed with the expectations or norms of your language learning environment? How did you navigate this conflict and what impact did it have on your language learning experience?). This type of instrument could support individuals' agency and yield rich subjective data. The written narratives were conducted in English, and no specific maximum limit was assigned for the writings. However, they were asked to write at least 80 words for each question and include real-life incidents of their own experiences and language learning journey. In a Word file, the questions were sent to each participant

individually through social media (WhatsApp) to be answered at their convenience. They could also ask the interviewer about any concerns or questions that arose. Finally, they typed their responses in the same file and sent it back.

2.2.3. Focus group interviews

To achieve diverse perspectives and interactive data, we employed two focus group interviews within each cultural group. Through collective discussions, the participants had the chance to willingly interact, discuss, and reflect on each other's experiences. By sharing ideas in a group setting, participants felt motivated and comfortable to co-construct meanings about imagined communities and identities; this allowed relevant or contrasting experiences to emerge. Each focus group, one for Spanish and one for Iranian participants, consisted of 8 participants. The language used for all interviews was English, and each session lasted approximately 60 minutes. Focus group interviews consisted of 4 semi-structured, open-ended questions (e.g., How have group dynamics in your EFL class influenced language learning experiences and strategies and the negotiations of cultural complexities?) to extend the findings of individual interviews and written narratives. The questions were read aloud by the interviewer, and participants shared their ideas one by one, if they had any. Additionally, no participant was forced to talk or cooperate in answering the questions. The interviewer verbally simplified or reworded the questions to avoid misunderstandings and also tried to keep up the conversation and increase the participants' engagement. The sessions were entirely audio-recorded with their permission and later transcribed for further analysis.

2.3. Data analysis

To identify the strategies that Iranian and Spanish EFL learners use to navigate language learning complexities with regard to imagined communities and identities, the verbatim transcribed interviews and the collected written narratives of both groups of participants were analyzed through qualitative content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The reason behind selecting content analysis is that it allows for categorizing and coding textual data and identifying themes, meanings, and patterns in participants' responses. Next, the researchers read all transcripts and written narratives multiple times and highlighted key terms and concepts (imagined communities, imagined identities, and strategies) to reach a general sense of the data. The initial coding process started by identifying meaningful data segments and assigning codes to them. These units were labeled with initial, descriptive codes that captured the core idea expressed by participants. The codes were then grouped in broader categories to display patterns. As coding continued, similar codes were compared, refined, and grouped. An iterative refinement process was used, and the categories were merged, separated, and redefined. In other words, through constant comparison, overlapping codes were merged, ambiguous ones were clarified, and new codes were added when fresh insights appeared. As for the final step, the major themes were developed from the categories.

The researchers conducted various attempts to ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis procedure. For example, they incorporated data triangulation by using three different types of data to support the findings, namely, interviews, narratives, and focus groups. All codes, categories, and emerging themes were peer-reviewed by researchers. As for the third step, reflexivity was conducted, meaning that researchers maintained reflective notes to address potential biases, while regular cross-checking among them ensured the reliability of coding and the emerging themes. Additionally, a detailed audit trail was maintained, capturing and documenting all coding choices and the development of categories. Finally, all the developed categories and themes were compared and contrasted across groups, identifying similarities and differences alongside strategies unique to specific cultural contexts.

3. Results and discussion

After conducting the qualitative content analysis, three overarching themes emerged from the data: (a) intercultural negotiation and communicative adaptation, (b) identity construction and transformation, and (c) strategic resource use to build imagined communities and future opportunities.

3.1. Intercultural negotiation and communicative adaptation

Most of the participants mentioned common strategies related to intercultural negotiation and communicative adaptation (Nagashima, 2025), as they used these strategies to bridge their language learning in foreign cultural contexts with their imagined communities and emerging identities (Norton, 2001; Wenger, 1998). Spanish and Iranian participants, despite showing similarities in their use of communicative adaptation, differed in their adaptation types, the motivation and rationale behind their adaptation, and the meaning they attributed to them, depending on their sociocultural contexts, sociolinguistic experiences, and imagined future. These differences show that learners adopt different strategies based on their cultural conceptions, which is supported by, for example, Ishihara and Cohen (2021), Taguchi (2018), and Taguchi (2023). However, while such studies emphasized general pragmatic transfer, the present study shows that learners also adopt strategies behaviorally and emotionally; this indicates a more overarching intercultural negotiation and communicative adaptation. For example, Spanish participants tended to see communicative adaptation as a necessary, practical, and stylistic change to match what is seen to be the communicative norms of English speakers.

Spanish Participant (SP) 1, for example, demonstrated a high degree of pragmatic awareness, noting that English communication "is not as direct as Spanish" and that they had to "sound more polite" and rely on "more questions" and different

verb tenses. Their comment that over time “you even bring those kinds of things to Spanish” illustrates not only linguistic adaptation but also the bidirectional influence of intercultural communication on their broader identity repertoire (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Similarly, SP 6 reported adapting their embodied communication, saying that, in Spain, “we move our hands a lot, we use hand gestures”, but English speakers communicate “very slowly and very quietly”, as there exist many gesture variations across cultures while learning a language (Belio-Apaolaza & Hernandez Munoz, 2024). Additionally, “we [Spanish learners] adapt ourselves” and “behave similarly to them”. Such imitating suggests a reflexive negotiation of interpersonal norms in order to reduce social distance and be accepted into their imagined English-speaking communities. SP6’s use of gestures aligns with Gullberg’s (2022) discussion that learners adjust their embodied communication to match intercultural norms. However, unlike Gullberg’s explanation that learners do it unconsciously, the present study revealed that learners can strategize self-aware modifications which indicates a higher level of metacultural awareness. Yet at the same time, SP 6 emphasized that they remained “true to [their] essence”, highlighting the tension between adapting one’s behavior in relation to external expectations and maintaining a coherent sense of self.

Other Spanish participants described more complex emotional and identity-related negotiations. SP 3, for instance, moderated humor and emotional expression, stating “my strategy is trying to make it a bit simpler when I talk in English” because jokes “do not mean exactly the same”. This moderation of humor reflects learners’ sensitivity to pragmatic mismatch and affective risk in intercultural communication, where emotional expression may be constrained to avoid misunderstanding or negative evaluation (Dewaele, 2010). SP 3 also withdrew when encountering expected stereotypes about their ethnic identity: “I usually just ... retract myself ... but that retraction makes me not be myself”. Their experience highlights how communicative adaptation can also serve as self-protection in intercultural contexts where identity is misread or overdetermined. Such identity withdrawal could be a response to perceived identity threat, where learners strategically limit self-expression to avoid unequal positioning within intercultural interactions. This reflects the power-laden nature of language use in social contexts (Norton, 2013). SP 2 approached communication barriers through multimodality rather than identity withdrawal. When SP 2 felt “[others] are going to criticize you”, they compensated by using “whatever [they] can ... writing, the translator, or even with signs”, demonstrating a problem-solving rather than affective-regulation strategy. SP 7, meanwhile, described moments when their Spanish identity inhibited English performance, explaining that when they froze in front of a tourist, they were “in the mood of [their] Spanish identity”, indicating that identity activation itself becomes part of the communicative negotiation process.

Iranian participants, on the contrary, pictured cultural and communicative adaptation more as negotiation across deeper cultural distances, often involving reflection on their own cultural norms and the repositioning of their professional or personal identities and less as stylistic or pragmatic adjustment to familiar Western cultural spaces. Iranian Participant (IP) 2 specifically referenced Taarof (a culturally specific Iranian form of etiquette), saying, “I try to avoid this formality in our culture so that it wouldn’t cause problems in either culture”, which indicates that IP 2 deliberately suppressed this culture-based behavior through their metacultural awareness. Similarly, IP 1 described relying on immersion in authentic materials “to better understand these cultural differences”, linking cultural understanding directly to their imagined identity as a future teacher. This professional imagined identity shaped their communicative strategies, such as engaging mentors for guidance because “they can provide [IP 1] with valuable insights and feedback”. Thus, whereas Spanish learners often negotiated between versions of themselves in similar Western contexts, Iranian learners described communicative adaptation as a means of navigating between substantially different social worlds, often driven by long-term professional identity formation (Norton & Pavlenko, 2019). This finding extends earlier research that highlighted only identity conflicts experienced by learners.

Identity-based negotiation also appeared strongly in IP 4’s account. They acknowledged the tension between their “real identity” and their imagined English-speaking identity, explaining that “it’s really difficult ... to not show a lot of things that I can feel,” suggesting a form of communicative restraint that mirrors SP 3’s and SP 6’s strategies but arises from a deeper cultural gap rather than from concerns about interpersonal expectations. IP 4 reported that learning English “helps me to change my ... cultural identity because I think differently,” indicating adaptation not only in communication but in worldview. IP 3’s experience was more practical and family-oriented but still involved adaptive negotiation; IP 3 explained that intercultural challenges led them to reflect that the “world is full of contrast” and that over time they learned “what is the best way to pass their saying,” highlighting communicative adjustment driven by experiential learning.

A recurring difference between Spanish and Iranian learners concerns the framing of cultural distance itself. Spanish participants—especially SP 1 and SP 2—often minimized cultural differences. SP 2 declared that British culture “wasn’t like [they] had a big gap”, while SP 1 stated, “we want to be so similar ... I don’t see any barrier”. The fact that this distance was minimized may explain why the Spanish participants focused less on broader cultural negotiations and more on micro-adaptations, including tone, fluency, accent, and politeness. Even when Spanish participants encountered diversity within English, such as SP 8’s interactions with speakers of South Africa, they described the experience as “really interesting” rather than disruptive, showing that they perceive English as a global communication rather than a national one and have high intercultural curiosity. Iranian participants, by contrast, described adaptation as navigating system-level contrasts between Iranian and Western social structures, pedagogies, or ideologies. IP 8 highlighted learning “ideologies” through media, while IP 4 emphasized teachers who “help [them] to make [their] imagined identity” by showing cultural materials that reshaped their understanding of themselves. Therefore, communicative adaptation for Iranian learners often involved transformative cultural learning rather than surface-level style shifting. This divergence may be shaped by broader ideological alignments with English, as Spanish learners’ relative cultural proximity to dominant Western norms appears to reduce perceived distance, whereas Iranian learners negotiate English across more sociopolitical and ideological boundaries (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Despite these differences, all participants demonstrated that communicative adaptation is inseparable from imagined

identities. For many Spanish participants, imagined professional identities (e.g., becoming translators or multilingual professionals) motivated strategies such as adopting multiple English varieties (SP 5), managing accent to “respect” English norms, or expanding cultural exposure through media. Iranian participants also drew on imagined futures—IP 1 as a teacher, IP 2 as a multilingual professional, IP 4 as a confident educator—to guide strategic choices. Yet in every case, such adaptation was not random but the result of a movement to new imagined communities engaged in new modes of communication.

Results show that EFL learners in Spain and Iran negotiate intercultural communication, which includes modification of linguistic form, communicative behavior, affective display, and cultural mindset. Spanish EFL learners employ realistic adaptation and style modulation in familiar cultural scenarios, while Iranian EFL learners negotiate a broader cultural distance and undertake deep identity repositioning that is more complicated and multi-layered. In both groups, adaptation has mostly taken the form of intentional exploration of imagined communities and taking the identities they desired to achieve.

3.2. Identity construction and transformation

Across all participants, regardless of either Iranian or Spanish backgrounds, identity construction became one of the utmost measures taken in English language learning to address its complexities and nuances. However, Spanish participants constructed identities in English language learning by aligning with their culture and preferences, while Iranian participants tended to address identity by focusing on their professional aspirations and limitations set by their culture. In both groups, imagined communities served as a powerful motivational anchor, shaping not only learning behaviors but also learners’ evolving self-perceptions.

For many Spanish participants, identity construction was rooted in continuity rather than separation, supporting translingual identity frameworks (Canagarajah, 2024). SP 1 exemplifies this by emphasizing that English is already embedded in “almost everything [they] do”, seeking to minimize distinctions between their Spanish and English identities: “I try to reduce it and suppress it, so there is no difference”. SP 1’s strategy reveals an attempt to maintain a unified, translingual self, contrasting with the Iranian participants, who often engaged in more explicit identity reconstruction to align with their imagined professional communities. Similarly, SP 2 frames English as something “implemented in [them] since [childhood]” due to early exposure, showing that their imagined identity as an English speaker is affectively grounded long before any formal identity negotiation occurs. SP 2’s strategy—using music and performance (“I love to sing ... it connects pretty much with me”)—shows how cultural and artistic engagement can serve as identity enactment. This contrasts with participants like IP 1 and IP 2, whose strategies reflect more intentional, future-oriented identity positioning within professional spheres, such as teaching or research.

Spanish participants also frequently negotiated identity by adjusting communicative or behavioral patterns to fit perceived expectations of English-speaking communities. SP 3, for example, simplifies their speech—“trying to make it a bit simpler when I talk in English”—to avoid unintended offense, and even develops a second “comical identity” in English to navigate cultural differences in humor. This type of adaptive identity performance echoes SP 6’s deliberate behavioral moderation, pulling back from Spanish expressiveness—“I reel myself in a little bit”—to find a balance between being “true to [their] essence” and fitting into their imagined English-speaking community. SP 7 also felt the need to take a new “serious” persona when speaking English: “I must be serious too when I’m talking in English”. Even as they recognize that “[their] Spanish identity is more relaxed”. Such identity switching and its connotations suggest that some English-speaking cultures are necessarily more serious and less emotional—since while emotional experiences are broadly similar across cultures, differences in expressive intensity suggest that certain English-medium professional environments may encourage more moderated emotional display (Cowen, 2024); this pattern may also emerge when individuals switch identities into English-dominant academic or institutional contexts—and that such English-speaking cultures require learners of Spanish to adapt or perform differently (Holmes, 2024).

In contrast, the Iranian participants’ identity strategies focus less on culturally adjusting to Anglophone norms and more on negotiating legitimate membership within professional imagined communities. IP 1 resists deficit labels by reframing his non-native identity as an advantage: “I am a non-native English speaker myself ... This experience gave me a unique perspective”. IP 1’s negotiation of legitimacy demonstrates a strategic effort to construct an identity as a competent, confident future teacher, rather than aligning with native-speaker norms. Similarly, IP 2’s identity work appears in their decision to reject disrespectful professional treatment—“I decided to end the relationship ... it lacked the tone of respect”—a boundary-setting strategy that asserts their imagined identity as a respected English professional. These examples show that for Iranian participants, identity construction is anchored in agency, professional integrity, and self-definition rather than cultural assimilation.

Both groups, however, reveal identity transformation through ongoing engagement with English. Some of the Spanish participants describe becoming more confident, open, or even different versions of themselves when using English. SP 5 notes that English makes them “more open” and even “a bit more extroverted”, reflecting an identity shift tied to the freedoms they associate with English. This is similar to Dewaele et al.’s (2021) emotional valence shift, where learners experienced increased openness in English, although it is limited to linguistic levels in previous research. The present study revealed that such emotional changes can emerge from future-oriented imagined identities. Moreover, SP 6 finds and takes liberty in issues concerning social judgment regarding their regional accent in Spanish, as speaking in English enables them to “overcome” the bias they encounter in Spanish, making them feel “more comfortable” and “more seen”. These findings suggest that learning/speaking English offers such learners an alternative identity, which empowers their identity (Huang, 2025). In this sense, English functions as an affective space that allows learners to distance themselves from local constraints and enact more agentive or emotionally liberated selves, a pattern that is widely observed in research on multilingual emotional experience and identity transformation (Norton & Pavlenko, 2019).

Among the Iranian participants, transformation is equally pronounced but oriented toward professional growth and broader self-efficacy. For IP 6, language learning directly supports the construction of a teacher identity—they actively “search[es] how [they can] contact with [their] small kids at institute”—showing that their imagined identity drives their practical learning strategies. IP 4 credits their teachers with helping them “make [their] imagined identity”. IP 4 actively pursues participation in global communities by trying to “talk to natives and just feel [themselves] among them”. Similarly, IP 2 sees their growing English competence as foundational to their future academic identity, noting that “finding [themselves] capable ... has helped [them] have a better opinion of [themselves] in learning multiple languages and professions”. This echoes Norton’s view that imagined identities propel learners toward long-term goals, reinforcing persistence and confidence.

Another key distinction lies in how the two groups relate to cultural differences. Spanish participants frequently mention navigating cultural distance by observing, understanding, or moderating behavior. SP 7, for instance, avoids using Spanish-style swearing in English because “the use of bad words in a serious English context is not really good”, revealing an attempt to reconcile two cultural identity systems. By contrast, Iranian learners focus on negotiating cultural norms from within their own contexts—particularly norms that might conflict with participation in imagined global communities. IP 2 deliberately avoids Taarof because it “wouldn’t cause problems in either culture”, showing an effort to adjust local behaviors to align better with global interactions. IP 1, similarly, seeks open-mindedness through media to become “a more effective English teacher”, using cultural learning as a tool for professional identity alignment rather than personal assimilation.

Despite these differences, both Spanish and Iranian participants consistently demonstrate that identity work is not incidental but central to their navigation of English learning. As suggested by the findings of the current study, for Spanish learners, identity is generally constructed and negotiated through personality, accent, humor, emotional expression, and intercultural interactions. On the other hand, for Iranian learners, identity is constructed and negotiated across professional, agentive, translational, and academic domains through applying English language skills. But all of them form, maintain, and reconstruct their identities by imagining or projecting themselves into larger English-speaking communities, be they artistic, global, academic, or professional.

Finally, the results make it clear that, far from exclusively developing language proficiency, learners actualize and reconstruct who they are and/or whom they would like to become through English. This can be either by “suppressing differences” so as to keep one’s identity intact (SP 1), “imitating behaviors” from mass media products so as to embody one’s personal ideal (IP 2), utilizing English as a means of overcoming bias in order to emancipate one’s imagination and identity (SP 6), or resisting delegitimizing narratives so as to legitimize one’s professional identity (IP 1). Identity construction and negotiation, therefore, are not peripheral themes—they are the core mechanisms through which these learners navigate the complexities of language learning across cultural boundaries.

3.3. Strategic resource use to build imagined communities and future opportunities

Findings revealed that Spanish and Iranian participants made a strategic use of cultural, linguistic, cognitive, and technological tools to navigate the complexities of language learning, aligning their practices with imagined communities and imagined identities. Spanish participants, such as SP1 and SP2, highlighted the use of English within the self- and social-identities by drawing on both cultural awareness and individual interests. SP 1 pointed out that their awareness of the pragmatics of English, saying that “if you want to ask for something ... in English you have to ... sound more polite and use more ... tenses and things like that. This illustrates intentional alignment with linguistic norms to fit into the expected community of English-speaking people. SP 2, on the other hand, attributed language learning to their hobbies: “Because I started ... to speak English, it wasn’t pretty difficult ... it’s just like it’s part of me because I love to sing, and most of pop ... are mainly English-speaking countries”. Thereby, media and cultural interests facilitate membership within imagined communities (Putri, 2018).

Problem-solving and flexibility in intercultural interactions were highlighted by both the Iranian and Spanish participants, drawing upon spontaneous strategies and technological tools to continue communication. The majority of the Spanish participants, such as SP 3, SP 5, SP 6, SP 7, and SP 8, highlighted the strategies that combine self-awareness, purposeful skill development, and cultural adaptation. SP 3 simplified their language and moderated humor to avoid cultural misunderstandings, explaining, “My strategy is trying to make it bit simpler when I talk in English, even though it’s hard for me to not be comical”. SP 5 expanded their engagement with diverse English varieties and informal media to enhance communicative competence and professional identity, observing, “As English is a language that’s spoken in many places around the world, I can see the difference how it’s spoken in each country ... as you grow older and you can interact with more things from America, you can learn the differences between those places”. SP 6 described balancing cultural norms with their own personality, stating, “I had to reel myself in a little bit and try to talk slowly ... I just try to be calmer and I try to ... behave similarly to them”, while maintaining their authentic self. Both SP 7 and SP 8 valued cultural observation, mediated exposure, and social interaction with native speakers as part of their efforts to enhance language proficiency and professional development. Generally, Spanish learners deliberately employ cultural, linguistic, and technological resources to construct and reconstruct their imagined identities to have opportunities to gain access to academic and professional realms.

Iranian participants similarly demonstrated strategic resource use, but with notable emphasis on professional preparation and culturally immersive practices. IP 1 described immersion in authentic media and social networks as central to their professional and identity development, noting, “One of the differences between my culture and English culture is the meaning of idioms because direct translation doesn’t work. So, I tried to immerse myself in English media such as books, movies, and TV shows”. This approach reflects deliberate engagement with linguistic and cultural nuances to align with imagined teacher

communities. IP 2 emphasized observational learning and selective cultural adaptation, explaining, “By watching foreign TV shows I tried to imitate their behaviors in social constructs and communities, as well as learning about their cultural contexts and ideologies”, while negotiating conflicting norms such as Iranian formalities. IP 4 and IP 7 highlighted reflective and self-directed strategies, including social engagement and technology use, with IP 4 noting, “I try to talk to natives and just feel myself among them ... with social media, with Pinterest ... let me connect myself somehow”, illustrating intentional positioning within imagined communities (McLeod, 2025).

The participants of both groups related the use of strategic resources to prospective opportunities and professional growth, while emphasizing it as a medium for building global awareness and self-efficacy. Spanish learners tended to emphasize identity integration, cultural curiosity, and media engagement with personal interests, whereas Iranian learners focused more on self-reflection, professional preparation, and interactive practices in constructing their imagined communities. To bridge existing realities to imagined future selves, both groups used strategic resources through leveraging cultural, cognitive, linguistic, and technological tools. As pointed out in participants’ narratives, making use of these strategies not only paves the way for language competence but also enables EFL learners to negotiate social expectations and cultural norms, build imagined identities, and undertake future educational and career opportunities. Direct engagements with target-language media, adaptive behavior in social contexts, and reflective self-regulation are the key means through which learners themselves take an active role in negotiating the interplay that exists between language learning, identity, and imagined communities; thus, strategic resource use is dynamic and purposeful in EFL contexts (Li, 2018).

4. Conclusion

This research investigated the strategies employed by EFL learners in Spain and Iran to deal with language learning complexities in relation to their imagined communities and identities. The three themes identified by qualitative content analysis were: a) intercultural negotiation and communicative adaptation, b) identity construction and transformation, and c) strategic resource use to build imagined communities and future opportunities. Spanish learners adopted pragmatic communicative styles, with an emphasis on media exposure and cultural curiosity as approaches to align with their imagined communities. On the other hand, Iranian learners adopted identity transformation approaches, with an emphasis on professional and cultural identity as an approach designed to bridge social and cultural distances. Learners in both groups indicated that strategic engagement with cultural, cognitive, linguistic, and technology-based resources is essential and meaningful in navigating the challenges of learning and obtaining imagined futures.

Considering its implications, the study highlights that language learning should consider learners’ imagined communities and identities as main components in curriculum design. Curriculum developers can consider designing various tasks and activities to foster flexible identity construction by motivating learners to explore world Englishes, professional contexts, and cultural norms. By offering opportunities for authentic cross-cultural interactions, self-reflection, and exposure to cultural content and media, language teachers can significantly increase EFL learners’ engagement and class participation. Additionally, considering some strategies used by the participants such as utilizing social networks and technological means, the current study emphasizes the importance of learners’ agency, self-efficacy, and problem-solving, highlighting that learning a language is not only about linguistic competence but also identity development and social and cultural adjustment.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations to this study. The generalizability of the results may be limited by taking into account only senior university students as the participants. The research was dependent upon self-reported experience, and this may be open to subjective perspectives. Future research may extend and build upon these themes by considering research with more diverse groups of learners, including various learners from different sociocultural settings and ages or with different levels of language proficiency. Future studies may also seek to consider longitudinal research regarding the development and impact of imagined community and identity practices over time. They can also examine the role of technology-based learning contexts and their influence on learners’ imagined identities.

5. References

- Al-Mohanna, A. D. (2024). Difficulties and challenges encountered by Saudi EFL learners: A diagnostic study. *Scholars International Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 7(10), 288–299. <https://doi.org/10.36348/sijll.2024.v07i10.002>
- Al-Seghayer, K. (2019). Unique challenges Saudi EFL learners face. *Studies in English Language Teaching*, 7(4), 490–515. <https://doi.org/10.22158/selt.v7n4p490>
- Belio-Apaolaza, H. S., & Hernandez Munoz, N. (2024). Emblematic gestures learning in Spanish as L2/FL: Interactions between types of gestures and tasks. *Language Teaching Research*, 28(2), 599–631. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211006880>
- Canagarajah, S. (2024). Communication for Specific Purposes as translingual. *Iberica*, 47, 15–42. <https://doi.org/10.17398/10.17398/2340-2784.47.15>

- Cowen, A. S., Brooks, J. A., Prasad, G., Tanaka, M., Kamitani, Y., Kirilyuk, V., ... Keltner, D. (2024). How emotion is experienced and expressed in multiple cultures: A large-scale experiment across North America, Europe, and Japan. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, Article 1350631. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1350631>
- Crosby, A. (2025). Fostering engagement through imagined identities: Exploring the role of aspirational goals in Japanese university students' participation in English language classrooms. *International Journal of Language, Linguistics, Literature and Culture*, 4(1), 95–103. <https://doi.org/10.59009/ijllc.2025.0102>
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 36–56. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000191>
- De Costa, P. I. (2016). The power of identity and ideology in language learning: Designer immigrants learning English in Singapore: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-30211-9>
- Dewaele, J. (2010). Multilingualism and affordances: Variation in self-perceived communicative competence and communicative anxiety in French L1, L2, L3 and L4. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 48(2–3), 105–129. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.2010.006>
- Dewaele, J. M., Lorette, P., Rolland, L., & Mavrou, I. (2021). Differences in emotional reactions of Greek, Hungarian, and British users of English when watching television in English. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 31(3), 345–361. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12333>
- Dong, R. (2024). Culture: A journey through diversity in language learning. *Transactions on Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 5, 271–275. <https://doi.org/10.62051/f9rc5p93>
- Drisko, J. W., & Maschi, T. (2016). *Content analysis: Pocket guides to social work research methods*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190215491.001.0001>
- Early, M., & Norton, B. (2012). *Language learner stories and imagined identities*. *Narrative Inquiry*, 22(1), 194–201. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.22.1.15ear>
- Fan, H., Chowdhury, R., & Fielding, R. (2025). Toward a synergistic framework of investment and motivation: Bridging imagined identities and English learning of Chinese university students. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 35(1), 457–471. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12630>
- Foomani, E. M. (2024). Language, gender and empowerment: A qualitative study of self-identities of women English teachers in Iran. *Issues in Educational Research*, 34(3), 1016–1032. <https://www.iier.org.au/iier34/foomani.pdf>
- Gelmi, A. (2024). On the nature, uses and functions of imagination in education: A multidisciplinary approach. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 56(12), 1210–1228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2024.2376635>
- Goharimehr, N. (2018). Imagined identities and communities in an EFL context. *International Journal of Language, Literature and Culture*, 5(3), 35–40. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nooshin-Goharimehr/publication/331223939_Imagined_Identities_and_Communities_in_an_EFL_Context/links/5c6d15fb4585156b570ae220/Imagined-Identities-and-Communities-in-an-EFL-Context.pdf
- Gullberg, M. (2022). The relationship between gestures and speaking in L2 learning. In T. M. Derwing, M. J. Munro, & R. I. Thomson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and speaking* (pp. 386–398). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003022497>
- Heidt, M. A. (2022). Imagination as a tool for participation in communities for middle-school German students. *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German*, 55(1), 112–125. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tger.12198>
- Hjølstrom, E. (2025). Educational imagination. *Speki. Nordic Philosophy and Education Review*. <https://doi.org/10.5617/speki.11694>
- Holmes, K. J., Kassin, L., Buchillon-Almeida, D., & Canseco-Gonzalez, E. (2024). Emotion regulation elicits cross-linguistically shared and language-specific forms of linguistic distancing. *Scientific Reports*, 14, Article 22605. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-73440-6>
- Huang, W. C. (2025). Transforming self-identity in EMI: The interplay of behavioral engagement, motivational intensity, and self-efficacy. *Education Sciences*, 15(4), Article 429. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15040429>

- Ishihara, N., & Cohen, A. D. (2021). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003168188>
- Kanno, Y., & Norton, B. (2003). Imagined communities and educational possibilities: Introduction. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 2(4), 241–249. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327701JLIE0204_1
- Kharchenko, N. (2014). Imagined communities and teaching English as a second language. *Journal of Foreign Languages, Cultures and Civilizations*, 2(1), 21–39. https://jflcc.thebrpi.org/journals/jflcc/Vol_2_No_1_June_2014/2.pdf
- Komala, I., & Hudiyono, Y. (2025). Psychological obstacles in second language acquisition and how to overcome them. *Eduvest-Journal of Universal Studies*, 5(2), 2202–2213. <https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v5i2.50026>
- Lee, J. (2014). Experiences of intensive English learners: Motivations, imagined communities, and identities. *English Language Teaching*, 7(11), 28–38. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v7n11p28>
- Li, J. (2018). A resource-oriented functional approach to English language learning. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 74(1). <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.3302>
- Liu, G., Zhang, Y., & Zhang, R. (2024). Bridging imagination and informal digital learning of English: A mixed-method investigation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 45(10), 4533–4553. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2173214>
- Lund Dean, K., & Jolly, J. P. (2012). Student identity, disengagement, and learning. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 11(2), 228–243. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2009.0081>
- Luong, V. A., & Tran, T. Q. (2021). Imagined communities and identities in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning: A literature review. *Journal of English Teaching Adi Buana*, 6(2), 109–123. <https://doi.org/10.36456/jet.v6.n02.2021.4360>
- Marzban, B., Adel, S. M. R., Eghtesadi, A., & Elyasi, M. (2025). A qualitative analysis of identity and investment among advanced Iranian EFL learners in private schools. *Language Related Research*, 14(4), 405–445. <https://doi.org/10.29252/LRR.14.4.13>
- McLeod, C. N. (2025). Black Twitter as “master” social architects: Maintaining online community boundaries through the production of time and place. *Social Media + Society*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051251374500>
- Nagashima, L. (2025). Bridging cultures: A Japanese student’s path to intercultural communication. *Education Sciences*, 15(9), Article 1205. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15091205>
- Norton, B. (2001). Non-participation, imagined communities, and the language classroom. In M. Breen (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research* (pp. 159–171). Pearson Education. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315838465>
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation*. Multilingual Matters. <https://faculty.educ.ubc.ca/norton/Norton%202013%20Intro.pdf>
- Norton, B., & Pavlenko, A. (2019). Imagined communities, identity, and English language learning in a multilingual world. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *Second handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 703–718). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-46301-8_43
- Prieto-Arranz, J. I., & Jacob, K. (2019). A transcultural approach to EIL teaching and its impact on learners’ national identities. *Atlantis*, 41(2), 11–34. <https://doi.org/10.28914/Atlantis-2019-41.2.01>
- Putri, I. P., Nasruddin, E., & Wahab, J. A. (2018). Imagined communities and the construction of national identity. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(7), 565–572. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v8-i7/4399>
- Ruane, C. (2025). Ideological tensions between the English language teaching system and cosmopolitan aspirations in the South Korean context: reflections from a group of bilingual Koreans. *Asian Englishes*, 27(2), 330–350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2024.2426307>
- Sabouri, M., Ghaniabadi, S., Adel, S. M. R., & Davoudi, M. (2025). The role of agency and identity in the language socialization of Iranian EFL learners during the COVID-19 pandemic: An ethnographic study. *Language Related Research*, 15(5), 57–83. <https://doi.org/10.48311/LRR.15.5.57>

- Seijas, J. M., & Parra, M. L. (2021). Engaging students with social, cultural, and environmental sustainability topics in the Spanish-speaking world: A reimaged beginner Spanish curriculum. In M. de la Fuente (Ed.), *Education for sustainable development in foreign language learning: Content-based instruction in college-level curricula* (pp. 87–104). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003080183>
- Shahidzade, F., & Mazdayasna, G. (2022). The identity construction of Iranian English students learning translated L1 and L2 short stories: Aspiration for language investment or consumption? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 972101. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.972101>
- Soltanian, N. (2025). English language learning and imagined communities in the Iranian EFL context. *Teaching English as a Second Language Quarterly (Formerly Journal of Teaching Language Skills)*, 44(2), 55–80. <https://doi.org/10.22099/tesl.2025.51331.3340>
- Soltanian, N., & Ghapanchi, Z. (2024). An investigation into Iranian English language learners' investment in imagined communities. *Mextesol Journal*, 48(2). <https://doi.org/10.61871/mj.v48n2-2>
- Taguchi, N. (2018). Contexts and pragmatics learning: Problems and opportunities of the study abroad research. *Language Teaching*, 51(1), 124–137. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444815000440>
- Taguchi, N., Chen, Y., & Qin, Y. (2023). Metapragmatic knowledge and transfer of learning across speech acts. *Applied Linguistics*, 44(2), 217–238. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amac043>
- Tajeddin, Z., Mostafaei Alaei, M., & Moladoust, E. (2021). Learners' perspectives on imagined community of practice in English as an international language. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 44(10), 893–907. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1921784>
- Teng, F. (2017). Imagined community, identity, and teaching Chinese as a second language to foreign students in China. *Frontiers of Education in China*, 12(4), 490–514. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11516-017-0035-0>
- Ubaidillah, M. F., Elfiyanto, S., Rifiyani, A. J., & Islam, S. (2024). When EFL learner identity intersects with their investment: Stories from Indonesia. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 14(2), 403–424. <https://doi.org/10.23971/jefl.v14i2.8475>
- Vinall, K., & Shin, J. (2019). The construction of the tourist gaze in English textbooks in South Korea: Exploring the tensions between internationalisation and nationalisation. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 32(2), 173–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2018.1513022>
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803932>
- Wu, H. Y. (2017). Imagined identities and investment in L2 learning. *Taiwan Journal of TESOL*, 14(2), 101–133. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1171160.pdf>
- Xu, G., & Kim, J. (2022). Building and sustaining a group of Chinese EFL learners' imagined identities and agency. *Sustainability*, 14(8), Article 4659. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14084659>