Cultural Identity among Iranian EFL Learners: the Development of a Cultural Identity Questionnaire

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Abstract: Learning English as a foreign language in Iran has provided a novel learning milieu for language learners, giving them the capability to create the dialogue between their home culture and the culture of the foreign language they are learning. The current study aims to investigate the level of Iranian EFL learners' cultural identity. To do so, the researchers developed a questionnaire through extensive readings of the literature on language, culture and identity at both national and international levels. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was utilized. The reliability of all the items in the questionnaire was estimated as 0.78. To measure the validity of the questionnaire, Exploratory Factor Analysis through PCA was performed, demonstrating five underlying factors of Iranian Cultural Identity. Then, the questionnaire was administered to 494 language learners in the context of Iran. The analysis of the data revealed that nearly 68% of the Iranian language learners in the study possess a moderate level of cultural identity.

Keywords: Language, Culture, Identity.

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Introduction

It is perceived as an irrefutable issue that no human community can ever continue living without a culture and there is no such a thing as human nature independent of culture. Therefore, any human society, regardless of its size or population, tries to conform to certain sets of cultural values and norms. This culture somehow determines how we see the world around us, directs our attention to whatever considered important in the world we inhabit, and shapes our values and identities. The behavior of the individuals in a society is somehow influenced by the cultural values they hold and acquire.

Whatever the nationality of the people, most people contemplate their own culture as the most standard version and reflect on the other cultures of the world as an amalgamation of odd and bizarre conducts. Once people recognize that their selves are truly influenced by their own culture, they become more willing to admit their own language and culture and a greater willingness will appear to take a step forward in entering into the territory of another language and culture (Valdes, 1986).

Learning English, whether in the form of a holder of an English proficiency certificate or a university degree in English or even that of a mere bilingual, requires diverse degrees of access to cultural knowledge. Apprehending the interconnected nature of the relationship between language and culture is fundamental to the process of learning another language. Pulverness (2003) alleges that due to the incontrovertible increase in the use of English as an international language, cultural content was allowed to flow into language teaching programs. The surge for the use of English and its culture presents new cultural aspects and challenges to the local ones, some of them resulting in an alteration of the language learner's identity.

Learning English as a foreign language in Iran has provided a novel learning milieu for language learners, giving them the capability to create the dialogue between their home culture and the culture of the foreign language they are learning. In other words, learning a foreign language (FL) may encourage the interest in a foreign culture. This intercultural contact is a remarkably crucial and fundamental attribute of learning a new language and has a constructive role in motivating learners to create or maintain identities (Pishghadam, 2011; Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2012). Learning a new language and getting acquainted with its culture have surely multiple influences and impacts on the EFL learners' identity. The process of learning and using a second language affects the students' cultural identity and their sense of belonging to a community. This is mainly because of the notion that identity is embedded in culture and language. Considering the importance of learning English and its

culture in Iran and its impact on identity, introducing a valid questionnaire for measuring Iranian cultural identity can be a fruitful endeavor.

The results of this study can be helpful on a number of grounds. First and foremost, it explored what components form cultural identity of language learners of different genders, different fields of study, and different language proficiency levels. In addition, the findings will shed some light on issues related to Iranian English language learners' cultural identity. The results can reveal how individual language learners from different language proficiency levels, genders, and fields of study can depict differing levels of cultural identity in Iran. And last but not the least, an understanding of our language learners' cultural identity can be useful to our language teachers, materials developers, teacher trainers, and others involved in language education to make judicious decisions for the sake of any kinds of improvements in our language education system.

Review of the Literature

People have always been eager to live in a community with others. This community might incorporate your family, neighbors, and workplace and university friends. Human beings usually identify themselves culturally with a variety of these communities and every individual, no matter where he lives, is affected by his family, community, country, and language.

Language and culture interact as they are sternly linked to each other. While cultural elements are transferred through the medium of language, language itself describes, analyzes and evaluates cultural components in return. Understanding one requires the comprehension of the other. The emergence of these two entities seems rather simultaneous in human history (Kun, 2013). Language and culture are so intricately and strictly interwoven that we can hardly separate one from the other without one being completely defined. Scholars reflect on culture and language as two integrated, elaborately interwoven and interdependent entities which cannot be viewed as two separate and discrete ones (Shahsavandi, Ghonsooly & Kamyabi, 2010). Brogger (1992) (cited in Risager, 2007, p.132) believes that "culture is language and language is culture".

Recently, the pace of establishing greater and closer contacts among different communities and societies has been dramatically amplified. With regard to the choice of language for the purpose of interaction among these inter-related and inter-dependent nations, English has been awarded a special attention among languages. English has become the lingua franca for both spoken and written communication across nations (McKay, 2002).

Apprehending the interconnected nature of the relationship between language and culture is fundamental to the process of learning another language. Learning English, unquestionably, requires diverse degrees of access to cultural knowledge. Pulverness (2003) alleges that due to the incontrovertible increase in the use of English as an international language, cultural content was allowed to flow into language teaching programs.

Learning any human languages is surely linked with their cultural norms and values which normally define an individual's identity. While various language learning studies in the 1970s and 1980s defined language learners' identities as fixed, static personalities, styles, and motivations, more recent research on identity conceptualizes identities as fluid, context-dependent, and context-producing, in particular historical and cultural circumstances (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Cultural identity is correspondingly formed when the members of a community constantly follow the same sets of social norms and rules. A variety of factors such as ancestry, social class, educational level, family, language, political opinions and profession might have an observable influence on an individual's cultural identity (Hejazi & Fatemi, 2015). Cultural identity as a formative characteristic of a particular culture will function as a significant parameter which provokes different responses to this increase in the use of English all over the world.

Cohen and Kennedy (2000) mentioned three possible cultural responses to the rise in the use of English all around the world: selection, adaptation, and resistance. Some nations might only 'select' those aspects of processes which best fit their own requirements, wants, and circumstances. Some people make an attempt to 'adapt' themselves to the new rules or values. While other cultures do their best to 'resist' processes of global homogenization as they try to stick to their own system of norms and values. In these many cases, however, most communities and nations can become proud of and prefer their own specific system of rules, values, and norms and preserve their own identity. People in every nation defend their norms and values against the external forces. The degree and appearance of such resistance will be different across diverse nations and regions. The upsurge in the use of English, in this context, is mostly considered as a threat to these local system of norms and local identities (Cohen & Kennedy, 2000).

English language learning has established a new learning environment for learners to improve their own abilities. In this regard, the spread of English as a lingua franca has resulted in increasing the number of people who are actually eager to learn it around the world and Iran as well. Consequently, the rise in the use of and the need for English has

raised certain potential sociolinguistic and sociological concerns. Mitchell & Myles (2004) characterized language learning process as essentially social and also regarded the language learner as essentially a social being, whose identity is continually reconstructed through the processes of engagement with the L2.

Experimental Background

The expansion of cultural studies, investigations on identity, and the social and cultural revolutions in second language acquisition (SLA) have motivated language scholars at all levels to gradually open their minds to a notion of culture and identity beyond their homeland. Therefore, the cultural dimensions of the rise in the use of English have become a central concern of recent debates. These investigations and debates have tried constantly to add significance to identity and culture issues (Khatib & Rezaei, 2013).

Demont-Heinrich (2005) investigated the upsurge in the use of English in multilingual Switzerland and its potential impacts and bearings on Swiss collective (national) identity. He also reflected on the ways in which English's spread might influence the ethic of multilingual reciprocity in the Swiss and global contexts. The findings indicated that multilingualism has survived and thrived in Switzerland precisely because that nation state has legally and normatively codified the protection of linguistic particularism and established multilingualism as a basic component of its national identity.

Al-Hassan (2009) also discussed how globalization has produced drastic and strong changes in the society in terms of social, cultural values, political rather than purely economic and ethical changes. Further, he explored what globalization has brought to the society with reference to culture and language identity. When language crosses its national borders, it carries with it its culture, which will result in biculturalism in language – the state of a foreign culture existing side by side with the native culture.

Pishghadam and Sadeghi (2011) examined the role of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) on teachers' access to social as well as cultural capital in their home culture attachment, using Bourdieu's theories in the sociology of education as frames of reference. The results of their investigation revealed that although teachers' home culture attachment was not affected by their total social/cultural capital, access to two components of social/cultural capital, namely, social competence and social solidarity, had a major impact on teachers' home culture attachment. That is, cultural competence negatively influenced their home culture attachment.

Khajavi and Abbasian (2011) investigated the cultural pattern of English language materials being instructed at schools of Iran to see whether these materials are suitable in terms of national identity and globalization. Content analysis of materials indicated that the authors have evaded cultural matters of foreign countries. Consequently, textbooks are commonly neutral in terms of culture.

Sarani and Ganji Khoosf (2014) investigated the possible connection between EFL teachers' home-culture attachment and its underlying components with their teaching autonomy. To do so, two questionnaires were administered to a group of 80 male and female EFL teachers in Iran. Gathered data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient. Finally, results of the study revealed that there is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' home culture attachment and teaching autonomy. The most important outcome of this study is bringing about awareness for EFL teachers, EFL learners, EFL syllabus designers, teacher educators and policy makers of the fact that to what extent Iranian EFL teachers' attachment to their home culture can affect different aspects of their language teaching. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of affective factors especially teaching autonomy on EFL teachers' culture attachment which lightens the way for EFL syllabus designers, teacher trainers and policy makers.

Amirian & Bazrafshan (2016) made an attempt to measure the effect of cultural identity and attitudes on pronunciation learning of Iranian EFL learners. To achieve this goal, they chose 60 Iranian EFL high school learners in Sabzevar aging between 16 and 18 years of old. The research instruments were Language Learning Attitude Questionnaire and the Cultural Identity Questionnaire to measure the participants' attitudes and cultural identity towards pronunciation learning. The findings revealed that the participants hold positive attitude towards pronunciation learning. In addition, cultural identity has a meaningful association with learning.

Mohammadi & Izadpanah (2019) investigated the relationship between Iranian learners' sociocultural identity and their EFL learning. To do so, 360 intermediate and advanced English learners in Zanjan were selected based on the cluster sampling method. The participants took the Oxford Quick Placement Test to ensure homogeneity. Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (Cheek, 2013) was used to check the level of learners' sociocultural identity. The analyses of the data have shown that there was a negative relationship between learners' sociocultural identity and their EFL learning.

However, concerning these investigations and debates, the mainstream research on culture and identity in language learning is basically qualitative in nature and these studies are often done with a restricted number of participants at a small scale. As a result, they are bereft of generalizability. Generalizability is the extension of research results, assumptions and conclusions from a study performed on a sample population to the population at large. To eradicate this problem, the researcher adopted a larger scale to include more participants with diverse demographic features such as distinctive fields of study, numerous second language proficiency levels and from both genders (Khatib & Rezaei, 2013).

These studies also neglect the sociocultural aspects of identity as a social/cultural phenomenon and have not informed the contextual and local needs (Kress, 1989; Mahboudi & Javdani, 2012; Mirdehghan, Hoseini Kargar, Navab & Mahmoodi, 2011). To reach a fuller and a more vivid picture of language learning process and to yield more reliable and generalizable research results, this study included more contextualized factors related to the Iranian context. Local theories and studies were intentionally embedded to form the link between this study and the previous ones, and whenever it was allowed, a critical approach was taken.

Having considered the above-mentioned issues afflicting our field researches, this study was targeted to investigate the status of a sociocultural phenomenon in language learning, i.e. cultural identity, among Iranian EFL learners. To achieve more reliable findings for the sake of this purpose, the researchers embarked on developing a more contextualized questionnaire which is devoid of the above shortcomings.

Therefore, the following research questions were formulated to achieve the goals of the present study.

Research Question 1: What are the main components of Iranian language learners' cultural identity?

Research Question 2: Is the Iranian Language Learners' Cultural Identity Questionnaire developed in this study a reliable and valid data collection instrument?

Research Question 3: What is the degree of Iranian language learners' cultural identity measured through the cultural identity questionnaire? Is that low, moderate, or high?

Methodology

Participants

Since the main purpose of this study was to investigate EFL learners' level of cultural identity, sampling the best representative group was a difficult task. For the large-scale survey, stratified random sampling was employed. Tehran University, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Beheshti University, Modarres University, Alzahra University, and Kharazmi University were selected as the strata. The total number of participants for the survey was 494 Iranian EFL learners from different age groups, genders, language proficiency levels, fields of study, and holding different academic degrees. The reason for doing so was to accomplish diversity and hence generalizability of the findings.

Research Procedures

Since the purpose of the study was to investigate the cultural identity of Iranian English language learners, the researcher developed a questionnaire including the questions directed toward the main construct under study, i.e., the cultural identity of Iranian EFL learners. Just prior to the large-scale administration of the developed questionnaire, it had been piloted to 50 participants and also its reliability and validity were confirmed. It should be noted here that, during the large-scale survey phase, the questionnaire was administered to a group of 494 Iranian EFL learners with different genders, different fields of study, and different levels of language proficiency.

Questionnaire Development

In order to develop a reliable and valid questionnaire, the researchers ran through the following stages.

Step One: Item Accumulation and Item Generation

After reviewing the related literature on identity (Hogg, 2003; Norton, 1997, 2000, 2008) and culture (Kramsch, 2001; McKay, 2003), the researchers, first, went through the process of generating a pool of items. To do so, the researchers utilized content sampling and multi-item scales. The researchers also checked and went over numerous questionnaire in the literature (Khatib & Rezaei, 2013; Pishghadam, Hashemi, Bazri, 2013; Pishghadam & Sadeghi, 2011) to have a representative sample of the content to be included in the questionnaire.

In order to create the items, the researchers made an attempt to produce simple and short items using natural language away from any loaded and ambiguous words. The researchers also tried to generate more items, in case some of them might be omitted in the

pilot study stage. Furthermore, the researchers attempted to avoid double-barreled questions, that is, those questions which ask two or more issues in a single item. The researchers additionally tried to avoid to make the questionnaire too long. During the process of item generation, the researchers endeavored to include the same number of positively and negatively worded items as to eschew any bias and, consequently, provided a balanced number of positively and negatively worded items.

Step Two: Item Checking with Experts

After creating the questionnaire items in the previous stages, the researchers asked a panel of 4 experts on sociology to check its intelligibility and accuracy. The panel of experts were requested to rate the items of the questionnaire based on a Likert-type scale from one to four. According to this scale, they commented on the items as 'Not important to be included in the survey', 'Somehow important to be included', 'Important to be included' and finally 'Extremely important to be included in the survey'. These experts were further requested to pen in a final decision on the item by selecting either 'omit' or 'keep' the item as the final decision on each item. The results of the responses obtained from this step reduced the items from 99 to 54 items. Accordingly, 45 items were discarded due to a number of reasons mentioned by the panel including the redundancy, ambiguity, length and irrelevance of the items. As a general rule in this study, items which received more than 70% of acceptability were kept for the next step. The criteria to keep an item or omit it from the questionnaire were based on the panel of experts' opinions.

Step Three: Designing the Rating Scales

Likert scale was utilized in this study as the most popular and widely used scale. The researchers made use of six options including strongly agree, agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, disagree and strongly disagree. The researchers elected a six-option scale since reviewing the literature on questionnaire development (e.g. Dörnyei, 2010; Khatib & Rezaei, 2013) had shown that Iranians tend to act conservatively when they are answering a questionnaire and might mostly select 'no idea: undecided' in some seemingly sensitive items. As a result, six-option type was selected so that the respondents could not hedge. To score the items, 'strongly agree' received six points, 'agree' five points, 'slightly agree' four points and so on. Scoring was reversed for the negatively worded items.

Step Four: Designing the Personal Information Part

In this questionnaire, the personal demographic information consisted of information about gender, language proficiency level, education level, and field of study. The personal

information section was put at the end of the questionnaire because putting this section at the beginning of the questionnaire might negatively influence the respondents' responses.

Step Five: Designing the Instructions

At the stage of designing the instruction, both the general and specific instructions were made based on previous questionnaires in the literature.

Step Six: Item Translation and Revision

Having gone through the revisions and modifications noted by the panel of experts, the researchers translated the items into Persian. This had been done for the sake of the participants from different language proficiency levels. Two Persian Literature teachers, both MA in Persian Language and Literature from Tehran University were asked to edit the Persian version of the questionnaire and make it standard Persian.

Step Seven: Initial Piloting and Item Analysis

The respondents for the pilot study were informed that their information and responses would be kept anonymous so that they would feel comfortable and stress-free to answer to the potentially sensitive items in the questionnaire. The title of the questionnaire, that is, Iranian Cultural Identity Questionnaire, was removed during the administration because it might have influenced the participants' responses. The personal information section, consisting of gender, educational level, language proficiency level, and field of study, was initially generated as open-ended in the pilot questionnaire, but later turned into pre-determined categories to ease later analyses.

At this point, the questionnaire was administered for an initial piloting. The questionnaire included 54 items. Attempts were made to administer the questionnaire to 50 students similar to the target population for which the questionnaire was designed. The feedbacks were very helpful in omitting some of the items and modifying some of the others. Hence the remaining questionnaire included 27 items.

Step Eight: Reliability Index

To measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire in this study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was employed. The questionnaire at this stage consisted of 27 items and was administered to 209 Iranian English language learners. The results for the Cronbach's Alpha showed that the internal consistency of the whole questionnaire was 0.78 (Statistical Procedures and findings are presented in the Results Section).

Step Nine: Validation

Face validity, content validity and construct validity were investigated as the main types of validity for questionnaire validation in the current study. As response, predictive, and concurrent validities were not applicable in this study, they were not investigated (For detailed statistical information refer to the Results Section).

Step Ten: The Whole Questionnaire

Having gone through all the previous rigorous steps, the final questionnaire was finalized with two main parts. Part one included the questionnaire items and part two enquired about the respondents' demographic information including their gender, language proficiency level, education degree, field of study, and email address.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

After developing the questionnaire and confirming its reliability and validity, it was administered to 494 Iranian English language learners across universities in Tehran. The questionnaires were mostly administered through hand. The questionnaire was also uploaded on www.docs.google.com and the respondents filled out the questionnaire online. The data analyses gave descriptive statistics of the 494 Iranian EFL learners filling out the questionnaire about their cultural identity. So, the main statistical methods in this stage were descriptive statistics.

Results

Statistical Procedures and Findings (Research Questions One and Two)

Regarding the first research question, five components were found to constitute Iranian EFL learners' cultural identity, based on step eight and nine of the Methodology section. These components are, namely, Religion, Arts, Media, Persian Language and Literature, and Globalization.

Concerning the second research question, the findings from reliability and validity measurement sections revealed that the Iranian Language Learners' Cultural Identity Questionnaire developed in this study is a reliable and valid data collection instrument.

The statistical procedures concerning these two research questions along with the findings are elaborated in more details below.

Reliability

To measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire in this study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was employed. According to DeVilles (2003, as cited in Pallant, 2007), 0.70 is

regarded as the ideal Cronbach's value and this value can be different based on the number of respondents and the number of items in the questionnaire. Dörnyei (2010) believes that 0.60 is an acceptable measure for the reliability index of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire at this stage consisted of 27 items and was administered to 209 Iranian English language learners. The results for Cronbach's Alpha showed that the internal consistency of the whole questionnaire was 0.78. Items which seemed to reduce the reliability were intentionally kept intact for the researchers thought that those items were vital and crucial and the fact that an acceptable level of reliability was already met.

Table 1 indicates the six components in the questionnaire and their related items and reliability indices.

Table 1. *Questionnaire Components, Their Related Items, and Their Reliability Indices*

1	Nationality	1	Q1: It's always interesting for me to go to Iranian historical places.	0.829
		2	Q2: I like local Iranian clothes.	
		3	Q3: Iran has a very old and original culture and civilization.	
		4	Q8: I think Iranian culture is richer than western culture.	
2	Religion	5	Q11: The basic goals of human life should have a religious basis.	0.899
		6	Q13: Human society needs religious education.	
		7	Q14: Religious laws and ordinances are consistent with human nature.	
		8	Q17: I enjoy attending religious ceremonies.	
		9	Q18: My general attitude to life is based on my religious beliefs.	
3	Art	10	Q19: I enjoy watching Iranian arts and craft.	0.846
		11	Q20: Persian films are full of interesting and informative concepts.	
		12	Q22: Watching Iranian films is dull for me.	
		13	Q23: I enjoy following the works of Iranian artists.	
		14	Q24: Iranian films are much more informative than western films.	
		15	Q27: I enjoy the Iranian architecture.	
4	Persian Language & Literature	16	Q28: I think Persian literature is much richer than western literature.	0.794
		17	Q29: I love Persian much more than English.	
		18	Q33: In my opinion, English is more beautiful and sweeter than Persian.	
		19	Q36: I like reading poems from Iranian poets.	
5	Media	20	Q37: The media (the Internet, TV, newspaper, etc.) are an important part of my life.	0.896
		21	Q39: I use Internet services like email, chat, search engines, etc.	
		22	Q40: I spend a lot of my free time on social networks such as Telegram, Instagram, etc.	
		23	Q43: At night, I usually watch TV series on domestic / satellite TVs.	

	24	Q46: I enjoy chatting with and encountering people from other cultures.	
6 Globalization	25	Q47: I'm not afraid of living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.	0.974
	26	Q48: I am certain that I can live in a different and new culture.	
	27	Q54: The country's social, economic, and political and etc. situation is positively affected by the process of globalization.	

Validity

Face validity, content validity, and construct validity were investigated as the main types of validity for questionnaire validation in the current study. As response, predictive, and concurrent validities were not applicable in this study, they were not investigated.

To ensure the face validity of the questionnaire, the researchers tried to employ a good layout, font type, margin, etc. Successively, the face validity of the questionnaire was met by considering these significant issues and checking them with the previously validated questionnaires in the literature (Khatib & Rezaei, 2013; Pishghadam, et al., 2013; Pishghadam & Sadeghi, 2011).

In order to establish the content validity of the questionnaire, the researchers asked the panel of experts on sociology, as discussed above, to judge how far the items were representative of an Iranian cultural identity. Following the experts' comments on the wording and the interpretation of the items, the researchers implemented some changes. These two kinds of validity, that is, face and content validity, were investigated prior to the reliability phase.

To investigate the construct validity, two procedures were employed. During the first stage, the questionnaire was checked for its congruency with the theories in the literature regarding cultural identity. The aim of this stage was achieved by iteratively checking the items with the researches in the literature. During the second stage, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were used to statistically check the validity.

It needs to be mentioned that a set of criteria must be met before running factor analysis. The first step in factor analysis is to assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Pallant (2007, p. 180) believes that two criteria must be met to ensure the suitability of the data for factor analysis; sample size and the strength of association among the variables (or items). Regarding the sample size, the most conventional view says the larger the better. In this study, the criterion was that of five to ten respondents for each item in the questionnaire. Two hundred and nine participants who took part in the exploratory factor analysis phase met this criterion.

The second criterion which is necessary to run factor analysis is related to the inter-correlations among the items in the questionnaire. Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure determine this criterion. In order for these two options to indicate factorability for the data, Bartlett's test of sphericity should be significant, that is, $p<0.05$ and KMO index that ranges from 0 to 1 should not be below 0.6; otherwise, the data will not be considered appropriate for running factor analysis. For the current study, as shown in Table 2, the KMO and Bartlett's test results showed that KMO measure was above 0.60 (KMO=0.675) and also the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (p=0.00). These two values assume that there are some significant factors to be extracted from the data.

Table 2. *KMO and Bartlett's Test Results*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.675
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	8998.335
	df	351
	Sig.	.000

Determining the factorability of the data, the researchers chose Principle Components Analysis (PCA) in order to run factor analysis. To decide about the number of factors to be preserved, the Kaiser's criterion was chosen according to which only the eigenvalues of 1.0 and more were selected. For the current questionnaire, the scree plot in Figure 1 indicates 8 factors above eigenvalue 1. The eight factors accounted for 89.87% of the total variance (usually anything over 60% is good in this case). These eight factors accounted for 14.77%, 14.62%, 14.31%, 12.77%, 11.86%, 8.16%, 7.92, and 5.44% of the total variance, respectively.

Figure 1. *Scree Plot*

Variable communalities were greater than 0.30 for all the items. Communality values for this questionnaire ranged from 0.71 to 0.98.

The results of factor analysis based on PCA, as shown in Table 3, indicates that a five factor solution might provide a more suitable grouping of the items in the questionnaire. Some cross-loadings were also observed. Items 2, 3, and 8 which were from the first factor, i.e., 'Nationality', were loaded on the second factor, i.e., 'Religion,' making the researcher rename the factor as 'Nationality and Religion'. Items 19 and 27 were also loaded here as they both contained concepts related to nationality. Some of the other cross-loadings were neglected because they loaded on another factor. After checking the factor loadings, items that do not load highly on any of the factors were to be eliminated from the questionnaire. In this phase of questionnaire administration, question 1 and question 43 were deleted as both were malfunctioning.

Table 3. *Factor Loading based on PCA*

Component Matrix[a]

	Component							
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
q1	.636					.470		
q11			.605					
q13			.513					
q14			.568					
q17			.518					
q18			.495					
q19			.673					
q2			.438					
q20				.692				
q22				.692				
q23				.695				
q24				.682				
q27			.504					
q28							.519	
q29							.534	
q3			.514					
q33							.538	
q36							.474	
q37						.456		
q39						.474		
q40						.472		
q43	.667							
q46		.802						
q47		.804						
q48		.790						
q54		.752						
q8				.487				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. 8 components extracted.

Some other necessary changes were also made including removing some of the items like questions 2, 3, 8, 19, 27 (all from the first factor, i.e., Nationality and Religion), 33, 36 (from Persian Language and Literature) and 43 (from Media) because they showed low factor loadings. The omission of items 2, 3, 8, 19, and 27 made the researchers rename the first factor as "Religion".

Therefore, the five factor questionnaire was found to be a reliable and valid instrument to measure the level of Iranian EFL learners' cultural identity.

Statistical Procedures and Findings (Research Question Three)

Considering the third and the last research question, the respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaire online through personal networks or they were given the paper questionnaires to fill in. The participants were 494 English language learners across Tehran universities (Tehran University, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Beheshti University, Modarres University, Alzahra University, and Kharazmi University). The descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) for gender, field of study, and English language proficiency level of the participants are all tabulated in Table 4.

Table 4. *Frequency of Gender, Proficiency, and Fields of Study*

Gender Frequency		Proficiency Level Frequency						Field of Study Frequency			
Male	**Female**	**Bas**	**El**	**Pre**	**Inter**	**High**	**Ad**	**Lit**	**TEFL**	**Tran**	**Lin**
106	388	0	2	24	93	94	281	223	82	148	41
21.45%	78.54%	0%	0.40%	4.85%	18.82%	19.02%	56.88%	45.14%	16.59%	29.95%	8.29%

As this table presents, 21.45% of the participants are male and 78.54 % others are female. Furthermore, Table 4 shows the language proficiency level of the participants from different genders. As presented in this table, advanced English language learners take the highest number of participation (56.88%) in this study followed by high intermediate (19.02%), intermediate (18.82%), pre-intermediate (4.85%), elementary level (0.40%), and no learners at basic level (0%). Finally, Table 4 shows the fields of the study which the participants from different genders are majoring in. As presented in this table, from among 494 respondents, 223 respondents were studying English Literature, 148 majoring in Translation, 82 studying TEFL, and 41 majoring in Linguistics. In other words, English Literature students took the highest number of participation (45.14%) in this study followed by Translation students (29.95%), then TEFL students (16.59%), and finally linguistics students (8.29%).

The 494 participants filled out the questionnaire either online (almost 23.48%) or by hand (almost 76.51%) in their classes at universities. The questionnaire included 18 items after the validation phase and each item was based on a six-part Likert scale. Table 5 below shows the frequency of the responses to each item on the Likert scale. This table shows how the participants in the study responded to each item in the questionnaire.

Table 5. *Frequency and Percentage of the Responses*

		Completely Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Completely Agree
1	The basic goals of human life should have a religious basis**.**	146	88	45	119	75	21
		29.60%	17.80%	9.10%	24.10%	15.20%	4.30%
2	Human society needs religious education.	97	74	45	133	103	42
		19.60%	15.00%	9.10%	26.90%	20.90%	8.50%
3	Religious laws and ordinances are consistent with human nature.	64	58	70	158	99	45
		13.00%	11.70%	14.20%	32.00%	20.00%	9.10%
4	I enjoy attending religious ceremonies.	157	78	60	123	44	32
		31.80%	15.80%	12.10%	24.90%	8.90%	6.50%
5	My general attitude to life is based on my religious beliefs.	141	76	54	125	70	28
		28.50%	15.40%	10.90%	25.30%	14.20%	5.70%
6	Persian films are full of interesting and informative concepts.	208	116	89	67	8	6
		42.10%	23.50%	18.00%	13.60%	1.60%	1.20%
7	Watching Iranian films is dull for me.	11	50	82	104	105	142
		2.20%	10.10%	16.60%	21.10%	21.30%	28.70%
8	I enjoy following the works of Iranian artists.	48	59	66	188	104	29
		9.70%	11.90%	13.40%	38.10%	21.10%	5.90%
9	Iranian films are much more informative than western films.	196	131	86	58	15	8
		39.70%	26.50%	17.40%	11.70%	3.00%	1.60%
10	I think Persian literature is much richer than western literature.	22	48	70	157	106	91
		4.50%	9.70%	14.20%	31.80%	21.50%	18.40%
11	I love Persian much more than English.	57	72	107	121	83	54
		11.50%	14.60%	21.70%	24.50%	16.80%	10.90%
12	The media (the Internet, TV,	12	28	38	128	170	118
		2.40%	5.70%	7.70%	25.90%	34.40%	23.90%

		Completely Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Completely Agree
	newspaper, etc.) are an important part of my life.						
13	I use Internet services like email, chat, search engines, etc.	2	2	16	46	185	243
		0.40%	0.40%	3.20%	9.30%	37.40%	49.20%
14	I spend a lot of my free time on social networks such as Telegram, Instagram, etc.	10	48	78	139	128	91
		2.00%	9.70%	15.80%	28.10%	25.90%	18.40%
15	I enjoy chatting with and encountering people from other cultures.	3	8	16	55	158	254
		0.60%	1.60%	3.20%	11.10%	32.00%	51.40%
16	I'm not afraid of living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.	17	44	66	103	132	132
		3.40%	8.90%	13.40%	20.90%	26.70%	26.70%
17	I am certain that I can live in a different and new culture.	8	28	63	129	134	132
		1.60%	5.70%	12.80%	26.10%	27.10%	26.70%
18	The country's social, economic, and political and ... situation is positively affected by the process of globalization.	20	25	65	146	142	96
		4.00%	5.10%	13.20%	29.60%	28.70%	19.40%

To answer the study's third research question, the score which a single respondent obtained from the cultural identity questionnaire was computed. As already mentioned, the scales in the questionnaire were ranked from 1 to 6 with strongly disagree at one end of the scale receiving 1 point to strongly agree at the other end receiving 6 points. Therefore, each respondent received a total score from the whole questionnaire. The scores fluctuated between 18 as the minimum score to 108 as the maximum score.

In order to be able to specify the cut-points and criteria for the low, moderate and high groups, the scores had to be classified in a statistically appropriate way. To achieve this aim, the mean and standard deviation were computed. The low, moderate, and high scores were specified by considering the mean and standard deviation. The scores which fell one standard deviation above the mean were considered as the high scores. The scores falling one standard

deviation below the mean were considered as the low scores. And finally, the scores between these two would be the moderate zone.

The results of the questionnaire administration to 494 Iranian EFL learners at universities revealed that the mean score and the standard deviation obtained were 68.25 and 10.01, respectively, based on the SPSS output as shown in Table 6. The minimum and maximum scores were 18 and 108 respectively and the score range was 90 (i.e. 108 - 18= 90). Despite the existence of controversies and debates about the credibility and plausibility of converting attitude scales into interval data, the researchers decided to have interval data for the questionnaire in this study based on the recommended and suggested textbooks and articles in the literature (See e.g. Agresti & Finlay, 1997; Khatib & Rezaei, 2013; Sharma, 1996).

Table 6. *Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Identity based on Respondents' Scores*

Number of Respondents	494
Mean	68.25
Standard Deviation	10.01
Range	90
Minimum	18
Maximum	108

Consequently, the scores between 58.26 and 78.26 were regarded as indicating moderate level of cultural identity and the scores below 58.26 and above 78.26 indicated low and high levels of cultural identity, respectively. To interpret the scores obtained from the questionnaire, the higher the scores are, the higher the participants' level of cultural identity would be. On the other hand, the lower the scores are, the less attached the respondents are to their culture.

Therefore, in order to respond the third research question, the results of the large-scale survey from 494 Iranian English language learners were investigated. The findings indicated that this group of EFL learners in Iran exhibited a moderate level of cultural identity. Table 7 shows the percentages of the participants falling in the low, medium, and high language identity group. As this table shows, of all the respondents in this study 15.6% belonged to the high cultural identity group and 16.6% belonged to the low cultural identity group. Most of the respondents (67.8%) belonged to the moderate cultural identity group.

Table 7. *The Percentage of the Respondents with Specific Level of Cultural Identity*

Cultural Identity Level	Percentage
Low	16.6
Moderate	67.8
High	15.6

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

Discussion of the Findings

The current study consisted of two main phases; the development of a cultural identity questionnaire and the administration of the questionnaire to measure the level of Iranian EFL learners' cultural identity. Here, the findings of each phase are summarized for a quick read.

The results of the first phase of this study were exploratory and statistical in nature. The results of this preparatory and heuristic phase showed that the construct of Iranian cultural identity could be hypothesized to be made of six complimentary elements including *nationality, religion, art, Persian language and literature, media, and globalization*. In order to test the hypothesis, a questionnaire with 27 items was developed and validated. The reliability and validity of this questionnaire was confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha and exploratory factor analysis, respectively. The first factor, i.e., nationality, was later removed because its items were not loaded during the validity investigation. Therefore, the final questionnaire included 18 items on *religion, art, Persian language and literature, media, and globalization* as the main components of Iranian cultural identity.

In the second phase of this study, the questionnaire developed and validated in the previous phase was utilized to collect the data from Iranian EFL learners. The chief intention of the researchers in this phase was to identify the general level of cultural identity of Iranian English language learners. The participants were 494 English language learners from different universities in Tehran. The findings indicated a moderate level of cultural identity on the part of Iranian English language learners. That is, Iranian EFL learners showed an average level of cultural identity awareness and understanding.

In relation to the findings of the study, three types of identity have always been significant in Iranian context, namely, national, religious, and western identities (Karimifard, 2012). Therefore, the components of Iranian identity normally come from these three main cultural realms: Persian, Islamic, and Western (Haghighat, 2012; Shahramnia & Tadayon, 2012; Zahed, 2004).

The first constituent of Iranian cultural identity in this study, i.e., National Identity, stemmed from ancient Iran. The first entirely native dynasty in Iran, the Samanid dynasty, along with the ancient Persian Empire which dates back to 2500 years ago are regarded to be the chief formers of Iranian national identity.

Iranian cultural identity also originated from the Muslim conquest in the mid-7th century. Since then, Islamic identity has had a great impact on Iranian identity. The element

of 'Religion' was first hypothesized in the early stages of questionnaire development but was eliminated to achieve the appropriate validity index.

Individuals in Iran have always been passionate about their language and regard Persian language and its literature as a momentous and principal part of national identity. Consequently, the theories and studies on language and identity (e.g. Block, 2007; Khatib & Rezaei, 2013; Norton, 2000) were consulted because of their influence on cultural identity.

Art is a decent reflection of our identity as it is of the expression of sights, music, fashion, films and designs. We generally show our own identity through the channel of the art we utilize, the music we listen to, the kind of art we admire, the way we decorate our houses and offices, and the films we watch. These channels are exactly what conveys our identity (Stainton, 2001).

Media such as television, radio, print, etc. are a fundamental constituent of young people's lives. They have provoked a significant force increasing the pace of the development of society in the last two decades. These means of communication have been regarded as influential on people's identity (Thomas, Briggs, Hart, & Kerrigan, 2017).

The third important factor, Modern (Western) Identity, originated from the encounter with the West and modernity. The Constitutional movement at the turn of the twentieth century was conceived to be the most significant factor in paving the way for Iranians to become familiar with modernity. Moreover, the phenomenon of globalization has been making the world smaller and the nations closer to one another through the exchange of goods, produces, information, careers, knowledge and culture. Globalization and its impact on language learning issues (Coupland, 2010; Graddol, 1997) were also taken into consideration in this study.

Iran has long been following the ideas of modernism in nearly all aspects of education. There exist very rare instances of postmodernism when it comes to conservative, centralized educational system in Iran. All the main decisions are made by the authorities in the government and their policies are put into practice by schools and teachers, whose voices have never been heard. Here, a one-size-fit-all policy is dominant which creates an atmosphere in which individual differences are overlooked. The principal reason behind this policy is to unify all students through the process of global decisions making. Students are required to memorize, repeat and reiterate the opinions of their teachers and books. Teachers are only the conveyers or performers of the government educational policies. There exists no room for students and teachers to reflect and display their ideas and abilities. Holding high-

stakes tests, mostly at the end of each year, are also very common in Iran. These tests are very influential and can affect the future life of the students.

English Language is regarded as a foreign language for it is only spoken in the class. It is compulsory for Iranian students to study English for 6 years during their high school period before university. They can also pursue their interest in English by going to language institutes. Learning English and acquiring a native-like accent is well respected and admired among Iranian students and teachers. This attitude toward English and its learning has made language teachers compel and put too much pressure on their language learners to have correct use of English. Having denigrated and devalued their native culture and appreciated the English language and culture, language teachers put burden on the students' shoulders, moving them toward more distance from their own language and culture, resulting in great levels of deculturation (Pishghadam, 2007; Pishghadam & Kamyabi, 2009, Pishghadam & Navari, 2009).

Teaching English in Iran in an era of globalization poses complex questions for both teachers and learners. Nowadays, English is being studied, taught, and used as an international language in which learners learn the language as an additional means of wider communication. When it comes to English education, globalization fundamentally impacts the form of English and the method through which it should be taught in language classes. According to McKay (2003), the development of English as an International Language (EIL) has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of speakers of English and a shift in the cultural basis of the language. It affects English in terms of how it is used by its speakers and how it relates to culture. The dominance of native language and its culture and its speakers in the context of ELT pedagogy has been critically challenged. It seems that the time has arrived to recognize the multicultural context of English use and to close the eyes to a native speaker model of research and instruction. This generates the opportunities for the local educators to take ownership of English and the manner in which it is taught (McKay, 2003).

Implications of the Findings

Based on the results of the study, Iranian English teachers and instructors are suggested to apply some changes to their attitudes toward English language and its learning. This seems probable if they embrace and adopt postmodern views such as World Englishes. They must educate and motivate learners to be proud of their own culture, paving the way for the language learners to enrich their native culture. The learners must be given the awareness that

learning a foreign culture is not going to be at the expense of losing their native language. They only need to be sensitive to the distinctions between the two cultures, adopting better aspects of foreign culture in a way that their native culture is enriched and promoted.

Language textbook writers in Iran must also prepare themselves to make use of more local materials. Their textbooks must equally contain both native and foreign cultural aspects, diminishing the chances of deculturation.

Iranian syllabus designers need to be aware of the language learners' age when presenting them with cultural aspects of the target language. Introducing all aspects of a target culture to all learners from diverse ages might endanger those language learners who have not mastered their native culture completely.

Lastly, language policy makers in Iran need to present practical and theoretical bases for the preservation and enrichment of the native culture and the elimination of any danger of exposing the learners to the dominant English culture.

Conclusions

Kramsch (2001) mentioned that people who identify and categorize themselves as members of a special social group develop certain ways of viewing the world through their interactions with other members of the same group. These views are further reinforced and strengthened through institutions such as family, school, workplace, etc. The study of culture during the foreign language classes might enhance and improve the learners' motivation and attitudes towards language learning. Language learners must gain knowledge about their own culture and also learn about different cultures around the world. By training language learners in comparing and contrasting different elements of culture, we can help them develop cultural awareness and reflect upon the values, expectations and traditions of others (Salazar & Carballo, 2011).

In conclusion, instead of strictly following some of the Core countries' norms and cultural ideas, English can be applied to represent and embody cultural features of wide range of countries all around the world. American and British varieties are usually the only varieties of English which English global coursebooks tend to introduce, creating the impression that these are the only correct varieties. Such an approach is not only imprecise but also can produce negative effects on the language learners' attitudes toward other varieties of English. Limited amounts of exposure to diverse varieties of English in the classroom may generate misunderstanding or resistance when learners are faced with

different types of English users or uses outside of classroom. The use of English as an international language exclusively among nonnative speakers is believed to be much less represented than that involving native speakers (Graddol, 1997; Smith, 1983). It seems extremely critical to make the language learners understand that real language proficiency, as Widdowson (2003) mentioned, "is when learners are able to take possession of the language, turn it to their advantage, and make it real for themselves" (p.42). This way, learners learn to respect their language and culture.

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