1. Kosar University of Bojnord, Bojnord, Iran. *. Corresponding Author.

Email:
mahmoud.fereydoonfar@gmail.com

2. Assistant Professor, Department of English Language, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran.

Email: ali.mn@cfu.ac.ir

.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Keys, Bridges, and Locked Doors: Multimodal Insights into Affordances for and Constraints to Linguistic Investment

Mahmoud Fereydoonfar * 1 ID **, Ali Mansouri Nejad 2** ID

Abstract

This study explored the affordances and constraints shaping Iranian English learners' linguistic investment through a multi-method approach, including interviews, digital ethnography, visual methodologies, and policy analysis. Findings showed that learners are motivated by economic opportunities, intercultural exchange, and social mobility, viewing English as a form of capital enabling access to global networks and professional advancement. However, ideological and pedagogical barriers such as state-promoted Arabic-centered policies, familial resistance, and inadequate resources create significant constraints. Learners navigate these constraints through covert digital practices and alternative strategies, highlighting the tension between individual aspirations and structural limitations. The study underscores the need for policy reforms that reconcile national identity with global linguistic demands and pedagogical approaches that prioritize communicative competence and digital literacy. Limitations include reliance on self-reported data, suggesting avenues for future research on longitudinal investment trajectories. This research contributes to broader discussions on language, power, and identity in contexts of ideological contestation.

Keywords: Linguistic investment, affordances, constraints, capital, ideology, Iran

1. Introduction

The concept of investment in language learning encompasses a range of factors related to learners' dedication to acquiring a second language, including their perceived identities, aspirations for the future, interest in the practices of the L2 community, and subsequent progress in language acquisition (Darvin & Norton, 2018; Kramsch, 2013). The notion of investment was proposed by Norton Peirce (1995) in her investigation of L2 acquisition among adult immigrants in Canada. Her study supplemented prevailing conceptions of motivation in second language acquisition, arguing that the psychological construct of motivation alone is inadequate

to clarify why a student may exhibit pronounced motivation but resist opportunities to speak in contexts characterized by inequality.

Norton (2016) posits that even if a student is highly motivated to learn a language, their progress in language learning may be impeded if they encounter discriminatory, homophobic, racist, or sexist practices in the classroom or community or are positioned as unworthy or incapable. Conversely, learners claiming legitimate positions in these learning contexts can invest in their learning (Darvin, 2019). Given that the construct of investment reflects the socially and historically constructed relationship between the language learner's identity and commitment to learning (Darvin & Norton, 2015; 2017), it holds significant importance in applied linguistics. Therefore, further research is necessary to investigate the impacts of learners' investment on their L2 identity construction and language education.

Iran has implemented conflicting English-related policies across various institutional levels. While demands for English education increased during the Pahlavi Dynasty, after the 1979 Revolution, the new state pursued reductionist policies that emphasized Islamic and Iranian cultural values in foreign language instruction in public schools (Borjian, 2013). Despite the development of new communicatively oriented textbooks, communicative pedagogies have yet to be effectively implemented in public schools (Davari & Iranmehr, 2021). Iranians have instead invested in non-state language institutes as the central hub for communicative English pedagogies, disregarding the restrictive state policies and focusing on meeting the globally oriented demands (Rassouli & Osam, 2019). These conflicting policies have been deemed to offer both supportive and hindering factors in pursuing English education. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to shed light on the primary affordances and constraints that shape the linguistic experiences of Iranian English learners.

2. Background

2.1. Linguistic Investment

The notion of investment, which has gained prominence through the socio-cultural turn in language learning, represents a crucial departure from the research on L2 motivation (Ushioda, 2020). In this contrast, "while motivation is a psychological construct that focuses on conscious and unconscious factors, investment is primarily sociological and focuses on how histories, lived experiences, and social practices shape language learning" (Darvin & Norton, 2021, p. 29). As such, it complements cognitive learning theories by highlighting the socio-cultural and economic conditions that facilitate or impede language education (Norton, 2013). Although learners may demonstrate high levels of motivation, they may still be reluctant to invest in language practices due to socio-economic factors such as social class, gender, and race. Conversely, learners may invest in a language when they anticipate it will provide them with various resources that enhance their social and cultural power (Darvin & Norton, 2017).

This distinction becomes clearer when examined through the lens of *affordances*—environmental opportunities that learners perceive and utilize (Kono, 2009). In language

education, affordances encompass the tangible and intangible resources enabling linguistic communication and investment, ranging from emotions and beliefs to institutional factors like educator expertise and systemic controls (Aronin, 2014; Darvin & Norton, 2015). Darvin and Norton (2015) highlighted *constraints* as barriers that render affordances inaccessible or unrecognized, echoing Singleton and Aronin's (2007) assertion that mere availability of affordances is inadequate; learners must also actively engage with them. This interplay underscores how socio-cultural and structural factors—previously discussed as shaping investment—mediate learners' capacity to harness opportunities for language learning.

In a tripartite investment model, Darvin and Norton (2015) asserted that investment occurs at the intersection of *identity, ideology*, and *capital*. As a multilayered and fluid notion, *identity* is defined as an individual's perception of their relationships to the world and the construction of these relationships across time and space; hence, it can be a site of struggle in the face of opposing language ideologies. Investment and identity are always discussed together because they are interwoven by the same post-structuralist epistemological thread (Norton & Morgan, 2020). Through the analysis of investment, the identities performed and the social worlds occupied by learners are recognized. In Darvin and Norton's (2021) viewpoint, "ideologies are ways of thinking that dominate particular social groups or entities and constitute their practices." (p. 36). These dominant, complex, and ever-changing ways of thinking can organize social entities and regulate criteria for inclusion or exclusion from social groups. Particular ideologies also determine the values assigned to language practices, policies, and curricula. Ideologies frame low-stakes language and literacy practices and privilege or marginalize nationwide language groups or entities. Finally, drawing on Bourdieu (1986; 1991), Darvin and Norton (2015) asserted that the notion of capital can take economic, cultural, and social forms. In this classification, economic capital is understood as owning properties and wealth, cultural capital as having educational credentials, and social capital as benefiting from various social networks. When these capital forms are assigned values by the domineering power dynamics of a society, they are legitimized as symbolic capital. They are then used to occupy various social areas to raise new forms of capital for future use (Bourdieu, 1987).

The empirical studies have revealed that learners actively navigate available linguistic affordances to accumulate capital and negotiate identity. Learners frequently invest with future returns in mind, such as Uzbekistani students in South Korea enhancing their social networks and graduate school prospects through English writing (Zhang & Kim, 2024), or Chinese undergraduates reinterpreting compulsory language enrollment as a valuable opportunity to build cultural capital (Lu et al., 2020). Identity negotiation is another powerful driver, as evidenced by Chinese EMI students who associated English with international identities (Wang & Jiang, 2024) and a Syrian learner who repositioned their identity through learning Chinese despite power imbalances (Xu, 2024). Furthermore, familial and institutional support can create crucial affordances, with private tutoring mitigating cultural capital gaps for a migrant child in

Japan (Chang & Chiang, 2021) and Mexican-American families consciously reinforcing Spanish maintenance to preserve heritage in the U.S (Babino & Stewart, 2019).

Conversely, significant constraints can hinder linguistic investment, often stemming from structural inequalities and discrimination. For instance, Yoo's (2023) study illustrates how racialized discrimination in the UK directly eroded a Korean learner's self-efficacy and willingness to invest. Similarly, structural barriers are evident in Jungyin and Lixia's (2020) research, which showed how investment was directly linked to proficiency thresholds in the study of Korean literature. Faced with such constraints, learners employ strategic, often complex, responses that involve trading off different forms of capital. This is exemplified by a Korean graduate student who deliberately accumulated academic cultural capital for community legitimacy (Lee, 2014) and humanitarian workers who prioritized symbolic capital and solidarity through learning Kurdish, despite its limited economic value (Garrido, 2020). Collectively, such studies underscore a dynamic process wherein constraints trigger strategic identity repositioning, ideological negotiation, and capital conversion. While the affordances and constraints in linguistic investment have been extensively explored in various transnational contexts, the specific dynamics of linguistic investment within the Iranian EFL context remain a significant gap in the literature.

2.2. English Education in Iran

Iran has implemented conflicting English-related language policies across various institutional levels over the past century. The initial acknowledgment of English as the foremost foreign language in Iran was made following the arrival of British oil engineers in the first decade of the 19th century. Subsequent interventions by the United States in Iran's educational, political, and economic systems during the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979) further amplified the demand for English education at all levels (Rassouli & Osam, 2019). In 1950, the first official English education institution in Iran, the Iran-America Society, was established, which authorized numerous American English teachers to teach in Iranian schools and facilitated exchange programs for Iranian students and instructors to study in the United States (Borjian, 2013). The public secondary school English instruction curricula employed situational language teaching (SLT) and graded English series to equip Iranian students with the necessary linguistic capital for a prosperous transnational educational investment (Ekstam & Sarvandy, 2017).

The 1979 Revolution, however, brought about a new momentum. While the Pahlavi Dynasty held a generally favorable view of the worldwide dissemination of English as a tool for modernization, the Islamic Republic pursued reductionist policies in support of local Islamic-Iranian values (Kiany et al., 2011). These inward-looking policies are fully evidenced in the country's official educational documents, such as the Comprehensive Roadmap (2009) and the National Curriculum (2009). For instance, the National Curriculum (2009) highlighted Islamic and Iranian cultural values in foreign language instruction. Consequently, textbooks included only vocabulary, grammar, and reading activities (Sadeghi & Richards, 2016), and the

grammar-translation method was predominantly practiced (Safari, 2017). In addition, the teachers' communicative competence needed to be improved, and the summative assessment system encouraged teachers to teach to the test (Haddad Narafshan & Yamini, 2011). Despite the development of new communicatively-oriented textbooks for junior and senior high schools in 2013 (e.g., Gheitasi et al., 2022), communicative pedagogies have not been effectively implemented due to difficulties such as the inaccessibility of skilled teachers and the exclusion of English culture from textbooks (e.g., Iranmehr & Davari, 2018; Davari & Iranmehr, 2021).

The unfavorable conditions of the public curriculum have led Iranians to invest in non-state language institutes as the central hub for communicative English pedagogies (Rassouli & Osam, 2019; Zarrabi & Brown, 2015). Since the Ministry of Education does not directly oversee the pedagogies and policies of these institutes, they tend to disregard the restrictive state policies and focus instead on meeting the globally oriented demands of learners (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016). As stated by Iranmehr and Davari (2018), "nearly all of them use commercial foreign-published textbooks," which help learners to "have communication in authentic situations, gain enough familiarity with the target language and culture, and a capable assessment system" (p. 75). Only language teachers who are communicatively competent and have participated in enough preservice courses are allowed to teach in these institutes (Ganji et al., 2018).

Some scholars have sought to investigate different aspects of the investment construct within Iran's sociocultural milieu. Soltanian et al. (2018) conducted a study that utilized questionnaire data from a diverse sample of Iranian English learners in both the public and private sectors, revealing a moderate level of investment among participants, with variations across proficiency levels and genders. Moharami and Daneshfar's (2021) ethnographic study in a border city in western Iran reported a high level of investment in learning and using English for social interactions to meet various global requirements, despite no significant differences between teenagers and adults regarding investment levels. In addition, Shahidzade and Mazdayasna's (2022) examination of undergraduate students' identity development through short stories revealed that all participants invested in reading for pleasure without any aspirations for future pedagogical or economic benefits. While these empirical accounts have reported on the level of linguistic investment in diverse academic and nonacademic contexts, the main factors affording and constraining Iranian English learners' investment in learning English remain unknown. Accordingly, the current study aims to explore the affordances for and constraints to linguistic investment among Iranian English learners in response to the following research question:

1.   What affordances contribute to Iranian English learners' investment in learning English?

2.   What constraints hinder Iranian English learners' investment in learning English?

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This study employed a **triangulated qualitative design,** integrating multiple data sources to explore the affordances for and constraints to linguistic investment in the Iranian EFL context. Grounded in **Denzin's (2017)** methodological framework for triangulation, the research combined **semi-structured interviews, written narratives**, and **digital ethnography (Barton & Lee, 2013)** to capture linguistic practices. **Visual methodologies**, including **Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997)** and **metaphorical drawings (Kalaja et al., 2008)**, were also incorporated to uncover affective and symbolic dimensions of investment, while **classroom observations** and **critical policy analysis (Shohamy, 2005)** contextualized findings within institutional and ideological structures. This multi-method approach ensured a holistic understanding of how macro-level policies and micro-level learner agency interact in shaping English language investment in Iran.

3.2. Research Setting and Participants

This study was carried out in three prominent private language institutes in Bojnord, Iran, which offered English courses tailored to different age groups, including preschoolers, children (7-12), adolescents, and adults. These institutes followed learner-centered teaching methods, emphasized communicative pedagogies, and used internationally published textbooks aligned with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). The research focused on teenagers and adults enrolled in structured three-year English programs divided into six CEFR levels (A1 to C2), with each level spanning six months and consisting of three 60-day semesters.

The study involved 20 EFL learners (5 teenagers aged 16-18 and 15 adults aged 19-32) with an equal gender distribution. Participants had varying language proficiency levels (A1-C2) and diverse academic backgrounds, including high school students in different disciplines and university students/graduates from various fields. While teenagers were studying English both in institutes and public schools, adults were exclusively enrolled in private language courses. Prior experience in English learning ranged from 4 to 16 years. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and the use of anonymized identifiers (e.g., P1, P2) in reporting findings.

Table 1: Demographics

ID	Age	Gender	Language level	Educational Level	Major	Years of English learning
P1	17	Female	B1	High School (11th grade)	Experimental Sciences	5
P2	31	Male	C1	University Graduate	Business Administration	12
P3	16	Male	A2	High School (10th grade)	Humanities	4
P4	17	Female	B1	High School (11th grade)	Mathematics	6

ID	Age	Gender	Language level	Educational Level	Major	Years of English learning
P5	18	Male	B2	High School (12th grade)	Mathematics	7
P6	22	Female	C1	University (4th year)	Computer Engineering	9
P7	25	Female	C2	University Graduate	Translation Studies	11
P8	28	Male	C1	University Graduate	Civil Engineering	14
P9	29	Male	B2	University Graduate	Education	15
P10	30	Female	C1	University Graduate	Economics	16
P11	27	Female	C2	University (PhD candidate)	Sociology	13
P12	32	Male	C1	University Graduate	Mechanical Engineering	16
P13	26	Male	C1	University Graduate	Electrical Engineering	10
P14	24	Female	B2	University (Master's student)	Anthropology	8
P15	23	Female	B2	University (4th year)	Architecture	9
P16	21	Female	B1	University (2nd year)	Psychology	7
P17	18	Male	B2	High School (12th grade)	Humanities	5
P18	28	Male	C1	University Graduate	Law	12
P19	19	Female	B1	University (1st year)	Medicine	6
P20	20	Male	B2	University (3rd year)	Political Sciences	8

3.3. Data collection

An integrated multi-method data collection approach, grounded in the principle of triangulation (Denzin, 2017; Flick, 2018), was employed to capture both learner agency and structural influences. This approach strengthened the study's credibility of findings and enabled a deeper understanding of linguistic investment by merging micro-level individual experiences and macro-level contextual factors. The foundation of data collection was semi-structured interviews (45-60 minutes each), selected for their ability to balance structured inquiry with flexible exploration (Magaldi & Berler, 2020; Ruslin, 2022). Following Lindlof and Taylor's (2002) recommendations, a tailored interview guide was designed with two components: an introductory section explaining research objectives and ensuring confidentiality, followed by eight core questions divided into two thematic parts. The first part explored affordances, including the benefits of English education, available support sources, and anticipated future opportunities. The second part examined constraints such as educational challenges, negative societal attitudes, demotivating factors, and pedagogical limitations. All interviews were conducted in Persian to facilitate deeper expression and were scheduled around participants' class times. The recordings were transcribed through intelligent verbatim processing (removing fillers while preserving meaning) and were shared with participants for member checking to enhance data validity.

While interviews provided valuable insights into learners' explicit perceptions, they were complemented with narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen, 2013; Pavlenko, 2007) to uncover more

implicit, temporal aspects of investment. Accordingly, Participants composed 2-3 page written narratives responding to prompts about pivotal learning experiences and evolving goals. These accounts revealed critical developmental patterns in investment, such as P18's realization of English's monetary value through translation work, while also highlighting themes of capital accumulation and identity negotiation. Digital ethnography (Barton & Lee, 2013) was also incorporated to provide crucial insights into learners' naturalistic language practices in online spaces where informal capital accumulation and resistance to dominant language ideologies frequently occur (e.g., Androutsopoulos, 2014). Participants shared screenshots of their English-language social media and digital spaces interactions. This approach revealed unconscious investment practices like P2's strategic use of English for international networking, demonstrating how online environments serve as important venues for linguistic capital accumulation beyond formal educational settings.

At the institutional level, twelve classroom observations (four per institute) were conducted using Bloome et al.'s (2004) critical ethnographic framework to systematically document teacher-student power dynamics and pedagogical approaches. These observations provided crucial context for interpreting interview findings, particularly P3's critique of the overemphasis on rote memorization in public schools, by revealing how institutional practices can enable or constrain investment opportunities. To access the often-unspoken affective dimensions of investment, visual methodologies, including Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) and metaphorical drawings (Kalaja et al., 2008), were used. Participants created Photovoice collages depicting 'English in my daily life' and produced metaphorical drawings representing English as symbolic objects. These visual outputs proved particularly effective in revealing emotional attachments and symbolic meanings.

Lastly, to understand the broader ideological context shaping investment, policy document analyses were conducted following Shohamy's (2005) critical framework. The examination of public curricula and institutional syllabi revealed fundamental tensions between the prioritization of religious identity and the marginalization of English as a global lingua franca. These documented policy contradictions provided macro-level confirmation of the systemic barriers, demonstrating how national language policies create significant constraints on English education in Iran's sociopolitical context.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis of the collected data employed an integrated approach, aligning each methodological component with its corresponding analytical framework to ensure a valid understanding of the research topic. The interview transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, following a rigorous seven-step procedure. Two analysts collaborated on all steps except the initial familiarization phase, ensuring intercoder reliability. The procedure is illustrated with a data sample from P18. In the first familiarization step, each analyst independently immersed themselves in reading and re-reading to gain a holistic

understanding of the dataset. In the second step, meaningful units were highlighted to create initial codes. For example, in the following excerpt, four meaningful units were underlined:

> *"After my first <u>paid translation job</u>, I saw English as a <u>valuable asset</u>. I <u>doubled my study hours</u> and set clear <u>goals like working for international companies</u>."*

In the third step, related codes were grouped into broader categories. In the given example, the first two codes were merged to create a category representing economic affordances, and the other two were combined to create a second category reflecting behavioral investment. Further codes were incorporated into these categories from other sections of P18's interview. In the fourth step, these categories were synthesized into an overarching theme representing the economic value of English education. In the fifth step (cross-checking), the analysts revisited the raw data to validate themes. P18's narrative timeline, showing increased study hours post-translation work, confirmed the economic value of English investment. Discrepancies (e.g., whether "valuable asset" reflected cultural *or* economic capital) were resolved through discussion. In the sixth step (member-checking), P18 affirmed: *"Yes, the 'economic value' captures my turning point perfectly." Finally, the given theme was labeled 'English as economic capital' for conciseness and representativeness.*

Written narratives were analyzed through narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen, 2013), focusing on temporal trajectories and pivotal moments in learners' investment. For example, P18's narrative revealed the same turning point reflected in his interview—paid translation work—that reshaped his study habits and goals, demonstrating how economic realizations directly influenced behavioral investment. This method uncovered implicit motivations and identity negotiations, such as P3's post-conference shift in linguistic vision, which contrasted with social media code-switching. Narrative analysis provided depth to the thematic findings by contextualizing them within individual developmental arcs (Pavlenko, 2007).

Digital ethnography data, including screenshots and screen recordings, were analyzed using content and discourse analysis (Barton & Lee, 2013). This revealed unconscious investment practices, such as P2's strategic language policing on Facebook or P12's archived emails showcasing English proficiency requirements. These digital traces often contradicted or enriched interview claims, as seen in P4's browser history (filled with overseas university visits) juxtaposed with reported parental disapproval. Androutsopoulos's (2014) framework for online linguistic practices was instrumental in interpreting these findings, highlighting how digital spaces serve as covert sites for capital accumulation and resistance.

Classroom observations, analyzed through critical ethnographic lenses (Bloome et al., 2004), exposed in-context authentic institutional constraints and affordances. For instance, teachers' code-switching to Persian undermined official English-only policies, reinforcing vernacular dominance, a finding that contextualized P3's critique of rote memorization in public schools. Observation notes also revealed demographic disparities, such as adult courses emphasizing professional networking versus teen classes prioritizing "polished" presentations, aligning with

interview themes about English as social capital. These observations provided a meso-level bridge between individual experiences and macro-level policies.

The data collected through Photovoice and metaphorical drawings were analyzed using visual semiotics (Rose, 2016) to decode symbolic representations. For instance, P4's "golden nametag" metaphor and P12's "suit" drawing visually articulated English's aspirational value and cultural misfit, respectively. Photovoice collages, like P10's juxtaposition of global tech logos with Iranian infrastructure, reinforced interview claims about English's economic role. Wang and Burris' (1997) participatory framework guided this analysis, emphasizing how visual data captured affective and symbolic dimensions often absent in verbal accounts.

Lastly, Policy documents were analyzed using critical policy analysis (Shohamy, 2005), revealing ideological tensions. For example, allocating more instructional hours to Arabic than English in public schools quantified systemic marginalization, corroborating P10's "bewilderment" and P3's critiques. This macro-level analysis contextualized micro-level resistance strategies like P14's VPN usage to access banned materials, demonstrating how policies shape grassroots defiance. Collectively, triangulating these methods uncovered the multifaceted affordances for and constraints to English education, framing learners' investment.

4. Findings

The study of Iranian English learners' linguistic trajectories indicated that various economic, cultural, social, pedagogical, and ideological factors either afford or constrain their linguistic investment.

4.1. Affordances

The findings showed that the participants are invested in English education due to diverse economic, cultural, and social affordances (RQ 1).

4.1.1. Economic Value of English

The monetary value of English emerged as a dominant theme across interviews, digital practices, and visual data. Interview responses provided the most explicit articulations, with P18 framing English as a "*valuable asset*" after paid translation work, a turning point that reshaped his learning trajectory. His written narrative revealed a surge in study hours and goal specificity following this financial realization, demonstrating how economic incentives directly influenced behavioral investment. This economic motivation was further reflected in participants' digital behaviors. P12's interview remark, "*English would secure career advancement,*" aligned with his screenshots of multinational job postings and screen-recorded tour, which featured bookmarked folders like "*PhD abroad opportunities.*" These unconscious digital traces substantiated his conscious interview claims, illustrating how economic incentives permeated even informal online activities.

Visual data reinforced this theme through metaphors and symbolic representations. P10's photovoice collage juxtaposed global tech logos with Iranian infrastructure projects, visually supporting her argument that "*English enables national economic growth.*" Similarly, recurring metaphors of English as "*keys*" or "*bridges*" (drawn by P4, P7, and P15) suggested a shared conceptualization of language as a mediator of economic access. At the macro level, policy analysis contextualized these individual perspectives. While national curricula downplayed English, vocational institute syllabi heavily emphasized "English for employability," indirectly validating participants' economic rationale for seeking private education. This tension mirrored P12's critique of state language policies, revealing a macro-micro alignment: institutional contradictions reinforced individual perceptions of English as contested yet indispensable capital.

4.1.2. Cultural Value of English

The cultural significance of English emerged through interconnected evidence across interviews, digital behaviors, and visual data, revealing its role as a conduit for intercultural and academic exchange. Interview responses explicitly positioned English as a gateway to intercultural understanding. P14, for example, emphasized how "*English-language websites provided unparalleled access to comparative research on marriage customs*". This claim was substantiated by screenshots of her browser history showing frequent visits to international cultural archives, demonstrating behavioral alignment with her stated practices.

The cultural value of English took symbolic form in participants' visual representations. P17's metaphorical drawing depicted English as a "*bridge with two-way traffic,*" reinforcing his interview argument about bidirectional knowledge exchange. This imagery was complemented by his Photovoice collage, which featured stacked academic books alongside a notebook titled "*My English Book Project,*" tangible proof of their ambition to contribute to global discourse. For P11, the academic advantages of English were most evident in her digital scholarly footprint. Analysis of her ResearchGate profile revealed that 80% of her publications were in English-indexed journals, directly operationalizing her interview claim about leveraging English for global dissemination. Her narrative traced this strategic choice to a pivotal moment during her master's studies when she "*encountered untranslated seminal papers,*" an experience that solidified her "*view of English as essential for academic participation.*"

These individual perspectives were contextualized by institutional practices. Classroom observations in advanced academic writing courses showed instructors emphasizing citation norms that privileged English-language sources, mirroring P11's publication strategy and tacitly reinforcing English as the currency of academic legitimacy. Policy analysis further revealed a contradiction: Despite nationalistic rhetoric, Iranian university accreditation standards implicitly rewarded English-medium publications. This structural reality underscored

the participants' cultural-academic motivations, demonstrating how macro-level policies shape micro-level behaviors.

4.1.3. Social Value of English

The social value of English education emerged through distinct patterns across age groups, with each demographic employing different investment strategies to leverage language proficiency for social advantage. Digital ethnography provided compelling evidence of how adults utilized English for career socialization. P13's LinkedIn activity demonstrated consistent engagement with international industry groups, while his screen recordings revealed archived emails where English proficiency was explicitly required for foreign contract bids. This digital footprint directly validated his interview claims about "*language-enabled career advancement.*" Similarly, adult participants like P16 conceptualized English classrooms as social hubs, a perception visually reinforced through Photovoice collages featuring group study sessions labeled "*My English network.*" The social value of English extended beyond professional contexts into personal networks. P2's narrative of online friendships gained depth through Facebook screenshot analysis, which revealed deliberate language policing (e.g., editing non-native errors before posting) to maintain social prestige. This performative aspect of language use, notably absent from his interview account, highlighted the unspoken pressures of English as social capital.

4.2. Constraints

While most participants exhibited sufficient motivation to invest significant effort and resources in English education, significant familial, social, cultural, and ideological constraints were also identified (RQ 2).

4.2.1. Familial and Social Constraints

Comparing participants' stated beliefs with their digital practices illustrated a generational tension surrounding English investment. The learners showed a disconnection between familial/societal skepticism and personal aspirations. For younger learners, linguistic investment was fraught with social risks. P3's narrative timeline showed his insistence on using English intensified after attending an international youth conference, "*a turning point that reshaped my linguistic vision.*" Yet this vision remained contested as his social media activity displayed careful code-switching, using Persian for peer interactions but English for public posts, reflecting a strategic balancing act between self-expression and social acceptance. Similarly, P4's interview claims of "*parental disapproval*" contrasted sharply with her digital browser histories filled with overseas university visits and Instagram feeds dominated by English-language career influencers. These contradictions highlighted the tension between overt familial constraints and covert personal ambitions.

Visual data further exposed the emotional stakes of English investment. P3's drawing depicted English as "sunglasses"—enabling access to cooler worlds but inviting accusations of pretentiousness, encapsulating both the allure of English and its social costs. P4's Photovoice collage juxtaposed English textbooks with images of locked doors, visually framing parental resistance as a literal barrier to opportunity. Classroom observations revealed how institutional practices reinforced these tensions. Despite official English-only policies, teachers frequently code-switched to Persian for complex explanations, inadvertently legitimizing the vernacular's dominance. This ambivalence mirrored broader societal hesitations about English's threat. Policy analysis confirmed this pattern as education ministry officials explicitly discouraged English "overuse" in secondary schools, coinciding with the period when teenage participants reported the strongest social pushback. Such top-down linguistic nationalism clarified why teens, embedded in state educational structures, faced harsher scrutiny than adult learners.

4.2.2. Cultural Constraints

The tension between English fluency and cultural resistance emerged most starkly through the interplay of interview narratives and digital communication patterns. P12's reported job interview experience, "*where English proficiency was dismissed*," gained deeper significance when juxtaposed with his email correspondence screenshots. These revealed consistent use of English in professional communications, including follow-ups with the same employer who had downplayed its value, demonstrating a persistent personal investment despite institutional disregard. His language learning narrative further contextualized this conflict, documenting how prior overseas education had solidified his English identity, making re-entry into Iran's linguistic marketplace particularly jarring. This narrative timeline showed how his self-concept as "primarily an English communicator" clashed with local workplace expectations.

Visual methods added symbolic depth to this struggle. P12's metaphorical drawing portrayed English as "a suit that fits me better but isn't weather-appropriate here"—capturing both their alignment with English and its perceived cultural misfit. His Photovoice collage notably placed English-language certificates in a drawer while displaying Persian documents prominently on a desk, visually reinforcing the interview story's tension between capability and presentation. Policy analysis illuminated the broader context. An examination of civil service hiring guidelines showed no explicit point system for English skills, validating P12's interview experience while contrasting sharply with private sector job postings collected in document analysis that frequently listed English as a requirement. This institutional contradiction explained why adults like P12 faced such inconsistent valuation of their linguistic capital.

4.2.3. Ideological and Pedagogical Constraints

The tension between Iran's state-promoted Arabic-centered language ideologies and learners' English aspirations emerged through a triangulation of policy analysis, interviews, and digital ethnography, revealing how top-down mandates collide with grassroots resistance. Interviews

exposed participants' frustrations with institutional priorities, with P10 expressing "*bewilderment at English's marginalization*" and P3 criticizing "*an ideological overemphasis on Arabic education*" that sidelined English. Policy documents quantified this disparity, showing that Ministry of Education directives allocated 37% more instructional hours to Arabic than English in public schools—a structural disincentive for English acquisition. The human cost of these policies became clear in P9's narrative about an "*exceptional English teacher who relocated due to unfavorable conditions,*" a pattern corroborated by teacher transfer records showing high turnover among English faculty that perpetuated educational inequities.

Learners actively subverted these constraints through covert digital practices, as evidenced by P14's browser history revealing VPN usage to access banned English-learning platforms, bookmarked underground Telegram channels sharing Cambridge materials, and pirated TED Talk downloads dated after their official blocking. These acts of digital defiance mirrored P14's interview critiques of state policies, demonstrating how resistance translated into daily practice. Visual methods further captured this dissent, with Photovoice collages depicting public school English textbooks piled in trash bins—symbolizing rejection of inadequate resources—alongside private institute logos prominently displayed on personal belongings and images of clandestine meetup locations for English practice, highlighting the need for hidden learning spaces. The data revealed learners constructing alternative learning ecologies through digital, visual, and social means to bypass ideological constraints. While interviews initially identified learner frustration, digital and visual methods ultimately proved most vivid in demonstrating the active resistance strategies learners developed in response to systemic marginalization of English, exposing the profound disconnection between national language policies and individual linguistic aspirations.

5. Discussion

The study of Iranian English learners for the affordances for and constraints to linguistic investment showed that various economic, cultural, social, ideological, and pedagogical issues may enhance or hinder their investment. Economic aspirations are significant motivating factors for English education among Iranians. In this view, English is considered a valuable asset as it provides access to diverse employment opportunities, reminiscent of Bourdieu's concept of economic capital (1987; 1991). Language is a linguistic capital that offers various financial futures to its learners (Darvin & Norton, 2015; 2021). Morady Moghaddam and Murray (2019) assert that improving English education in Iran is crucial to enhancing global economic competitiveness. As Newman (2023) posits, learning a second language can significantly contribute to a country's economic output by enhancing workforce productivity, trade relations, and global competitiveness. English is generally associated with various economic advantages on both personal and governmental scales.

The research findings also underscored the importance of English education for Iranians regarding intercultural competencies, learning about different cultures, academic qualifications,

and global dissemination of ideas. These findings also recall Bourdieu's (1991) construct of cultural capital, providing individuals' access to cultural knowledge and skills valued in society. As Ghasemi Mighani et al. (2019) suggest, intercultural competence is crucial for Iranian English learners, enabling them to engage with cultural differences and communicate effectively across cultures actively. This can lead to better job prospects and social mobility, as cultural capital can be converted into economic or social forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The role of digital technologies in fostering globalized social mobility must be considered (Bondi & Cacchiani, 2021) because English language skills enable Iranians to participate in global academic networks and communicate scientific research and knowledge globally, as English is the dominant language of academia. Moreover, as Langum and Sullivan (2020) posit, English can be a valuable resource for its learners, allowing them to navigate the challenges of academic writing and create virtual transnational communities.

The social aspect of linguistic investment was found to be equally crucial to Iranian English learners, as they revealed motivations for social networking purposes and inclusion in national and international communities of English learners and users. By investing in English, Iranian learners aim to tap into the social capital (Bourdieu, 1987) embedded within the language, enabling them to expand their social networks and enhance their social standing. Furthermore, as discussed by Tajeddin et al. (2021), the concept of imagined communities of practice provides a valuable framework for understanding the motivations behind Iranian English learners' investment in English. These learners envision themselves as part of communities where English proficiency is valued and shared. By investing in English, they seek to become members of these imagined communities, where they can engage in meaningful interactions and exchange knowledge and experiences with other English learners and speakers.

English is significant among Iranians and is the predominant language within private foreign language education in Iran (e.g., Moharami & Daneshfar, 2022). The scholarly accounts have also shown that Iranian society is generally optimistic about English education (e.g., Kazemi Malekmahmudi & Kazemi Malekmahmudi, 2018; Rahnama Bargard et al., 2020). In Iran, English knowledge is valued for its association with prestige, honor, and social connections. Faramarzi et al. (2015) emphasized that Iranian English learners greatly appreciate English for social and professional reasons. By investing in English education, individuals seek to accumulate symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1987), which signifies their competence, adaptability, and cosmopolitanism. This symbolic capital is viewed to intersect with or to be intricately linked to the construction and expression of individuals' identities (Darvin and Norton, 2018). English proficiency allows Iranians to envision and construct future selves that align with global discourses, aspirations for social mobility, and participation in a globalized world. It becomes a means through which individuals shape their identities and project a desired image of themselves as cosmopolitan citizens. This investment in English education intertwines with identity construction, where English proficiency becomes a marker of desired identities and projected images of success, cosmopolitanism, and agency in a globalized world. The

accumulation of symbolic capital through English education, therefore, strengthens individuals' social and professional standing and shapes and negotiates their identities (Darvin & Norton, 2017).

Although Iranians exhibit generally positive attitudes toward English education (Abolfazli & Sadeghi, 2018), they still face various learning constraints. The findings indicated that the participants encountered several social, cultural, ideological, and pedagogical impediments. Despite being highly motivated to invest in English learning, the participants reported disappointment stemming from peer and familial disapproval and unfavorable job application outcomes. These findings corroborate the views of language scholars over the past three decades, who have sought to distinguish between the related yet distinct concepts of motivation and investment (e.g., Norton Pierce, 1995; Darvin and Norton, 2015, 2017, 2021). Indeed, previous research on language learning motivation has overlooked the role of diverse socio-cultural factors in impeding language learning, which exist across all social, familial, and professional contexts. For example, teenagers in this study faced challenges primarily from friends and family members, while adult participants discussed professional hurdles.

The findings further revealed a common belief that the Iranian state's language policies prioritize Arabic instruction over English education. This preference for Arabic instruction can be attributed to the state's attempts to promote Islamic values and dilute Western norms (e.g., Rassouli & Osam, 2019). The state's emphasis on Islamization has led to changes in the government's infrastructure, including the segregation of males and females, the observation of Islamic laws, and the Islamization of textbooks, as Farhady et al. (2010) described. These changes have fueled the perception that English education is associated with Western culture and threatens Iranian-Islamic cultural norms (Gholaminejad & Raeisi-Vanani, 2021). The participants of this study called for a reform of language education and indicated their desire for the recognition of the importance of English as a global language. The Iranian state's focus on promoting Islamic values and diluting Western norms should not come at the expense of English language education, which is critical for international communication and economic development. The state should recognize the value of English and work toward a balanced approach that promotes both Islamic values and English education.

The participants also stated that the educational system faces various challenges, including problems with teacher qualifications, teaching methodology, teaching materials, classroom environment, and the lack of communicative language pedagogies and technology-based education. These challenges are common to public schools, as private institutes also have issues. The problems in the educational system can be traced back to the post-revolutionary English education policies and ideologies, which are primarily focused on grammar, reading comprehension, and vocabulary, with little attention given to listening, speaking, and writing. The dominant teaching method during this period has been the grammar-translation method, which emphasized the deductive learning of grammar and reading comprehension (Sadeghi & Richards, 2016). The state's focus on Islamic values and the exclusion of the target culture from

textbooks, as noted by Davari and Iranmehr (2021), also reflects the state's ideology and investment in promoting a particular cultural identity. The challenges facing English education in Iran are not only educational but also reflect the state's investment in promoting certain cultural and ideological values, which may not align with the needs and aspirations of language learners. The lack of communicative pedagogies and teacher training deprives language learners of the right path of English education, which should enable them to develop communicative competence and engage with the world beyond the borders of Iran. These challenges further highlight the mismatch between the educational system and the needs of the learners, as well as the impact of the state's ideology on the development of English language skills.

6. Conclusions

The study highlights the multifaceted nature of linguistic investment among Iranian English learners, revealing how economic, cultural, social, and symbolic affordances motivate their efforts while ideological and pedagogical constraints hinder their progress. Learners perceive English as a gateway to economic opportunities, intercultural exchange, and social mobility, reflecting Bourdieu's concepts of capital. However, systemic constraints such as state-promoted Arabic-centered policies, familial and societal skepticism, and inadequate educational resources create significant challenges. The triangulation of interviews, digital ethnography, visual data, and policy analysis underscores the tension between individual aspirations and structural limitations, demonstrating how learners navigate these contradictions through both overt and covert strategies.

The findings carry important implications for policymakers, educators, and language practitioners. At the institutional level, there is a pressing need to reform language education policies to balance the promotion of Islamic values with the pragmatic demands of global communication. Educators should prioritize communicative pedagogies and teacher training to address the disconnection between learners' needs and current instructional practices. Additionally, the study underscores the role of digital spaces as sites of resistance and capital accumulation, suggesting that integrating technology into language learning could mitigate some systemic constraints. Recognizing English as a tool for economic and social empowerment rather than a cultural threat could foster more inclusive and effective language education strategies in Iran.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. The sample, though diverse, may not fully represent all demographics of Iranian English learners, particularly those in rural or less privileged settings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data and digital traces introduces potential biases, as participants may have selectively shared information. Future research could expand the scope to include broader geographical and socioeconomic diversity, as well as longitudinal studies to track learners' trajectories over time. Investigating the efficacy of alternative learning ecologies, such as digital platforms and community-based initiatives, could also provide valuable insights into overcoming systemic barriers. Such efforts would further

illuminate the dynamic interplay between individual agency and structural forces in shaping linguistic investment.

Consent to Participate Declaration

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Funding Declaration

Human Ethics and Consent to Participate Declarations

This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

References

[1] Abolfazli, Z., & Sadeghi, K. (2018). Iranian language learners' attitudes towards teaching/learning English: The role of university major, gender, and age. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies, 5*(1), 1-26. https://doi.org/10.30479/jmrels.2019.10399.1297

[2] Androutsopoulos, J. (2014). Mediatization and sociolinguistic change. *De Gruyter*.

[3] Aronin, L. (2014). The concept of affordances in applied linguistics and multilingualism. In: Pawlak, M., Aronin, L. (eds) *Essential topics in applied linguistics and multilingualism. second language learning and teaching* (pp. 157-173). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01414-2_9

[4] Babino, A., & Stewart, M. A. (2019). Multiple pathways to multilingual investment: a collective case study of self-identified Mexican students in the U.S. *International Multilingual Research Journal, 13*(3), 152-167. https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2019.1623635

[5] Barkhuizen, G. (2013). *Narrative research in applied linguistics*. Cambridge University Press.

[6] Barton, D., & Lee, C. (2013). *Language online: Investigating digital texts and practices*. Routledge.

[7] Bloome, D., Carter, S. P., Christian, B. M., Otto, S., & Shuart-Faris, N. (2004). *Discourse analysis and the study of classroom language and literacy events: A microethnographic perspective*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

[8] Bondi, M., & Cacchiani, S. (2021). Knowledge communication and knowledge dissemination in a digital world. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *186*, 117-123. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.10.003

[9] Borjian, M. (2013). *English in post-revolutionary Iran: From Indigenization to Internationalization*. Multilingual Matters.

[10] Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. F. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.

[11] Bourdieu, P. (1987). What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, *32*, 1–17.

[12] Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.

[13] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

[14] Chang, C. H., & Chiang, K. M. (2021). What can a migrant child gain through linguistic investment in juku? findings from a longitudinal narrative inquiry study in Japan. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 45*(5), 1424-1435. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1974465

[15] Comprehensive Roadmap. (2009). *The comprehensive science roadmap of the country*. The Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution.

[16] Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.

[17] Darvin, R. (2019). L2 motivation and investment. In M. Lamb, K. Csizer, A. Henry, & S. Ryan (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of motivation for language learning* (pp. 245-264). Palgrave.

[18] Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 35*, 36–56. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000191

[19] Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2017). Language, identity, and investment in the 21st century. In T. L.McCarty & S. May (Eds.), *Language policy and political issues in education, encyclopedia of language and education* (pp. 227–240). Springer.

[20] Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2018). Identity, investment, and TESOL. In S. Nero & J. Liontas (Eds.), *Socio-cultural aspects of English language learning, The TESOL encyclopaedia of English language teaching* (pp. 1–7). Wiley.

[21] Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2021). Investment and motivation in language learning: What's the difference? *Language Teaching, 56*, 29-40. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444821000057

[22] Davari, H., & Iranmehr, A. (2021). Culture as an unresolved problem is ELT program in post-revolutionary Iran: A comparative study of the attitudes of the teachers at schools and language institutes. *Iranian Journal of Comparative Education, 4*(1), 986–1009. https://doi.org/10.22034/IJCE.2021.249634.1218

[23] Denzin, N. K. (2017). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

[24] Ekstam, J. M., & Sarvandy, E. (2017). English language teaching in Iran: Tradition versus modernity. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics, 40*(1), 112–119. https://doi.org/10.1515/cjal-2017-0007

[25] Faramarzi, S., Elekaei, A., & Afghari, A. (2015). Iranian Students' Attitudes towards English as a Bilingual Language in Iran. *Journal of English Language and Literature 3*(2), DOI:10.17722/jell.v3i2.111

[26] Farhady, H., Sajadi Hezaveh, F., & Hedayati, H. (2010). Reflections on foreign language education in Iran. *TESL-EJ, 13*(4), 1-18.

[27] Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage.

[28] Ganji, M., Ketabi, S., & Shahnazari, M. T. (2018). English teacher training courses in Iranian private language institutes: Issues and options. *Issues in Educational Research, 28*(2), 367-384.

[29] Garrido, M. R. (2019). Language investment in the trajectories of mobile, multilingual humanitarian workers. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *17*(1), 62–79. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2020.1682272

[30] Ghasemi Mighani, M., Yadani Moghaddam, M., & Mohseni, A. (2019). Developing intercultural awareness and skills in English majors: A constructivist approach. *Journal of Teaching Language Skills, 38*(3), 81-112. DOI: 10.22099/jtls.2020.35611.2758

[31] Gheitasi, M., Khazy, R., & Aliakbari, M. (2022). Representation of national identity in English Vision Textbook Series for Iranian senior high schools. *Applied Research on English Language, 11*(2), 51–72. https://doi.org/10.22108/ARE.2022.129540.1747

[32] Gholaminejad, R. & Raeisi-Vanani, A. (2021). English language teaching in Iranian mainstream schools: Pedagogical, societal and government policy environments. *Issues in Educational Research*, 31(1), 111-129.

[33] Haddad Narafshan, M., & Yamini, M. (2011). Policy and English language teaching (ELT) in Iran. *Iranian EFL Journal, 7*(5), 179–189. http://ikiu.ac.ir/public-files/profiles/items/306c52c7a5788203dd57321a748cd0c1.pdf

[34] Iranmehr, A., & Davari, H. (2018). English language education in Iran: A site of struggle between globalized and localized versions of English. *Iranian Journal of Comparative Education, 1*(2), 70–84. https://doi.org/10.22034/IJCE.2018.87725

[35] Jungyin, K., & Lixia, Q. (2020). Factors affecting investment in an English literature class at a Korean university. *Korean Journal of General Education, 14*(4), 133-149 https://doi.org/10.46392/kjge.2020.14.4.133

[36] Kalaja, P., Menezes, V., & Barcelos, A. M. F. (2008). *Narratives of learning and teaching EFL*. Palgrave Macmillan.

[37] Kazemi Malekmahmudi, M., & Kazemi Malekmahmudi, S. (2018). Attitude of Iranian Students towards Learning the English Language**.** *Journal of Clinical and Basic Research (JCBR), 2*(2), 35-39.

[38] Kiany, G. R., Mirhosseini, S. A., & Navidinia, H. (2011). Foreign language education policy in Iran: Pivotal macro considerations. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, *53*(2), 49–71.

[39] Kono, T. (2009). Social affordances and the possibility of ecological linguistics. *Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science, 43*(4), 356-373. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-009-9097-8

[40] Kramsch, C. (2013). Afterword. In B. Norton (Ed.), *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (pp. 151-161). Multilingual Matters.

[41] Langum, V., & Sullivan, K. P. (2020). Academic writing, scholarly identity, voice and the benefits and challenges of multilingualism: Reflections from Norwegian doctoral researchers in teacher education. *Linguistics and Education*, *60*, 100883. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2020.100883

[42] Lee, E. J. (2014). Motivation, investment, and identity in English language development: A longitudinal case study. *System*, *42*, 440-450. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.01.013

[43] Lindlof, T.R. & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods*. (2nd Ed.) California: Sage Publication.

[44] Lu, J., He, L., & Shen, Q. (2020). LOTE (Languages Other than English) learners' investment in learning languages. *Círculo de Lingüística Aplicada a la Comunicación, 84*, 55–64. https://doi.org/10.5209/clac.71995

[45] Magaldi D., & Berler M. (2020) Semi-structured interviews. In: Zeigler-Hill V., Shackelford T.K. (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_857

[46] Mirhosseini, S. A., & Khodakarami, S. (2016) Aspects of 'English language education' policies in Iran: '*Ourownbeliefs*' or '*outofwhoyouare*'? *Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 11*(3), 283–299. https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2016.1217870

[47] Moharami M., & Daneshfar S. (2021). The impacts of learning English on Iranians' everyday life: An ethnographic example from Piranshahr. *Issues in Educational Research*, *31*(4), 1156–1174. http://www.iier.org.au/iier31/moharami.pdf.

[48] Moharami M., & Daneshfar S. (2022). The political climate of English language education in Iran: A review of policy responses to cultural hegemony. *Issues in Educational Research*, *32*(1), 248–263. http://www.iier.org.au/iier32/moharami.pdf.

[49] Morady Moghaddam, M., & Murray, N. (2019). English language teaching in Iran: A case of shifting sands, ambiguity, and incoherent policy and practice. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language, 7(*1), 96-105.

[50] National Curriculum. (2009). *National curriculum document*. The Ministry of Education.

[51] Newman, L. (2023). The economic impact and effects of learning a second language. Economics Undergraduate Honors Theses Retrieved from https://scholarworks.uark.edu/econuht/51

[52] Norton Peirce, B. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly, 29*(1), 9–31. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587803

[53] Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation (2nd ed.)*. Multilingual Matters.

[54] Norton, B. (2016). Identity and Language Learning: Back to the Future. *TESOL Quarterly*, *50*(2), 475-479. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.293

[55] Norton, B., & Morgan, B. (2013). Poststructuralism. In C. Chapelle & L. Harklau (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of applied linguistics*. Wiley-Blackwell.

[56] Pavlenko, A. (2007). Autobiographic narratives as data in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 28(2), 163-188. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amm008

[57] Rahnama Bargard, Z., Sharafoddin, M., & Afzalaghaee, M. (2020). Motivation and attitude of language learning among students (Case study: Mashhad University of Medical Sciences and Ferdowsi University). *Future of Medical Education Journal, 10(*3), 13-20. 10.22038/FMEJ.2020.47632.1325

[58] Rassouli, A., & Osam, N. (2019). English language education throughout Islamic Republic reign in Iran: government policies and people's attitudes. *SAGE Open, 9*(2), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019858435

[59] Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (4th ed.). Sage.

[60] Ruslin, R., Mashuri, S., Rasak, M. S. A., Alhabsyi, F., & Syam, H. (2022). Semi-structured interview: A methodological reflection on the development of a qualitative research instrument in educational studies. *Journal of Research & Method in Education, 12*(1), 22-29, DOI: 10.9790/7388- 1201052229

[61] Sadeghi, K., & Richards, J. C. (2016). The idea of English in Iran: An example from Urmia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 37*(4), 419–434. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2015.1080714

[62] Safari, P. (2017). Proletarianization of English language teaching: Iranian EFL teachers and their alternative role as transformative intellectuals. *Policy Futures in Education, 15*(1), 74–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210316681203

[63] Shahidzade, F., & Mazdayasna, G. (2022). The identity construction of Iranian English students learning translated L1 and L2 short stories: Aspiration for language investment or consumption? *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 972101. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.972101

[64] Shohamy, E. (2005). *Language policy: Hidden agendas and new approaches*. Routledge.

[65] Singleton, D., & Aronin, L. (2007). Multiple language learning in the light of the theory of affordances. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 1*(1), 83-96. https://doi.org/10.2167/illt44.0

[66] Soltanian, N., Ghapanchi, Z., & Pishghadam, R. (2018). Investment in L2 learning among Iranian English language learners. *Teaching English as a Second Language Quarterly, 10*(3), 131–168. https://doi.org/10.22099/jtls.2019.31876.2620

[67] Tajeddin, Z., Mostafaei Alaei, M., & Moladoust, E. (2021). Learners' perspectives on imagined community of practice in English as an international language. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development.* DOI: 10.1080/01434632.2021.1921784

[68] Ushioda, E. (2020). *Language learning motivation: An ethical agenda for research*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.

[69] Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3), 369-387. DOI: 10.1177/109019819702400309

[70] Wang, Y., & Jiang, D. (2024). Investment, linguistic capital and identity in Chinese university students' EMI experience. *Language and Education*, *39*(1), 252-269. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2024.2314136

[71] Xu, W. (2024). 'I want to settle down in China': Charlie's (dis)investments in Chinese and identity negotiation across times and spaces. *Language and Education, 38*(6), 1152-1167. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2024.2302601

[72] Yoo, J. (2023). This did not feel like other people's business!: the role of linguistic and racial marginalization in hindering motivation and investment. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2022.2163397

[73] Zarrabi, F., & Brown, J. R. (2015). English language teaching and learning analysis in Iran. *International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences, 9*(10), 3485–3493. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1340254

[74] Zhang, J., & Kim, J. (2024). Factors affecting Uzbek students' prewriting investment at a South Korean university. *Education Sciences, 14*(4), 353. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14040353