



RESEARCH PAPER

A Narrative-Based Case Study of Language Learning Investment and L2 Identities in the Pakistani EFL Context

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores how a language learner is inextricably connected with the social world and how the learners invest in negotiating power relations to achieve their L2 identity. The study draws insights from Darvin and Norton's Investment Model (2015) to unearth how investment contributes to the development of L2 learners' identity in the Pakistani EFL context. The data were collected from two Pakistani EFL learners with the help of face-to-face interviews. The findings show that investment plays an important role in identity formation which is boosted by other power networks. Furthermore, the data show that the components of the investment model are individually important to support the process of learning and identity formation of EFL learners.

Keywords: Capital, Identity, Investment, Language Learners

Introduction

In SLA, our recent understanding of the English language learners' L2 identities requires us to take into account a more global perspective of English language learning (Crystal, 1997). Colonialism is one of the major factors giving a boost to the status of the English language. As a result of colonialism, the English language has gained a prestigious status and importance in the world (Crystal, 2003). The globalization of English has become a popular phenomenon in the world and it has also added to the heightened focus on English language learning and teaching practices. In Pakistan, the English language also enjoys prestigious status and a high rank (Malik, 2010; Shamim, 2011; Channa, 2017) in formal institutions such as courts, offices, and educational settings.

A bulk of literature on the status of English in Pakistan establishes its high status in society and academia, nonetheless, according to Zaki and Dar (2012), Pakistani EFL learners, after spending many years learning English are not capable of applying the language skills in their real-life settings. There are multiple reasons for their poor competence in the English language. For instance, one of the major reasons is the use of faulty practices, approaches, and methods of teaching English (Rahman, 2004; Zaki & Dar, 2012; Channa, 2017). As already identified by Coleman (2010), in the Pakistani educational system, poor teaching methodologies are the major reasons for students' incompetent use of English language skills especially in listening and speaking. Unfortunately, classroom teaching is based on textbook exercises that encourage rote learning and rarely attempt to improve the listening and speaking skills of the learners. This exam-based approach does not allow the learners to improve their communicative and oral skills (Sultana & Zaki, 2015). For language learners, the learning context and social settings are the major factors necessary for language learning.

In the Pakistani context, exploring different dimensions of L2 motivational orientations of EFL learners, such as Shahbaz and Liu (2012), Islam (2013) and Malik and Shehzad (2018) have identified different psychological, social and cultural factors that affect their language learning behaviors. Nonetheless, from the perspective of L2 identities, the

primary focus of these studies has remained on the possible selves that are generally operationalized in their studies quantitatively. Over the last two decades, scholars (e.g., Norton, 2000; Kramsch 2013; Malik, 2019) have questioned the positivist and reductionist approaches that cannot adequately explain the intricate relationship between L2 identity and language teaching and learning practices. There is still a need to understand L2 motivation and learners' L2 identity from a more rigorous qualitative approach. In this regard, poststructuralist perspectives, according to Norton (2013a), have significant potential in delineating how language learning is a situated phenomenon that provides learners an opportunity to invest in their actual or imagined identities. The current study attempts to investigate the nature and role of investment in L2 learning EFL settings in Pakistan

Literature Review

A lot of literature explores the L2 learners' identities, investment in imagined communities, and learners' interaction with the social world (e.g., Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2007). Block (2007a) has elaborated on identity as a form of desire, as it can be explained as the desire for self-recognition, respect, acceptance, gratefulness, and security, association, and material benefits. According to Norton (2000), identity is the relationship of people to their social world, how they socially engage in their environment, and how they engage themselves in their social practices. L2 Identity is not a static concept; rather it is dynamically involved with different factors that shape the lives of the learners.

Language learners' identity and the process of language learning are interlinked. It is already mentioned, that the connection between learners' identity and their language learning is multifaceted, compound, vigorous and multidimensional regarding time and space (Norton, 2000; Kramsch 2013). It is dependent, connected, and contextualized according to the learning settings and learning practices. These elements are related to learning, and the learners' requisite to acknowledge themselves because learners utilize the tool of language to communicate their emotions, thoughts, ideas, inspiration, information, and conversion of any society and social setting (Kim, 2009). It can be stated that language is a tool to achieve acceptance, legitimacy, perfection, involvement, and affiliation in the learning process of a second language.

Investment and Language Learning

Motivation is a psychological construct that does not adequately explain how learners seek inspiration and motivation to learn a language but yet because they do not achieve their language learning goals. Despite being highly motivated to learn, language learners may appear dull, unmotivated, and passive in language learning settings. In language learning classrooms, sometimes the learners sincerely put effort into learning, but they find the classroom settings biased, unequal, prejudiced, intolerant, and unfair. So, the learners do not make progress and show a low level of investment in such learning contexts. Furthermore, there is a lack of association between language learners learning efforts and the teaching methodologies and approaches used by language teachers (Norton, 2013b). To keep this situation in mind, Norton and Toohey (2011) have emphasized the importance of investment and argued looking for the answer to the question "What is the learner's investment in the language practices of this classroom?" (p. 421).

According to the construct of investment, the second language learner identity is compound and dynamic in nature, which is in the process of constant change from one given time to another, from one social setting to another because the dynamic process of language learning constantly changes and evolves (Norton, 2013b). Most of such dynamism can be attributed to the on-going social connections and collaboration between the language learners and the actual world in which they find themselves (Norton, 2013b). Moreover, when learners invest in learning the English language; they invest in the formation of their

desired imagined identity (Norton, 2000). Learners achieve their desired identity by applying investment in class practices and formal settings, as elaborated by Norton (2013b); the idea of investment is context-dependent and situation-based. However, in different formal settings, learners employ different resources of investment, and in different power networks; learners are achieving the goal of acceptance as a second language speaker. Shortly, it can be concluded that nature-wise, the term of investment is diverse, complex, and self-contradictory (Norton, 2013b).

The investment model by Darvin and Norton (2015) provides the advanced theoretical conceptualization of the construct and according to this model investment is composed of three components identity, capital, and ideology. Investment is a sociological construct that explores how the language learners lived experiences, and the language learning practices determine language learning. The language learners identify themselves with the target language communities and the learners' realization about the distance between them and the target language community requires a change in L2 learners' identity and behavior. During the process of L2 learning, the second language learners frequently evaluate or reconsider their perception of self which is dynamic with respect to the world outside (Norton, 1995). The construct of Investment highlights the need to understand the learners' relation with the social world and historical background, and their commitment to language learning under the construct of investment (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Learners' investment in language learning is explored in many studies. For instance, Jaidev (2011) has conducted semi-structured interviews with three Saudi learners while studying in Singapore. The findings of the study reveal that learners apply different levels of investment and learning approaches to manage their fear while learning the English language. Similarly, Chang (2011) has studied two students to understand their language learning journey and the role of investment in the whole process. The data shows that a greater amount of investment can bring greater results in learning L2 and identity formation.

The work of Li (2014) has selected ESL learners to study their level of motivation and investment. The data highlights that those learners who are willing to invest in their process of learning can bring positive change in their learning process. They can easily achieve their goals and desired identities. Vasilopoulos (2015) has applied in-depth interviews and open-ended questionnaires to highlight learners' L2 learning and the role of investment. The main purpose of the study was to highlight the role of investment in gaining the second language learners' identity. In the same manner, the work of Wu et al., (2020) is based on narrative inquiry which is implemented by face-to-face interviews. He has selected three language learners and tries to build the connection between language learners' investment and the character of their EFL language learning practices.

The review of the literature establishes that the construct of investment is a poststructuralist notion that can be best explored qualitatively. In this regard, social factors and cultural perceptions of second language learners and the learning outcomes are qualitatively explored by applying the poststructuralist methodological frameworks. Nonetheless, Block (2007b) has voiced that there is a dire need to open the wider zone of inquiry to develop a comprehensive understanding of EFL learners' investment and learning. The current study focuses on the under-researched Pakistani EFL context to understand the investment of Pakistani English language learners in their learning.

Material and Methods

This is a qualitative study in nature. The current research in learners' investment has utilized the qualitative approach for data collection and data analysis. The study uses a narrative inquiry method and conducts semi-structured interviews that allow the researchers to collect in-depth, rich, situation-dependent, complete, and naturalist views of

the learners' lived experiences and learning practices. The data were collected from two EFL undergraduate learners, enrolled in the University of Gujrat, for their language learning experiences. The narrative inquiry technique is selected after the careful study of literature to collect more comprehensive data as; narrative inquiry is grounded on the assumption that human life can be understood with the help of different stories. These stories may potentially provide a better understanding of the overall phenomenon and learning experiences (Rubin & Babbie, 2011; Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Riazi, 2016; Ary et al., 2019).

Theoretical Framework

In the field of SLA, the poststructuralist perspective has offered a new perception of understanding learners' identity, identity construction, and their connection. It is also important to understand learners' identity formation and its direct link to the learning process. According to Norton (2000), the process of identity construction is a form of language learners' effort to negotiate their identity and self. The learners' identities are their subjective perspectives conditioned by social power which assigns learners different social positions (Norton, 1995). This particular research work applies the poststructuralist view of investment to measure learners' investment and their efforts for identity formation.

Concerning the present research topic, the application of the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) to the collected data allows the researcher to understand the deeper side of learners' identity and investment change. This particular framework provides the guidelines to understand learners' use of material and social resources for investing in the Pakistani EFL language learning settings. In this way, the researcher was able to determine the organized and systematic patterns of power of different language learning practices.



Figure 1: Darvin and Norton's Model of Investment (2015)

Research Participants and Research Procedures

Two Pakistani EFL learners were selected for this particular study. The participants included one male and one female student who were enrolled in the undergraduate program at University of Gujrat, Pakistan.

Instrument

The data were collected through formal interviews. The researcher designed a semi-structured interview targeting the information about research participants' background information, L2 learning experiences, knowledge learning and real-life experiences, and language learning histories (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Eslami & Wharton, 2015). As the study used a narrative-based method, the respondents were encouraged to tell their language learning stories and experiences. A narrative inquiry "generates the kind of data that are

essential for research as praxis, in which there is a productive and sustainable relationship between theory, research, and classroom teaching" (Norton & Early, 2011, p. 417). Such types of data collection provide a better understanding of the language learning procedures (Lingard et al., 2008). Similarly, Razfar (2012) has mentioned that such data collection approaches can deliver the true nature and purpose of learning, classroom environment, formal context, and teachers' attitudes.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

By applying the framework of Warren (2002), the researchers conducted interviews in the most suitable and appropriate places for the research participants. During the interview, researchers discussed different aspects of their language learning process, previous learning experiences of the learners, behavior, and role of the teachers, and learners' investment and efforts regarding learning. The participants were permitted to choose any language to communicate their learning experiences. After the completion of every session, the participants were asked to add any other information if they wanted to add as this technique can enhance data collection and enrich the data (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

The typological analysis approach was selected to analyze the collected, qualitative data (Hatch, 2002). The researchers collected, transcribed, and translated the whole data. After careful reading, the entire material was divided into sub-categories based on emerging themes and patterns. These patterns helped the researchers to identify relevant themes from the data.

Ethical Consideration

At the very first meeting, the researchers made clear to the research participants about the topic, research methodology and data collection procedure. It is also informed to the participants that the interview data will only be used for this particular study and the researchers will keep the entire information secret. For ethical reasons, the names of the participants are not mentioned as they are called Participant 1 and 2 while data analysis to keep their identity in privacy.

Results and Discussion

In the below section, the results have been presented in two sections, namely, Participant 1 and Participant 2.

Participant 1

The first participant is 23 years of age, a young scholar in the English Department at the University of Gujrat. He belongs to a middle-class family and attends a public school for his early education. He belongs to a nearby village of Gujrat.

Participant 1 Learning of English

The high school is far away from his home which is the only best private school according to their brothers. So, he could not attend any institution and academy to improve his English language skills additionally. According to him, the courses of English at school are not up to the mark. The attitude of his English teachers is not satisfactory. They do not take pain to communicate and clarify well. They also do not devote enough time to students, and they are also unable to make it clear why they are supposed to learn the English language and how. According to him, "If they knew about all this before, he would have put extra time and effort into learning English". He also adds that English textbooks are not according to the language skills.

English books have comprehension questions and grammatical rules and our teachers asked us to memorize all the things. At that time, we could not develop the sense of learning grammar rules to improve language.

The power networks and the social support from family and parents always bring a great source of motivation for learners (Falout, 2012). Consequently, Norton and De Costa (2018) have also mentioned that if a learner has direct access to the different forms of capital can easily approach his desired identity and the limited access to capital can challenge the identity perception of the learner. Participant 1, is unable to receive help from social power networks and sourcebooks. Even his teacher does not guide him or provide him enough help in language learning. So, he is unable to develop a sense of belonging to the target community and identity construction.

The main focus of our teachers was to get good marks in the final exams. They always pushed us to follow their instructions without asking a question.

His discussion clearly states that the role of the teacher cannot be ignored in language-learning classrooms. Under the guidance of language teachers, the learners develop the connection with their desired identity that they want to build in the imagined vision. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) have named this connection the future self of the learners. Similarly, Hadfield and Dörnyie (2013) have stated that developing the connection with vision can provide the only and the most significance to form any purposive and beneficial learning environment and practices, which allows them to bring change and guides learners "reduce the gap between [their] present and ideal self" (p. 12).

For him, the overall English language learning situation remains constant till he has passed the first semester when he meets his new teacher of English who is very supportive, kind, knowledgeable, and helpful. He has helped all the students to learn more enthusiastically and worked hard to score high. But after a few weeks, the class was shifted to another teacher and the students have lost their interest in English learning. As Participant 1 states,

The class was purely teacher-centered; no one was allowed to talk freely. The teacher did not answer the question properly. She always passed negative remarks in the class to all the boys and girls. Mostly the students bunked that class and preferred to spend time in the cafe.

The learner is unable to utilize his/her current strengths without developing different level of emotional and social connections with other in the world outside. Moreover, it is understood that the emotional capital of any person is finite and the rate of failure and success of his/her is dependent on the way they invest in it (Fannin, 2018). In the formal settings of language learning, the learners' association and social connection with each other their interaction with the teacher, and how they are keeping their interaction can affect their success rate and achievement (Ghafarpour et al., 2018). Similarly, students get benefits from the teacher's capital if they are familiar with and have good interaction with the teacher. Learners' disgust with English language learning and the instructor touch its highest point when the final scores are told at the end of the semester. In this regard, P1 says that: "Our English scores are unexpectedly low". The negative scores may cause unmotivated behavior, lack of investment, and confidence in the learners' overall attitude. According to Falout (2012), low scores may produce the highest level of demotivation. It can be observed in the case of P1 as he has bunked the classes and does not want to meet that instructor again. It is worth to note that the experiences of language learners are very crucial because these experiences design and redesign the learning objectives and accomplishments and make them clear to help them to shape their identity. Consequently, the social and cultural ground realities which are directly associated with the identity of the learners affect student's identity in the classroom settings and the world outside. It should

be taken seriously by the teachers and should pay a deep awareness and concentration on learners' diverse potentials, principles, individualities, opinions, emotions, fears, and apprehensions (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

P1 Investment in Language Learning

He is good at reading and writing which is the main focus in almost all the EFL classes (Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010), as compared to the other skills (listening and speaking). Concerning English language sub-skills, though he has a large vocabulary set he is not satisfied with it because for him pronunciation is not important as everyone speaks differently in his or her style. Keeping this in mind, it is clear that the identity of the learner is not dependent on proficiency in any of the skills or sub-skill rather it is the amount of investment which counts that the learners make in learning each skill.

The conscious attempts to bunk classes during the sessions are the result of the teacher's negative remarks and lack of support from the side of the teacher as; "the tendency to put off or completely avoid an activity under one's control" (Stöber & Joormann, 2001, p. 50). When P1 is inquired about his sitting position in the classroom, he states that I am naughty and the best place in class is the last row and teachers always demand much from those who sit at the front. In this way, he could not get much attention and importance from the teacher.

Keeping all these in view, the present researchers strongly state that student centered approach allows the learners to invest and form a desired identity that is related to their future identities. It is clear from the P1 story that different forms of capital are required to shape and build the desired identity. Certainly, language instructors should motivate the language learner to facilitate learners' communicative proceedings for using the language. They can also allow the learners to invest their efforts in the promotion and understanding of the English language (Jung, 2011).

At the end of the interview, P1 showed me a series of language activities after the completion of the first semester, from where he started learning English vocabulary and sentence structure. His interview sessions reveal that he is not getting any beneficial help from the book as well. The collected data show that in his learning there is a gap concerning the model of investment. Temporal capital is required to cover the gap because it determines the success and failure of the language learners. For Participant 1, the English language learning process is not smooth and constant because he does not give appropriate time and does not follow a scheduled timetable for language learning. He also claims that he studies late at night which is not a favorable time. He believes that his previous teachers and university teachers have not dedicated their time and energy to the learning process. In his case, his efforts to learn are purely based on instrumental motivation and he has not got enough chance from powerful institutions such as, parents, school administration, and instructors to fully invest in it. As a language learner, different factors, such as learners' age, academic approach, and practices at different levels of learning are necessary for learning. It is also obvious that the role of temporal capital is very important in the process of learning.

Participant 2

The other participant is a female student of 20 years. She is the only daughter of her parents and her two brothers are not highly educated as their parents, but settled in abroad. She belongs to a well-off family and lives in the same city where she is getting her early education. During the interview, she used Urdu and English to convey her thoughts and opinions.

P2 Learning of English

In her brothers' opinion, learning English will open the door to success and a better future for her. From her childhood, she was admitted to a private school. The school pays much attention to the English language and soon she becomes interested in English language learning.

The environment of the school matters a lot. If we get positive responses from the teacher, we will work hard to improve our mistakes.

She is a very regular and active user of social media and soon she started making friends around the globe and started communicating with them. It helps her to learn English in a real-life context. By spending time on the internet, she has learned from one of her friends to watch animated movies to improve her language.

In the present age of technology, we can directly communicate with the native speaker. It allows us to understand their culture, living style, and language style.

As she enters University, her first semester is a phase of struggle like other students but soon she catches the attention of her class teacher through her communication style. She also urges her to speak and practice the language. Her interest in movies increases her interest in language learning and it also provides a platform for practicing and learning language. Watching English movies provides her wider stance for learning and developing her English language competence. As endorsed her English teacher, she regularly watches the animated movies and writes every single sentence in the notebook carefully. To understand their accent and vocabulary bank, she practices the conversation several times and this activity helps her to attain correct pronunciation unknowingly. After writing the complete movie scenes, she finds out the meanings of new words which leads her to the learning of new vocabulary as well. Moreover, according to P2, listening and writing which are considered the passive skills are the most important skills to learn the language properly and these skills play a vital role in her journey of English language acquisition.

Every individual has a different style of learning a language. Few start from listening and speaking and few start from reading and writing. In all types of learning styles, the role of the teacher is very important. My teachers always guided me. They were always supportive.

Now in the second semester, she is a good student of English and has fluency in English. Although she is of the view that now she does not have enough time to practice different activities but she still manages to do them at weekends to stay in contact. Language learning is an ongoing process for her, scarcity of time does not avert her from learning the English language and emerging language skills. Therefore, she has adjusted herself to the coming circumstances and tracked her experience of developing skills through the English series, as these clips take less time.

Participant 2 Investment in Language Learning

In her opinion, language is only a source to connect people. As in her words: "Knowing a language makes you more confident to connect and make relations with more people and do more activities. It shapes your personality as a team player. We cannot communicate our feelings, thoughts, and opinions without knowing a language". It allows any learner to get benefits from different power networks; and class teachers.

She is of the view that she has developed an emotional connection with the language and focuses on the affective utility of the language. The interview reflects that for her, language learning is a thrilling and life-changing practice that helps her to shape their

personality and identity. According to her, "Knowing a language minimizes the role of power and it gives one an equal position in communication, except language and its origin". It is the only language that opens the door to foreign friends and literature for her. It is the source of connection with other people globally to understand the situation all over the world, to get connected with other people, to build relations around the globe to understand their ideologies and belief systems in the given community.

The EFL language institutions have different levels of issues. According to P2, in the classroom context, it is not possible to learn native-like proficiency because the teacher writes things on the board and asks them to write them in the notebooks and memorize the rules rather than they ask them to practice them in the class in front of them. Luckily, P2 has solved this problem on her own by watching movies and understanding their meanings which has resulted in her better understanding and fluency in English language. As mentioned in the P1 case, temporal capital is not available as it is one of the most crucial factors in defining the level of proficiency in second language learning.

As the temporal capital is concerned, the P2 language learning experience is highly appreciated, she started learning from her early education and when she had free time she utilized it to watch movies and chat with foreign friends which resulted in her success in language learning. At the time of her mother tongue acquisition, she had started learning L2 which resulted in her native-like accent. From the study, it is also clear that classroom settings and time are not in the favor of learners to invest in language learning. The classes are mostly overcrowded and teachers do not have enough time to support students' efforts and investment in acquiring the English language. The study of Razmjoo and Mavaddat (2016) makes clear that almost all English language learners have to face temporal issues as one of the most thoughtful challenges in their career in language learning.

The same situation has been observed by both interviewees that they sit in the last row. For P2, she does not want to show off her skills by sitting in the first row, so she likes to sit at the end but gives her best in class. For her, she is giving the chance to other average students to sit at the first and catch the attention of the teachers. Overall, she is the lucky girl of her family, who has gained extra support and from her family, more specifically from her brothers. Additionally, she has highlighted that from the start of learning English brings a positive change in her personality. This process of change is made possible through the use of different power resources such as her family and teachers and the usage of different technological advancements, such as mobile phones, the internet, and computers.

Conclusion

The findings of the present research have highlighted that language learners may invest in language learning at different levels based on their assumed identity for themselves. Learners put great emphasis on capital investment as one of the major forms of investment in their language learning (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The findings of the study also reveal that the careful use of investment in the process of learning can bring desired results as Participant 2 has expressed her strategic plan of language learning through investment. It can be seen in contrast in the case of P1, that lack of temporal investment brings low scores in the final exams. Additionally, the healthy communicative bond between teachers and students in the language classrooms can offer better chances to the learners to get benefits from teachers' various forms of capital

It is obvious from the data that a learner's worth and rigorousness can hamper his/her learning process with the help of investment. The key feature of a consistent investor of language is the one who is always ready to accept the challenge. The learners accept the challenges of language and follow the overall process of learning without any interruption. Likewise, emotional and temporal types of capital are equally important to measure the accomplishment of their investment in language learning. The findings of the

study show that the importance of emotional capital cannot be denied. The process of language learning, it can cause long-term negative effects in the learning process and leads towards learners' counter-motivation. Similarly, healthy relationships with teachers and fellows are also important to get benefit from teacher's capital in language learning. It assists the learners in shaping and forming their visions and hastens the formation of identity.

Recommendations

The present study has discussed the role of learners' investment in Pakistan EFL settings and provides an insight that investment plays an important role in the learning process and identity formation. This study would encourage other researchers to conduct further research in this field. The study also provides insight into the role of imagined identity and imagined community and its relation to investment in EFL settings. Future researchers may also operationalize the construct of investment for the quantitative research design.

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