

An Investigation into Iranian English Language Learners' Investment in Imagined Communities¹

Nahid Soltanian², Sadjad University, Mashhad, Iran

Zargham Ghapanchi³, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

Abstract

Unlike communities of practice, previous studies on imagined communities of practice are scarce, yet enlightening. The present research was conducted in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context in order to provide more insight into how language learners perceive their imagined communities (ICs). It was based on Norton's (2000; 2001) conceptualization of ICs which connected the notions of imagination and imagined community to second language (L2) learning and classroom practice. To this end, 945 male and female EFL learners from different cities in Iran belonging to different age groups and language proficiency levels were recruited for this study. The instrument for data collection was a validated 57-item questionnaire. The findings of the study showed that the participants possessed a moderate level of investment in their ICs. Moreover, *t*-test results indicated that there was a significant difference between male and female learners in the extent of investment in their ICs. Furthermore, the significant differences in the extent of investment in ICs were shown between teenagers and adults and between learners in low proficiency (LP) and high proficiency (HP) groups. These findings contribute to more in-depth understanding of language learners' ICs in an EFL context. Pedagogical implications of the study are discussed and some suggestions are made for future research.

Resumen

A diferencia de las comunidades de práctica, los estudios previos sobre comunidades de práctica imaginadas son escasos, pero esclarecedores. La presente investigación se llevó a cabo en un contexto de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) con el fin de proporcionar más información sobre cómo los estudiantes de idiomas perciben sus comunidades imaginadas (CI). Se basó en la conceptualización de los CI de Norton (2000; 2001) que conectaba las nociones de imaginación y comunidad imaginada con el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua (L2) y la práctica en el aula. Para este fin, 945 estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) de diferentes ciudades de Irán pertenecientes a diferentes Para este estudio se reclutaron grupos de edad y niveles de dominio del idioma. El instrumento para la recolección de datos fue un cuestionario validado de 57 ítems. Los resultados del estudio mostraron que los participantes poseían un nivel moderado de inversión en sus circuitos integrados. Además, los resultados de la prueba *t* indicaron que había una diferencia significativa entre los estudiantes masculinos y femeninos en el grado de inversión en sus CI. Además, se mostraron diferencias significativas en el grado de inversión en CI entre adolescentes y adultos y entre estudiantes de grupos de bajo dominio (LP) y de alto dominio (HP). Estos hallazgos contribuyen a una comprensión más profunda de los CI de los estudiantes de idiomas en un contexto de inglés como lengua extranjera. Se discuten las implicaciones pedagógicas del estudio y se hacen algunas sugerencias para futuras investigaciones.

Introduction

Identity, which once was researched in neighboring disciplines, especially psychology, anthropology, and sociology, became an intriguing topic of research among applied linguistics researchers after Peirce (1995) conducted her pivotal research on five adult immigrant language learners in Canada. This research caused a shift in second language acquisition (SLA) from predominantly psycholinguistic approaches to second language (L2) learning to sociological and anthropological aspects of language learning (Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Norton, 2013a).

Norton's (1997; 2000; 2001; Peirce, 1995) research on identity in L2 learning led to the creation of some new concepts including language learner's imagined communities (ICs) and a learner's investment in language learning. The three closely interrelated ideas of identity, investment, and ICs can be helpful in addressing numerous questions to extend our understandings of language learners' experiences (Norton, 2019).

¹ This is a refereed article. Received: 2 November, 2021. Accepted: 25 November, 2022. Published: 24 April, 2024.

² nah.soltanian@sadjad.ac.ir, 0000-0001-9048-0885, Correspondent

³ ghabanchi@um.ac.ir, 0000-0001-8941-5277