

English Learning And Moroccan EFL Learners' Perceptions Towards Their Cultural Identity: Understanding Of The Self And The Other

LOUBNA EL HARRAS¹, ABDELGHANIE ENNAM²

¹Department of English, Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts/Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco)

²(Department of English, Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts/Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco)

Abstract:

Background: Learning a foreign language marks the learners' identity. Tamimi (2017). Also, learners hold positive attitudes towards the impact that learning English has on the reconstruction of their identity. Tamimi (2017). These positive attitudes are explicitly shown in that through learning a foreign language, EFL learners start to pay more attention to the target language culture of L2 and learn about others' way of life as well as norms and values and therefore they embrace them as well. Therefore, according to the implication of his study, it is the teacher's responsibility to acknowledge the multiple repertoire of identities the learners have since cultural identity is shifting and language teaching should not take into consideration the learner as a mere learner but rather as a student, worker, and gftimmigrant...etc. Hence, it is the mission of the teacher to recognize the distinct versions of the same learner. Subsequently, Khaldoun (2021) pinpoints in his study the effect of learning English on the identity of Algerian students. Most of the participants of the study affirm that learning English is positive and therefore they hold positive attitudes towards learning English. As for them, English is a door to know another culture, get information and attain good jobs in the future despite that some of them still regret about the gradual diminishing of their cultural identity and culture. To Khaldoun's study, learners are much influenced by the culture of the target language they learn; however, that does not mean that those learners completely forget about their identity. It is hoped that this study uncovers the perceptions of Moroccan EFL learners towards their cultural identity and explores if learning English has shaped their cultural identity in a way or another.

Materials and Methods: In this study, 20 of learners of English were the participants of this study. The participants belong to most of the Moroccan Universities, department of English. The data were gathered by means of focus groups interviews and conversations in WhatsApp. This current research is purely qualitative. As for the compiled data, they were analyzed in terms of emergent themes.

Results: The study showed that the Moroccan EFL learners hold positive perceptions towards learning English and their cultural identity and they deem that this experience has nothing to do with the shape of their cultural identity. That is, it is an interesting experience that has opened the door for them to explore the whole world, to discover others and other cultures encompassing the British and the American culture. It is through learning English, Moroccan EFL learners have discerned the pivotal importance of their cultural identity as Moroccans since their cultural identity is a sense of belonging to a specific place, a certain culture and to a group of people. Hence, learning English has enabled them to understand their cultural identity as a personal and social construct and has helped them to appreciate more their culture and understand others cultures without being judgmental.

Conclusion: In sum, this showed that learning English is an interesting experience for Moroccan EFL learners and it has nothing to do with the shape of their cultural identity but rather it has helped them in understanding the self and appreciating more their cultural identity as well as understanding even the other.

Keywords: English Learning, EFL learners, Perceptions, Cultural Identity, Understanding, self, other

Date of Submission: 20-07-2023

Date of Acceptance: 30-07-2023

I. Introduction

Language is deemed to be a pivotal medium of communication. The learning of a new language involves the whole person in terms of cognition, physics and emotion. Since the learners of a foreign language dive in a recent process in which they learn new structures, therefore a second language, they have to understand themselves as speakers of L1 and learners of L2. Nonetheless, some learners, in this experience, fluctuate between understanding themselves as native speakers of L1 and as learners of another foreign language. Thus,

since learning a foreign language is not merely about learning the structure of that language, linguistically speaking, rather it is about acquiring the culture of the target language.; also, given the fact that identity is a part and a parcel of culture, hence, it is believed that identity is not fixed and stagnate. Furthermore, since language is noticeably related to cognition, most studies state that language is shaped by one's identity and it is, in turn, shaped by language. Put differently, both constructions are remarkably linked since the language may determine one's identity and the language itself is one component of identity besides of behaviors, culture, religion, ethnicity, sex and so on and so forth. Therefore, as language and identity are closely related, it is commonly believed that the learners of foreign languages as English may own multiple set of changing identities and the process of learning foreign languages is a chief factor. Thus, because of the crucial importance of identity in learning foreign languages notably English, this current study attempts to explore EFL learners' perceptions of their cultural identity and most importantly it tries to enquiry if the experience of learning English has contributed to the shape of their cultural identity. In other words, this study tries to discover if learning English has shifted EFL learners' cultural identity. To approach this area of study, a qualitative research was adopted on the basis of conversations and interviews in focus groups. The compiled data were discussed and analyzed in terms of emergent themes.

II Literature Review

Broadly speaking, foreign language learning is referred to any language that is not spoken by the members of the society and is taught just in classrooms. Learning a foreign language is so crucial for numerous reasons. By and large, learning a language provides its learners an access to other information, to other cultures as well as it promotes the ability to understand other cultures. Moreover, learning another language is also pivotal since it can be as medium to boost effective interaction and communication. Plethora of studies have demonstrated the clear distinction between language learning and language acquisition. Language learning refers to the process of learning a language in classroom, that is by instruction and teaching, meanwhile acquisition attributes to the process of learning a language naturally. This is highlighted by Sethmini (2022) who considers that language acquisition as the first exposure to English in which the learners learn the language through a subconscious way while learning is studying a certain language through formal education and theoretical grounds. In the same regard, Kramina(2000) deems that languages acquisition is deemed to be a subconscious process which is much similar to the first language that children acquire while learning is the opposite as it is a conscious process which is the ultimate production of formal learning.

Overall, identity is a slippery term that has an array of definitions. However, identity denotes who are in terms of personality, sex, age, culture and ethnicity...etc. It also refers to how people see and perceive us. This perception of others towards us can be through communication and interaction. Accordingly, individuals tend to determine their identity according to diverse constituents that may differ from each other. While some individuals define themselves in relation to race encompassing skin colour and their facial traits, others show who they are by their ethnicity in terms of the language they speak, their origin and culture. Others still identify themselves according to their sexual orientation or religion, for instance. Likewise, Fearon(1999) pinpoints that identity has a double meaning in the sense that it refers to social categories and individual ones as well. Put differently, identity refers to what is social as culture, traditions and norms and simultaneously stands for what is individual as age, sex and personality. Cultural identity, on the other hand, is defined as to what is shared by a group of people since they own the same culture, adhere to the same nationality, ethnicity and customs and speak the same language. In the same vein, Hen(2014) defines cultural identity as the identification to a particular society wherein collective knowledge is shared and maintained including language, heritage, customs, norms and traditions. However, it still a complex term to define since it can be multiple dependent on both spatial and temporal factors notably if we live in a global world.

Language, on the other hand, is a significant medium for communication and interaction. Once the word language comes to our mind, the first function that this language has is communication. Human beings make use of language to express their thoughts, ideas, attitudes, emotions and feelings and to know each other. Identity, on the other hand, manifests we who are and it is "what one projects into the world and how one wants to be perceived by others" Vizulete (2022).

By and large, emphasizing the relationship between language and cultural identity, both constructions are apparently interrelated and there is a correlation between them. By way of illustration, it is through language we can determine one's cultural identity. If one speaks, he inevitably shows where he is from. In the same vein, sometimes even individuals may encounter other people from distinct cultural backgrounds who have a different language and use instead a contact language such as English as a medium of communication, others still can notice from their accent their authentic national identity, which is non English as a simple example. Thus, language transcends its linguistic function to be a symbol of identity for a community. This is confirmed more by the study of Echerbini (2023) which states that " language in its connection with its identity goes beyond its linguistic and technical meaning to be a symbol of a society as it is a tool for interaction and by which people

think and express, that is, it is closely related to the identity of the state and the personality of its citizens'' Echerbini (2023). The effect of language on cultural identity lies more in that by language the identity of individuals is determined as it is a transmitter that transmits the culture of its speakers, their attitudes, the beliefs of a certain society, and therefore their identity. Hence, by language individuals preserve their cultural identity.

In general, language and identity are two constructions that are mutually connected. Language, on the one hand, is a transmitter of identity by which people not merely express their own thoughts and feelings but also transmit their culture, traditions, and social norms; therefore, it is a facet of one's identity. This is proven by Rouvira (2008) who affirms that language and identity are closely related since language plays a paramount role in developing cultural identity. Also, she states that this relationship between the both construct lies in that it is by language we convey ourselves from one generation to another and through language we transmit our cultural system and our values. Cultural Identity, on the other hand, it is a projection of who are in relation to a group of people. Thus, as long as language and cultural identity are interlinked both of them exert a certain effect on each other. It is through language, individuals project their identity. By way of illustration, some individuals just by uttering one word from a specific language, others recognize their identity. This explicitly manifests that language has a power. Conversely, identity, in general, as well can have a noticeable influence on language and language use. To explain more, from a sociolinguistic angle, individuals can affect their own language on the basis of multiple factors such as age, gender, region, occupation, class and ethnicity. For example, the language of a child is not as the language that an adult speaks. Simultaneously, the language of the upper classes is completely distinct from that of low class as the former can make use of some varieties to show prestige. Likewise, the language that doctors may use is not identical to that of someone who is mechanic since the variety that the doctors speak within their occupation is much more technical and vice versa. In addition, as some individuals identify themselves by the geographical part where they dwell, which is their identity, each region may speak a different variety or accent, and this shows that how identity as well affects and shapes language. Thus, by way of recapitulation, what can be inferred is that identity itself has an influence on language. In a nutshell, language and identity are mutually linked and many scholars do not detach them in their research studies.

Also of myriad of studies have shown that cultural identity can be shaped and reconstructed by learning English and exposure to it; Tamimi (2017) pinpoints that English becomes a tool that noticeably marks learners' identity and he goes further to state that learners perceive this effect positively and see no harm in their shape of identity due to English. Also he considers that this act, in the practical term, can be seen as an opportunity for teachers to take advantage of it by taking into account that they deal with multiple identities within their classes therefore their teaching should be carried out on this basis. Likewise, Fatmawati (2021) states that learning English can be seen as a positive impact on EFL learners' identity and as learners learn English they can adopt the English culture too but still aware of their national identity and religion as well. Further, learning a foreign language as English is not used for the sake of communication but rather it has helped in the emergence of a new identity that is held by speakers who are proficient in English and who regard themselves as people who belong to another certain group. (Alfarhan (2016). Conversely, Hatoss (2003) postulates that even though learners of English learn a new language or even adopt another culture, they still cannot lose their cultural identity since by all means, they still maintain their culture and he provided us an example of the Hungarian minorities in Australia who strived to preserve their cultural identity even they speak English by launching cultural organizations there that ensure and maintain their culture. However, for Johnon (2009) as long as learners try to appreciate modernity and strive hard to associate themselves with it; Hence, they can do anything to learn English and adopt the target language culture and therefore they lose their cultural identity.

III Materials and Methods

This current study was carried out on EFL Moroccan learners between January and May 2023. A total number of 20 learners of English aged between 21 to 32 years old and their experience in learning English ranges from 7 to 12 years were the participants of this study. All the participants are Moroccan dwell in distinct cities over Morocco. To investigate this study, a qualitative method was used and interviews were the used instrument.

Study Design: This study ascribes to human sciences research and it aims to investigate a debatable issue in the literature, precisely it attempts to discover Moroccan EFL learners' perceptions towards their cultural identity as well it tries to explore if exposure to English and learning it impinges a certain effect on the learners' cultural identity in a way or another by asking many questions that feed in the bottom line of the issue under investigation. To approach this issue, a pure qualitative research methodology was employed, namely some semi-structured interviews were the adopted research instrument. The participants were asked to elaborate on each question either by recording their answers or in a written way by conversations. It is necessary to note that the data were elicited by five focus groups. Each group consisted of five participants and all the groups were

moderated by the researcher. The choice of this type of research is attributable to some numerous reasons. The reason behind the selection of this specific method is to fully grasp what the respondents think of the issue under study and to express their words, ideas, attitudes and feelings in depth notably if the employed instrument in this study was in form of conversations and interviews, a fact which is totally impossible in structured methods as quantitative research in which one obtains less details. As for the compiled data, they were analyzed in terms of emergent themes.

Study Location: There is no specific location. The data were gathered by means of focus groups interviews and conversations in WhatsApp. The interviews and the conversations comprised chiefly seven questions that enquired diverse issues that all feed in the bottom line of the learners' definition and perception of identity notably their cultural identity, the importance to own a certain identity, their attitudes towards their cultural identity and the experience of learning English in relation to it. Additionally, the questions attempted to enquire whether learning English has impacted and shaped their identity as well as their feelings towards learning English without taking into consideration its impact.

The participants were asked to elaborate on each question either by recording their answers or in a written way in conversations. It is necessary to note that the data were elicited by five focus groups. Each group consisted of five participants and all the groups were moderated by the researcher.

Study Duration: This study was conducted between January and May 2023.

Sample size: The participants of this study are 20 of learners of English.. *The participants belong to most of the Moroccan Universities, department of English.* They belong to most of the Moroccan Universities, department of English, namely Ibn-Tofail University in Kenitra, Mohamed V University and Faculty of science of education in Rabat, Moulay Ismail University in Meknes, Ibn Zohr University in Agadir. Their age ranges between 21 to 32 years old and their experience in learning English ranges from 7 to 12 years. All the participants are Moroccan live in different regions and cities as Rabat, Temara, Agadir, Khmissat, Kenitra, Sidi Kacem, and Errachidia...etc. They represent almost all Morocco. Some of the participants speak Darija, Moroccan Arabic, in addition to English and French. Others their mother tongue is Amazigh but they speak Moroccan Arabic, English and French. The participants of this current study are multilingual as they speak distinct varieties such as Standard Arabic, French, and English...etc. The selection of the population can be deemed both convenience sampling and voluntary response sampling. That is to say, convenience sampling method is a non random method in which the participants were selected according to their willingness, availability and time to take part in the research under investigation. Also, to approach this study voluntary response sampling was used since the participants were chosen to participate without being asked to.

Sample size calculation: The sample of this study encompasses 20 of learners of English. The participants belong to most of the Moroccan Universities, department of English. Their age ranges between 21 to 32 years old and their experience in learning English ranges from 7 to 12 years. They almost represent all Moroccan regions. The researcher targeted different learners from different regions, though the interviewees were virtually, as well distinct backgrounds and levels to guarantee a valid study.

Subjects & selection method: This current research is purely qualitative, that is a method in which much emphasis goes to gathering data through interviews in order to understand a certain phenomenon in depth. The reason behind the selection of this specific method is to fully grasp what the respondents think of the issue under study and to express themselves in depth including their ideas, attitudes and feelings. As for the compiled data, they were analyzed in terms of emergent themes.

Inclusion criteria:

1. Moroccan male and female learners of English
2. Moroccan male and female learners from different Moroccan Universities, department of English.
3. Their age ranges between 21 to 32 years old.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Learners of other subjects other than English.
2. Learners who never study English.
3. Learners who refused to participate in this study.
4. Teachers of English.

Procedure methodology: After deciding on the topic and the target population that expressed its willingness to participate in this study, the researcher designed the questions for the semi-structured interview to collect data. The questions feed in the bottom line of the learners' perceptions of cultural identity, the importance to own a certain cultural identity, their attitudes towards their cultural identity and the experience of learning English in relation to it. Additionally, the questions attempted to enquiry whether learning English has impacted and shaped their cultural identity. Then, the researcher formed 5 focus groups in WhatsApp . Each group consists of 5 participants. By being ready to be interviewed, the researcher asked each question alone and she gave each participant to record his or her answer in an audio till the finishing asking all the participants in each group. Afterwards, she compiled all the audios in a file after listening to them attentively and then she started to transcript them. Later, the researcher commenced to analyze the answers according to emergent themes.

IV Result

The objective of this research study mainly focuses to examine EFL learners' perceptions of identity in general as well as their cultural identity, to inquiry their attitudes towards their experience of learning English and found out if this experience has impacted and shaped their identity and to discover their attitudes and feelings towards these impacts, if any.

Learners' Perceptions of Cultural Identity

The participants of this study were asked first to identify both identity and cultural identity according to their point of view. Some definitions and perceptions of identity in general and precisely cultural identity were as the following:

Interviewee 1: *'Concerning my cultural identity, I am a Muslim. So, this is my identity. I have Arab roots and I was born and raised in the kingdom of Morocco and because I was born in Morocco. Geographically, I belong to Africa. So, this is my identity: Muslim, Arab and African woman. It is a feeling of belonging to Islam religion and my grandparents' roots as Arabs and the geographical part where I was born. So this is my identity'*

Interviewee 2: *'Cultural Identity cannot be defined in simple terms. It does rather raise more questions, such as whether we are born with some innate features of our cultural identity or are they acquired and adopted through time?'*

Interviewee 4 *'Cultural Identity reflects the origin of a group of people and to which ethnicity they belong'*

Interviewee 5 *'Identity is who you are, your personality, ideas and background'*

Interviewee 6 *'Identity is a unique character that distinguishes a person from another person or a group from other groups of people. Identity is about who we are, how a person understands himself or herself'*

Interviewee 7: *'It is who we are. It is a set of qualities that make me different from others: my personality, character, culture, my beliefs, ethnicity and so on'*

Interviewee 8 *'Identity is a way of living. It is related to our culture and includes sharing same language, same history and same destiny'*

Interviewee 9: *'Identity means all beliefs and values, the way I think, I behave, my cultural background, my religious background, my roots. Identity is simply who I am'*

Interviewee 12: *'identity is the overall beliefs and values as well as ideas that you hold and you have accumulated through upbringing and experiences in life by which you project yourself to the outside world based on those set of beliefs'*

Interviewee 13: *'Identity is a person's sense of self. It also a combination of behaviours that define who you are as it contains also many elements, characteristics, qualities, experiences and also interests that make a person different from one to another'*

Interviewee 14 *'Identity depicts who you are to others. There are different things that can depict our identity like our culture, religion and nationality'*

Interviewee 15: *'Identity represents a concept that includes the qualities, the beliefs and the personality that make one different from the other. This concept is complex and dynamic influenced by many internal and external factors such as education'*

Interviewee 16 *'cultural Identity is an abstract term. It is not tangible. It is about how we perceive ourselves. For example, I would identify myself as a Muslim Moroccan girl who speaks Arabic as a first language. I would also identify myself as an Arab or Amazigh person. It could be related to place of birth, the parents, the language, the customs, the culture, the traditions, rituals and religion'*

Interviewee 18 *'Identity is what defines the person. We cannot say this is a person without having an identity otherwise we would call him or her something else other than being a person. It gives us a meaning and a reputation as well. It is something that we should be proud of.'*

Interviewee 19. *'cultural identity is the one which determines who we are in terms of religion, culture and language'*

Interviewee 20: *“ Cultural Identity for me refers to the things that define who we are and where we come from. It is our culture, ethnicity, origin and language. It is what distinguishes communities like Moroccan community from American community’*

In sum, the interviewees define identity, in general, in various ways. While some consider that identity is who we are in terms of personality, sex, ideas, others see that identity is what relates people to each other in terms of nationality, customs, traditions, language and culture.

Identity as a Personal and Cultural Construct

The participants of this study were also asked another question of how they perceive their identity and cultural identity according to their opinion. Some definitions and perceptions of identity were as the following:

Interviewee 4 *“ Cultural identity reflects the origin of a group of people and to which ethnicity they belong’”*

Interviewee 5 *“Identity is who you are, your personality, ideas and background’”*

Interviewee 6 *“ Identity is a unique character that distinguishes a person from another person or a group from other groups of people. Identity is about who we are, how a person understands himself or herself’”*

Interviewee 7: *“ It is who are. It is a set of qualities that make me different from others: my personality, character, culture, my beliefs, ethnicity and so on’”*

Interviewee 12: *“ identity is the overall beliefs and values as well as ideas that you hold and you have accumulated through upbringing and experiences in life by which you project yourself to the outside world based on those set of beliefs’”*

Interviewee 13: *“ Identity is a person’s sense of self. It also a combination of behaviours that define who you are as it contains also many elements, characteristics, qualities, experiences and also interests that make a person different from one to another’”*

Interviewee 14 *“ Cultural identity depicts who you are to others. There are different things that can depict our identity like our culture, religion and nationality’”*

Interviewee 18 *“ Identity is what defines the person. We cannot say this is a person without having an identity otherwise we would call him or her something else other than being a person. It gives us a meaning and a reputation as well. It is something that we should be proud of.’”*

Interviewee 19. *“ Identity is the one which determines who we are in terms of religion, culture and language’”*

Interviewee 20: *“ Cultural identity for me refers to the things that define who we are and where we come from. It is our culture, ethnicity, origin and language. It is what distinguishes communities like Moroccan community from American community’*

Overall, the interviewees refer to identity in general as a personal construct and they relate it to one’s personality, age and sex. Others see identity as a social and cultural construct as it what bounds people together in terms of language, customs, traditions and culture.

Cultural Identity as a Sense of Belonging

Moreover, the participants were asked about the importance of identity and the answers were as the following:

Interviewee 7 *“ It gives us a sense of belonging and it dictates our thoughts, behaviours and decisions ‘”*

Interviewee 9 *“It gives us a sense of belonging and with that sense of belonging people can live in comfort and security. With a certain identity people live because they know who they are’”*

Interviewee 11 *“ There is a huge importance of owning a certain identity because it gives you a sense of belonging’”*

Interviewee 14 *“ It is a of great importance to own a certain identity because it gives you sense of belonging’”*

The interviewees consider that cultural identity is so vital as it gives them a sense of belonging. This belonging is shown in that they belong to the same culture and nation, to name but a few.

The Importance of Cultural Identity

Further the participants were asked to state the significance of having a certain identity. The answers were as following:

Interviewee 7 *“ It is important to own a certain cultural identity simply because it gives us a sense of belonging and it dictates our thoughts, behaviours and decisions ‘”*

Interviewee 9 *“ Having a certain cultural identity is important since it gives us a sense of belonging and with that sense of belonging people can live in comfort and security. With a certain identity people live because they know who they are’”*

Interviewee 10 *“ It is important. It is a value that is given to each person that makes them special in terms of culture, traditions, clothes, language.’”*

Interviewee 11 “ *There is a huge importance of owning a certain cultural identity because it gives you a sense of belonging*”

Interviewee 14 “ *It is a of great importance to own a certain cultural identity because it gives you sense of belonging*”

Hence, cultural identity is a very crucial for the learners as by which they feel attached to a certain culture and have a sense of belonging.

Importance of National Identity

Also, the participants were asked to state the significance of having a national identity. The answers were as following:

Interviewee 1 “ *It is important. It has to deal with language, culture, social norms, traditions and how individuals think. It helps us to understand ourselves. It through which you feel a sense of belonging to a certain place, a certain culture, a group of people*”

Interviewee 9 “ *It gives me a sense of belonging. It grounds me, It comforts me. I feel safe and rooted*”

Interviewee 12 “ *Given the fact we live in a society, a collective system of life, it is mandatory to uphold to a certain identity that fits within the group. People cannot live without a sense of belonging. You need to feel deep down that you belong to a certain group and this group is defined by a certain identity. For example, when you see the flag you feel that you are belonging*”

Interviewee 13 “ *To be Moroccan is really important. You feel that there is a lot of people who do the same traditions. You feel that you are special if you are in another country. You are happy when everyone does the same thing that you are doing. And you feel peaceful*”

Interviewee 16 “ *It is very important actually to have an identity. If you do not have a identity, who are you? This identity will give people around you an idea about, what you have in mind. It is not about others; it is about you too to know what you are and what you are not and which side you will be in. It is important, for me, to be Moroccan and Muslim. You get a clear picture about you. It helps you to construct a picture of principles about you.*”

National identity is significant and it is closely related to cultural identity. The interviewees consider that once they belong to nation, they also belong to a certain culture which is their identity that distinguishes them from others.

Learners' Experience of Learning English

Also, the participants were asked to talk about their experience in learning English to see if it influenced them. The answers were as follows:

Interviewee 1: “ *It was interesting. It was not only about learning the language but it involved other aspects of humanities such as history, media, myths, religion, and literature. It was rich. It helped me to evolve my knowledge and also developed my personality and awareness about other cultures*”

Interviewee 2: “ *It was nice and somewhat challenging*”

Interviewee 3: “ *It was very rich in terms of ways of learning by numerous teachers with different backgrounds. It started from 9th grade to nowadays*”

Interviewee 5: “ *I enjoyed learning English by myself either in school or university. It was a door to a whole new world so much different from my own, yet so intriguing.*”

Interviewee 6: “ *At the very beginning, it was difficult but later on it becomes good. Now, I am able to understand the langue based on its context*”

Interviewee 8 “ *My experience was good. I met new people and I discovered new cultures and new beliefs. Through learning the English language, I see the world in a different way*”

Interviewee 9 “ *My experience has been a complicated process. It started when I was a student in high school. In my first contact with this new language, I was surprised with the way the teacher used to speak and the way she pronounced the words. I became passionate of learning English. I gave it all my attention because as you know learning a language involves a lot of practices and follow- up. Until now I am still learning because I believe that learning any language takes a lifetime*”

Interviewee 11 “ *It is the best experience that I have so far because of my interest and my love for this language. This pushed me to search and do extra effort to get lot information as I can. I found it so enjoyable*”

Interviewee 14 “ *We are still learning when it comes to a foreign language. So, I found it enjoyable though I had some challenges especially at the beginning at the B.A degree but it is a great experience. I love English, and when you love something you learn it with passion*”

Interviewee 15 “ *My experience has been a challenging journey as a non native speaker. I have had to dedicate a significant amount of time and energy to become proficient in this language. I have studied various aspects of English. I was exposed to different forms of English such the British and the American English that enable me to a better understanding of the language and to other cultures.*”

Interviewee 17 “ *It was a great experience*”

Overall, the interviewees hold positive perceptions towards the experience of learning English.

English Learning Experience and Perceptions towards Cultural Identity

The participants were asked also to state their perceptions towards their identity and precisely their cultural identity after being exposed to English. Their answers were as follows:

Interviewee 12 “ *I have now and I had positive attitudes towards my own cultural identity and I can specify that they are attitudes of pride, of belonging to this society. Of course there are certain ideas that I do not agree with in my society but this will not push me to have a negative attitude. No I have just positive attitude regarding my identity.*”

Interviewee 14 “ *I have always had positive attitudes towards my cultural identity and let's say I am fond of, actually, of being a Moroccan person, being Muslim, being who I am. So I do not think I have negative attitudes towards my identity during learning English*”

Interviewee 18 “ *I have always held positive attitudes towards my cultural identity*”

Interviewee 19 “ *They were good and still good before or after learning English. Learning English does not and did not affect my attitudes towards my own identity. It is positive. I have positive attitudes towards my identity. Learning English has nothing to do with affecting my identity.*”

In general, the interviewees deem that exposure to English is still beneficial to them and they still maintain their cultural identity after this experience.

Learning English and the Shape of Cultural Identity

The interviewee were then asked whether learning English and exposure to it had and still has an influence on their cultural identity. In other words, the participants were asked to state whether learning English has shaped their cultural identity. Subsequently, their answers were as the following:

Interviewee 1 “ *Learning English did not have this impact on my cultural identity maybe it helped me to have a certain awareness to understand my own identity and be respectful to other different people who have different identities and cultures from mine. Learning English helped me to have much understanding about American and British culture, society, the evolution of English language and other things but it did not have this impact on my appreciation towards my identity, no*”

Interviewee 6 “ *My cultural identity did not change. I modified it but I did not change it. Identity has been building for a long time since childhood. It is very difficult to say my identity is changed.*”

Interviewee 8 “ *My cultural identity did not change except that after learning English, I have chance to meet new people or enlighten them about my homeland. I am still Moroccan and learning a foreign language or any language will never determine who I am since a language would just enable me to get a job*”

Interviewee 12 “ *My cultural identity has never been changed nor was it exposed to anything to affect it regarding my experience of learning English. My identity is the same before English and during English and I cannot say after learning because I am still learning the language*”

Interviewee 13 “ *Nothing is changed. My identity is still the same. Do people change their identity because of learning a language? I do not think so. Identity is still the same even though your learn seven languages*”

Interviewee 14 “ *I do not think so*”

Interviewee 15 “ *I think we should not even think to change our cultural identity after learning a language, any language not only English. My identity is still the same. Nothing is changed because I learn English because I love it. Learning English did not impact my identity*”

Interviewee 16 “ *I do not think so. It just a little bit affected maybe I got open to other identities, other cultures. Now I know more. I do not identify myself as American or as British after learning English. I still speak Arabic in gatherings with people, family gatherings, even when I meet teachers of English or people who are speaking English. I identify myself as a Moroccan Muslim girl. I think there is no change.*”

Interviewee 18 “ *I cannot say it has changed but I feel like after learning English, some things have become clearer than before especially that English has helped me to learn about other identities and cultures*”

Interviewee 19 “ *No, I do not think so*”

Interviewee 20 “ *I did not notice any impact of learning English on my cultural identity. I see certain richness in my information. My identity is a stable one which remains as it was*”

The interviewees consider that learning English has nothing to do with shaping their cultural identity but rather this experience has enabled them to know other cultures and at the same time their identity remains as it is.

Learners' Feelings towards Cultural Identity

The interviewees also were asked to express their feelings towards their identity regardless of the effect of learning English or even after being exposed to English. The answers were as follows:

Interviewee 3 “ *I feel that I have a fixed one*”

Interviewee 5 “ *I think I have become more flexible, more open minded and less judgmental. We share things and we differ in others. Be it a behaviour patterns, reactions and values...etc*”

Interviewee 8 “ *Satisfied. I am still Moroccan and learning a foreign language or languages will never determine who I am since language would just enable me to get a job*”

Interviewee 11 “ *I feel good about my cultural identity even after learning English. I feel so honoured that I have a strong identity. So, my identity and culture have not changed after learning English. I still have the same honour and the same feeling. I would be always proud of it and if I got the chance to be in another country with another culture, I would not be hesitated to share my identity*”

In sum, the interviewees hold positive perceptions towards their cultural identity and they feel proud that they are Moroccans and learning English does not determine who they are.

Learning English and the Appreciation of One's Identity and Culture

The participants were also enquired about their perceptions towards their cultural identity after exposure to English. The answers were as following:

Interviewee 8 “ *Satisfied. I am still Moroccan and learning a foreign language or languages will never determine who I am since language would just enable me to get a job*”

Interviewee 11 “ *I feel good about my identity even after learning English. I feel so honoured that I have a strong identity. So, my identity and culture have not changed after learning English. I still have the same honour and the same feeling. I would be always proud of it and if I got the chance to be in another country with another culture, I would not be hesitated to share my identity*”

Interviewee 12 “ *I have now and I had positive attitudes towards my own identity and I can specify that they are attitudes of pride, of belonging to this society. Of course there certain ideas that I do not agree with in my society but this will not push me to have a negative attitude. No, I have just positive attitude regarding my identity.*”

Thus, the interviewees deem that learning English has helped them to appreciate more their culture in the sense that they feel that they belong to a special culture by which they feel proud of.

Learning English and Understanding of the Self

The participants were also enquired about their feelings towards their cultural identity after exposure to English. The answers were as following:

Interviewee 1 “ *Learning English did not have this impact on my identity maybe it helped me to have a certain awareness to understand my own identity and be respectful to other different people who have different identities and cultures from mine. Learning English helped me to have much understanding about American and British culture, society, the evolution of English language and other things but it did not have this impact on my appreciation towards my identity, no*”

Interviewee 3 “ *I feel that I have a fixed one*”

Interviewee 5 “ *I think I have become more flexible, more open minded and less judgmental. We share things and we differ in others. Be it a behaviour patterns, reactions and values...etc*”

Interviewee 12 “ *I have now and I had positive attitudes towards my own identity and I can specify that they are attitudes of pride, of belonging to this society. Of course there certain ideas that I do not agree with in my society but this will not push me to have a negative attitude. No I have just positive attitude regarding my identity.*”

Through learning English, learners become more aware of themselves in the sense that they start to understand more their own culture which constitutes their identity. This understanding is demonstrated in appreciating their cultural identity.

Learning English and Cultural Awareness: Understanding of the Other

The participants were also asked about how they see both themselves and the other after exposure to English. The answers were as following:

Interviewee 1 “ *Learning English did not have this impact on my identity maybe it helped me to have a certain awareness, to understand my own identity and be respectful to other different people who have different identities and cultures from mine. Learning English helped me to have much understanding about American and British culture, society, the evolution of English language and other things but it did not have this impact on my appreciation towards my identity, no*”

Interviewee 5 “ *I think I have become more flexible, more open minded and less judgmental. We share things and we differ in others. Be it a behaviour patterns, reactions and values...etc*”

Interviewee 16 “ *I would say be open to different cultures, reading, watching series, being ambitious, living aboard for six months, studying aboard*”

Learning English has helped the learners to get open to the culture of the target language and discover the others' own way in dealing with things and most importantly they become respectful to that culture though it seems different.

V Discussion

By and large, learners consider that cultural identity is a sophisticated term to define for it is related to many issues. To elaborate more, for them; though identity is related to social aspects, it is still individual.. While some interviewees deem that identity in general is related to personality, age, sex, a fact that can be related to what is personal, others deem that identity is social and attached to family, traditions, social norms and being with the group. Put differently, identity is related to distinct markers ranging from what is social that is common between all the individuals of the community such as culture, family and relations to what is personal as sex and personality. These definitions are clearly reflected in the literature by the study of Tamimi (2017) and Edwards (2009). Tamimi (2017) who postulates that there are many remarkable markers of identity, all of them are ranging between personal to social features. That is, according to his study, identity is both personally and socially constructed. Much more, this notion according to him exceeds to what is biological as well, if one takes into account sexual features and physical body.

According to the results, learners state that to have a certain cultural identity is so fundamental since by which they feel their authentic self and recognize who they are. Most importantly, most of the participants confirm that by identity they feel a sense of belonging and attachment. To explain more, it is highly crucial for them to associate themselves with a specific identity namely the Moroccan one since it makes them special and it shows their value. Also, given the fact that we live in a community wherein people share the same, culture, language, traditions, customs, religion and sometimes behaviours, they feel safe ,secure and rooted. That is, they feel that they belong to a society where everyone do the same things, a fact which comforts them. Additionally, owning a certain identity, the Moroccan one, is of great importance for learners as it reveals to them who they are and who they are not as well as well as special when they encounter people with distinct cultures or when they themselves visit other places wherein different things exist. Thus, if this demonstrates one thing, it shows then that cultural identity is associated even with nationality. People tend to define themselves by their nationality as well including their national traditions, beliefs and values. In the light of this, some studies in the literature as Tamimi (2017) indicates that identity is also defined and constructed in terms of national borders that define of what identity is and what it is not.

As cultural identity is related to nation and nationality, learners, at the first glance, identify themselves to their nation. Accordingly, as long as they belong to the same nation and therefore have the same nationality, they share many issues in common as religion, traditions, culture and language, to name a few. In this regard, learners consider that once they share the same things in common with other people and they all belong to the same place, have the same culture, cultural identity is a sense of belonging and security. Thus, though learners' exposure to learning a foreign language as English, this experience reinforces their appreciation and agreeableness of their identity notably their national identity and cultural one. By way of elaboration, despite of learning English which carries another distinct culture, learners had and still have positive attitudes towards their own identity and culture. In this light, learners consider that it is by opposite, thanks to learning English which carries another culture, they start to appreciate more their identity and culture and see it as special and unique. That is, learners even after their exposure to English, they still hold positive attitudes towards their cultural identity which is highly linked to their culture. They feel honored and proud to belong to the Moroccan society as long as cultural identity is seen from the angle of nationality. They deem that the experience of learning English helps them to understand more their identity and be aware of it and learning English will never determine who they are. Others consider that it is by their identity, by being Moroccan, they feel special and they feel they would like to enlighten other people with other cultures about their homeland encompassing their culture as it is part and parcel of cultural identity.

Learning English is so important nowadays as it is the lingua Franca and the contact language that people use to communicate and interact over all parts of the world whatever of their native language. The participants of this study postulate that learning English language has contributed to their cultural awareness and has no effect on their identity. In the same vein, Small (2018) states that those classrooms-based foreign language learning have no affect on identity. EFL learners consider English as a window that has been opened to show them a different culture from their own. By this window, they start to discover others' way of thinking, believing, behaving and doing things Byram (2006). In other words, it is by this experience, learners have become open to other identities and cultures. Most of them, see that learning English has not influenced their identity, namely their cultural identity but it instead has contributed to open their eyes that the other exists, this other who owns another culture which is completely different form their own, therefore, what they should is to respect it. This is also discussed by Small (2018) who confirms that learning another language offers an opportunity for those speakers to step in another culture and perceive it in many multiple ways. Further, she

emphasizes that speaking another language means switching between distinct languages and putting oneself in the other person's shoes is so crucial to be intercultural competent person. Put differently, for her "being able to speak even one foreign language is a strong reminder that the other people understand the world differently" Small (2018). In this regard, according to the results, learning English has boosted the learners' understanding of other cultures such as the American and the British culture and therefore understand other identities while their identity is still the same. Learners still feel attached to the Moroccan identity, adhere to its traditions and culture and feel proud of it. Hence, this indicates that learning English has just contributed to the learners' understating of the target language culture and the identity of its people meanwhile their identity is maintained and not shaped.

Understanding the other is pivotal even that other may seem to be absolutely different. Nonetheless, understanding the self is very perquisite since one cannot understand the other without understanding the self at first. Thus, EFL learners see that after exposure to English, they underpin their understanding of the other and the self as well. Learners recognize of what constitutes and marks their identity in terms of many aspects as their personality, behaviours, attitudes and culture and see the issues that do not fit their identity too. This is proven more when they do not imitate the target culture in the process of learning and they instead preserve their own. Most importantly, this experience has added to them a lot as they develop satisfying feelings towards their identity and they become flexible. Flexibility reveals mostly in being open to other cultures including that of the target language without being affected since some of them still speak Arabic in their gatherings, all adhere to Moroccan culture and Islamic religion and so on and so forth. Additionally, though learning English, EFL learners still perceive their identity and culture as positive and unique, a fact that indicates much understanding to the self first.

VI Conclusion

In conclusion, according to this study learning English does not mark the Moroccan EFL learners' identity. For the participants, the experience of learning English has not shaped their identity but rather it has contributed to their cultural awareness in understanding other cultures especially the target language culture. That is, for learners, after exposure to English, they start to become culturally aware that the other exists with a totally different culture. Accordingly, English is like a door that learners open to know that there is a distinct culture and cultures and they need to be respectful towards all those cultures. Additionally, the participants showed great inclination to their own culture. By extension, for the participants, after exposure to English, much appreciation to their own cultural identity has been increased. The participants pointed out that English has helped them to understand even their culture which is a part of their identity and most importantly by discovering other cultures, they start to notice the agreeableness of their culture which is unique. Subsequently, even after learning English, EFL learners still see that their national identity is something to be proud of and English has nothing to do with their identity or rather to the shape of their identity. Their identity is stable and still the same and they are down to earth to it and to their culture as long as the latter is noticeably linked to the former. Put differently, EFL learners hold positive attitudes towards their cultural identity and through their national identity they feel a sense of belonging and attachment. Nonetheless, for most of the participants identity is slippery term as each one identifies it distinctly. For some identity is what relates us to our community either by traditions, customs, religion, culture and nationality, this construct, for others, is one's sex, physical body and personality.

The above findings that mostly feed in that the exposure to English after learning it has nothing to do with the reformulation and the shape of the learners' identity but rather this experience has led learners to appreciate more their culture and identity and accept the other identities and cultures. Nevertheless, according to some studies as Tamimi (2017) English is deemed to be as a tool that marks learners' identity. Most importantly, in this study, learners hold remarkably positive attitudes towards the effect of English on their identity.

This current study has some implications in language pedagogy. It can be believed that as long as the participants perceive that learning English has increased their cultural awareness to eventually accept the other who is different as well as suspend judgments and be open to other identities and cultures, thus, it is high time we emphasized the cultural awareness paradigm in our educational system and in teaching pedagogy. Also, since learners postulated that the exposure to English has increased their appreciation to their unique identity and culture, then it is a must to incorporate teaching the Moroccan cultural aspects more in our educational system and in our EFL textbooks. Furthermore, the excessive inclusion of the exchanging programs becomes a need in our Moroccan educational system for it provides learners from different identities and cultures the opportunity to exchange their culture and show their identities in authentic situations wherein they can reveal their acceptance and understanding of the other.

The limitation of this study lies in the sampling procedure. The participants that were chosen for this research might not be representative and therefore we cannot generalize the findings and relate them to the whole Moroccan EFL learners.

References

- [1]. Alfarhan,I.(2016). English As A Global Language And The Effect On Culture And Identity. School Of Education Saint Louis University; St. Louis University, United States. American Research. Journal Of English And Literature. Retrieved From [Htpps://Www.Arjonline.Org/Papers/Arjel/V2-11/10.Pdf](https://www.arjonline.org/papers/Arjel/V2-11/10.Pdf)
- [2]. Byram,M.(2006). Language And Identities. University Of Durham. United Kingdom. Retrieved From [File:///C:/Users/Use%20pc/Downloads/Byram_Identities_Final_EN.Doc%20\(2\).Pdf](File:///C:/Users/Use%20pc/Downloads/Byram_Identities_Final_EN.Doc%20(2).Pdf)
- [3]. Edwards,J.(2009). Language And Identity: An Introduction . Cambridge, Uk: Cambridge University Press.
- [4]. Echerbini,S.(2023) . The Centrality Of Language In Identity And Culture. Al Bayan.
- [5]. EL Ouali,F.(2021).Cultural Identity Reconstruction In The Study Abroad Context: The Case Of Algerian Sojourners. Global Journal Of Foreign Language Teaching,9(4) 226-237.
- [6]. Fatmawati,A.(2021).Learner Identity Construction Of EFL Postgraduate Students: A Narrative Case Study. ICELLA. Atlantis Press.
- [7]. Fearon,J(1999).What Is Identity(As We Now Use The Word?).Department Of Political Science. Stanford University Retrieved From. <File:///C:/Users/Use%20pc/Downloads/What-Is-Identity-As-We-Now-Use-The-Word-.Pdf>
- [8]. Hatoss,A.(2003).Identity Formation, Cross-Cultural Attitudes And Language Maintenance In The Hungarian Diaspora Of Queensland. Cultural Citizenship: Challenges Of Globalization. Decon University, Melbourne, 71-77. Retrieved From Htpps://Eprints.Usq.Edu.Au/1158/1/Hatoss_Deakin_Paper.Pdf
- [9]. Chen,V,H.(2014). Key Concepts In Intercultural Dialogue. Center For Intercultural Dialogue. Anyang Technical University. Singapore. Retrieved From . <File:///C:/Users/Use%20pc/Downloads/Key-Concept-Cultural-Identity.Pdf>
- [10]. Johnson, A. (2009). The Rise Of English: The Language Of Globalization In China And The European Union. *Macalester International*, 22(1), 12. Retrieved From <Http://Digitalcommons.Macalester.Edu/Cgi/Viewcontent.Cgi?Article=1447&Context=Macint> Kanno, Y., & Varghese, M. M. (2010). Immigrant And Refugee ESL Students' Challenges To Accessing Four-Year College Education: From Language Policy To Educational Policy. *Journal Of Language, Identity, And Education*, 9(5), 310-328.
- [11]. Khaldoune,A.(2021).The Effects Of Studying English Language On The Cultural Identity Of Algerian Students At Chadli Bendjedid University.*Language Practices*. 12. 16-16
- [12]. Kramiņa,I.(2000) Lingo – Didactic Theories Underlying Multi – Purpose Language Acquisition. University Of Latvia.
- [13]. Norton,B.(2013).Identity And Language Learning: Extending The Conversation. Bristol,Uk: Multilingual Matters.
- [14]. Rouvira,L,C(2008).The Relationship Between Language And Identity. The Use Of The Home Language As Human Right Of The Immigrant. Scalabrinian Center For Migration Studies;Brasilia,Brazil.. Journal Network Of Scientific Journals From Latin America, The Caribbean, Spain And Portugal Non-Profit Academic Project, Developed Under The Open Access Initiative. Retrieved From <Htpps://Www.Redalyc.Org/Pdf/4070/407042009004.Pdf>
- [15]. Sethmini.(2022).What Is The Difference Between Language Acquisition And Language Learning.. Retrieved From <https://www.differencebetween.com/what-is-the-difference-between-language-acquisition-and-language-learning/>
- [16]. Small,L(2018).Learning A Language-A Gateway To Intercultural Competence. The London School Of International Communication.Retrieved From <Htpps://Www.Londonschool.Com/Lsic/Resources/Blog/Learning-Language-Gateway-Intercultural-Competence/>
- [17]. Tamimi,S.(2017).Foreign Language And Identity Reconstruction: Learners' Understanding Of The Intersections Of The Self, The Other And Power. *Center For Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 7(4).