Analyzing the Impact of Multilingualism on the Formation of Linguistic Identity among English Language Learners in Multicultural Environments

Hanan Ramamdan Shaifi *

English Department, College of Languages &Translation, Azzaytuna University, Libya

*Corresponding author: hshaefi12@gmail.com

تحليل تأثير التعدد اللغوي على تشكيل الهوية اللغوية بين متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في البيئات المتعددة الثقافات

أ. حنان رمضان الشعايفي*

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كليه اللغات والترجمة، جامعة الزيتونة، ليبيا

Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to examine how multilingualism affects English language learners' development of linguistic identities in multicultural settings. Students are exposed to a variety of languages and cultures as global civilizations become more varied, which affects their communication styles and sense of self. Understanding how exposure to multiple languages impacts linguistic identity and how learners balance their native and target languages in diverse cultural contexts were the main goals of the study. A descriptive quantitative methodology was used to gather data from 100 students using questionnaires that evaluated their perceived proficiency, language identity awareness, phonetics, grammar, vocabulary, and cultural integration. According to the findings, leaners showed a high sense of linguistic identity (68.5%) and significant multilingual usage in daily life (71.2%). However, many had trouble speaking (38%) and writing (42% below 50%), which suggests that they lacked productive skills. For 42% of participants, cultural assimilation presented additional difficulties. Having the lowest average score (33.8%), vocabulary comprehension was noticeably lacking. These difficulties were frequently associated with poor primary education instruction. Based on these results, the study suggests combining culturally responsive teaching approaches, utilizing technology to enhance English language development, boosting writing and speaking abilities through active methods, and improving the quality of instruction in early education. All things considered, the study sheds light on the intricate connection between identity formation, multilingualism, and language proficiency, offering insightful information to educators and legislators who deal with a variety of student demographics.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Linguistic Identity, English Language Learners, Multicultural Environments**.**

الملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة كيفية تأثير التعدد اللغوي على تطور هويات متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في بيئات متعددة الثقافات. يتعرض الطلاب لمجموعة متنوعة من اللغات والثقافات مع تزايد تنوع الحضارات العالمية، مما يؤثر على أساليب تواصلهم وشعورهم بذاتهم. كان فهم كيفية تأثير التعدد اللغوي على الهوية اللغوية وكيفية موازنة المتعلمين بين لغتهم الأم ولغتهم المستهدفة في سياقات ثقافية متنوعة هو الهدف الرئيسي للدراسة. استُخدمت منهجية وصفية كمية لجمع البيانات من 100 طالب باستخدام استبيانات لتقييم كفاءتهم المتصورة، ووعيهم بالهوية اللغوية، ومهاراتهم الصوتية، وقواعدهم اللغوية، ومفرداتهم، وتكاملهم الثقافي. ووفقًا للنتائج، أظهر الطلاب شعورًا قويًا بالهوية اللغوية (68.5%) واستخدامًا ملحوظًا للغات متعددة في الحياة اليومية (71.2%). ومع ذلك، واجه الكثيرون صعوبة في التحدث (38%) والكتابة (42% أقل من 50%)، مما يشير إلى افتقارهم إلى المهارات الإنتاجية. وبالنسبة لـ 42% من المشاركين، شكّل الاستيعاب الثقافي صعوبات إضافية. كان فهم المفردات ضعيفًا بشكل ملحوظ، حيث حصل على أدنى متوسط درجات (33.8%). وارتبطت هذه الصعوبات غالبًا بضعف تدريس المرحلة الابتدائية. وبناءً على هذه النتائج، تقترح الدراسة الجمع بين مناهج التدريس المستجيبة للثقافات، واستخدام التكنولوجيا لتعزيز تطوير اللغة الإنجليزية، وتعزيز مهارات الكتابة والتحدث من خلال أساليب تفاعلية، وتحسين جودة التدريس في مرحلة التعليم المبكر. وبالنظر إلى جميع الجوانب، تُلقي الدراسة الضوء على العلاقة الوثيقة بين تكوين الهوية والتعدد اللغوي وإتقان اللغة، مقدمةً معلومات قيّمة للمعلمين والمشرعين الذين يتعاملون مع فئات طلابية متنوعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعدد اللغوي، الهوية اللغوية، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية، البيئات متعددة الثقافات.

Introduction

The dynamic interactions between languages, cultures, and identities are all included in the phenomena of multilingualism, which extends beyond the simple capacity to speak many languages. Navigating various linguistic systems in culturally heterogeneous environments has a significant impact on English language learners' sense of self, social belonging, and identity formation, The process of developing a cohesive linguistic identity can be both complicated and enriching in multicultural contexts where English is frequently learned as a second or third language. In many cases, learners must balance the linguistic norms and cultural values of English-speaking cultures with their home language identities. This can result in hybrid, changing, or even opposing identities It seeks to comprehend how learners' self-concept, language preferences, and methods for assimilating into multicultural settings are influenced by exposure to and usage of many languages. By doing this, the study advances our knowledge of the emotional, social, and cognitive aspects of language acquisition in globalized settings.

Statement of the Problem

English language learners in English Departments frequently struggle to balance various linguistic and cultural elements in multicultural settings, which can influence and occasionally conflate their linguistic identity. Although multilingualism has social and cognitive advantages, little is known about how it affects learners' sense of language identity. Research on the effects of navigating multiple languages on learners' self-expression, identity formation, and integration into various groups is necessary. By examining the connection between English learners' (ELLs) language identity construction and multilingual activities, this study fills the gap.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the ways in which multilingualism affects English language learners' linguistic identities in multicultural contexts; such as English departments.
2. To investigate the connection between multilingual ELLs' identity creation, cultural background, and language use.
3. To determine the opportunities and difficulties learners encounter when preserving and navigating different linguistic identities.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. In multicultural settings, multilingualism significantly affects how English language learners develop their linguistic identities.
2. Compared to monolingual learners, learners who actively utilize many languages create linguistic identities that are more dynamic and complex.
3. Learners' capacity to navigate and integrate several linguistic identities is favorably correlated with their level of exposure to multicultural and multilingual environments.

Questions of the Study

1. How does multilingualism influence the formation of linguistic identity among English language learners in English departments?
2. What are the main factors that shape linguistic identity in multilingual and multicultural contexts?
3. In what ways do English language learners negotiate between their native languages and the English language?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it helps us comprehend the complex relationship between linguistic identity and multilingualism, particularly in an era of growing globalization, mobility, and cross-cultural interaction. The study emphasizes the necessity for teaching approaches that go beyond language proficiency to incorporate identity support and cultural sensitivity by illuminating the ways in which multilingualism affects identity. It exhorts educational institutions to embrace strategies that promote students' successful assimilation into English-speaking communities while validating their linguistic background., by connecting language acquisition and identity formation, the work advances the fields of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics more broadly.

Methodology of the Study

This study adopts a descriptive analytical approach, which is suitable for examining the relationship between multilingualism and the formation of linguistic identity among English language learners in multicultural environments; such as English Departments in Faculty of Languages. The approach enables the researcher to describe phenomena as they exist in real contexts and to analyze patterns, relationships, and trends based on participants' experiences and perceptions.

Study Tools:

The primary tools for data collection are:

A structured questionnaire designed to measure learners' language backgrounds, language use patterns, and perceptions of their linguistic identity.

Data Collection Sources:

Data will be collected directly from participants through:

Online and paper-based distribution of the questionnaire.

Face-to-face or virtual interviews using pre-designed interview guides.

Study Sample:

The study will target a purposive sample of 100 English language learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These individuals will be selected from English Departments at the Alrefaq University, Alahlia University of Tripoli and Alhadera University in Tripoli.

Analysis Methods:

Quantitative data from the questionnaires will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential statistics (such as correlation and regression analysis) using SPSS or a similar statistical tool.

Qualitative data from interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify recurring themes and patterns related to linguistic identity, language choice, and cultural affiliation.

Limitations of the Study

This study has a number of limitations despite its applicability and possible benefits. First, the findings may not be as broadly applicable to larger populations in other multilingual contexts due to the study size being restricted to 100 English language learners. Second, participants' cultural and language differences may cause them to understand identity-related issues differently, which could impact response consistency. Lastly, the breadth and depth of qualitative data collecting may be restricted by logistical and temporal limitations, particularly when examining long-term identity development processes.

Literature Review

Introduction

The English language is now a lingua franca and a universal language. However, the impact of English on culture and identity is still not well understood, even though more people speak it as a second or foreign language than as their first language. It is considered a neutral language for social integration, a practical language for job progress, and an important second language for instrumental purposes. However, in some places, it is seen as a language that undermines regional traditions and jeopardizes the standing of the national tongue. **(Anchimbe, 2007,88).**

The concept of multilingualism and its social and cultural dimensions

The ability of a person or a group to use many languages in daily life is known as multilingualism. It is a complex social and cultural reality influenced by migration, globalization, education, and media exposure in addition to being a language phenomenon. Multilingualism can improve communication abilities, cross-cultural comprehension, and cognitive flexibility on an individual basis. At the social level, it represents how various linguistic communities live in one area, impacting identity development, power relations, and social integration. **(Franceschini, 2011, 344-355).**

Depending on the status and purpose of the languages people use, it influences how they see themselves and how others see them. In terms of society, it can act as a bridge or a barrier, promoting inclusion in some situations while possibly marginalizing minority language speakers in others. Therefore, comprehending multilingualism necessitates taking into account not only language competency but also the educational systems, cultural norms, and sociopolitical structures that either promote or restrict linguistic diversity. **(Duff, 2019, 6-22).**

The Relationship between Language and Identity in Multicultural Contexts

Identity and language are closely related, particularly in multicultural settings where people are exposed to a variety of linguistic and cultural influences. Language is a potent sign of cultural identification, group membership, and personal history in addition to being a tool for communication. People in multilingual societies frequently use the languages they speak, the ones they choose to employ in particular contexts, and the meanings they ascribe to each language to negotiate their sense of self, where students may have to choose between speaking their home tongue or languages and the official or dominant language of the larger community. Identity conflicts, hybrid identities, or even identity transformations may result from this. Learning English may provide new social and educational opportunities for English language learners, but it may also provide difficulties with regard to the preservation of legacy languages and cultural roots. As a result, language becomes a site of identity negotiation that is influenced by institutional norms, peer relationships, and societal expectations. Fostering inclusive teaching methods that respect linguistic diversity and aid in students' identity development requires an understanding of this dynamic. **(Lie, 2017, 71).**

The Effects of Cultural Settings on Identity and Language Acquisition

Both the process of language acquisition and the formation of linguistic identity are significantly influenced by multicultural settings. Through exposure to and contact with a diverse range of languages, cultural norms, and communication styles, learners can speed up language acquisition in these kinds of environments. But diversity has an impact that goes beyond language proficiency; it also has an impact on how people view themselves in relation to the languages they speak and the cultures they interact with**. (Ali, 2017, 34-41).**

Diverse cultural groups can give students the chance to embrace different facets of their identities, cultivate intercultural sensitivity, and adopt adaptable communication techniques. However, when there are disparities in language status or authority, multicultural settings can make it difficult for students to combine disparate cultural values and linguistic practices. For example, students could experience pressure to sacrifice their native tongue or cultural identity in order to fit in with mainstream linguistic norms (like English). As a result, depending on how inclusive, acknowledged, and supportive the existing social and educational structures are, these settings may promote identity enrichment or conflict. **(Collentine, 2004, 153-171).**

Multilingualism in Educational Contexts

Multilingualism in educational contexts refers to the presence and use of multiple languages within learning environments, whether in formal classrooms, bilingual schools, or culturally diverse academic institutions. It encompasses both the linguistic diversity of students and the pedagogical approaches that address or integrate this diversity. In today's globalized world, classrooms are increasingly multilingual, with students bringing a range of linguistic backgrounds that can enrich the learning experience when acknowledged and supported effectively, or culturally responsive teaching—they empower learners to embrace their full linguistic repertoires. This not only enhances academic achievement but also fosters positive identity development. On the other hand, monolingual approaches that prioritize the dominant language (e.g., English) while ignoring students' native languages can lead to language loss, identity conflict, and disengagement. Therefore, embracing multilingualism in education is not merely a linguistic choice, but a critical component of equity, inclusion, and identity affirmation for language learners in multicultural settings. **(Cenoz, 2010,34).**

Multilingualism as a tool for communication or social distinction

Multilingualism also acts as a symbol of social identity and differentiation throughout society. Functionally speaking, being multilingual enables people to perform in a variety of social, academic, and professional settings, promoting intercultural communication and opening up more options. Code-switching, sometimes referred to as language swapping, is frequently employed strategically in multilingual societies to convey inclusion, civility, or solidarity within particular groups, can also serve as a marker of social standing or group distinction. Fluency in some languages, especially global languages like English or French, may be linked to global citizenship, higher education, or social privilege in various situations. On the other hand, stigmatization or devaluation of native or minority languages can reinforce social hierarchy and marginalization. As a result, language use becomes intricately linked to power dynamics. Multilingual people may use their language proficiency to advance in their careers or, conversely, they may feel conflicted about their identity if their ancestral language is not accepted by society. Understanding multilingualism's dual functions is crucial to comprehending how it affects both personal identity and larger social dynamics**. (Edwards, 2012, 5-25).**

Research Methodology

Introduction

The section on study methodology describes the methodical technique used to look into how multilingualism affects how English language learners in multicultural settings develop their linguistic identities. This study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to gain both broad patterns and in-depth insights because of the complexity of the relationship between language use and identity building.

Population

The population of this study consists 100 of English language learners who are actively engaged in learning English within multicultural educational environments. These learners come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and are enrolled in language institutes, international schools, or university programs where English is taught as a second or foreign language.

Sample Size

The sample for this study consists of 100 English language learners selected from a variety of multicultural educational institutions, including language centers, international schools, and university programs.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is designed to gather quantitative data on participants' linguistic backgrounds, frequency of language use, attitudes toward each language they speak, and self-perceptions of linguistic identity. It includes both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, allowing for statistical analysis of trends and correlations across the sample.

3.4 Procedures

The research procedures were carefully planned and implemented to ensure the systematic collection and analysis of data. The process began with the development and validation of the research instruments—a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. These tools were reviewed by experts in applied linguistics and educational research to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives.

Reliability and Validity of Instruments

Regarding reliability, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of English language learners (not included in the final sample) to assess the consistency and clarity of the items. Statistical analysis was conducted to measure internal consistency, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Likert-scale items. A satisfactory alpha value (generally above 0.7) indicated that the questionnaire had acceptable reliability. Similarly, the interview guide was tested to ensure that the questions elicited meaningful and relevant responses aligned with the study's objectives.

Data Analysis and Discussion
Introduction

The analysis begins with descriptive statistics derived from the questionnaire responses, highlighting general trends in language use, identity perception, and cultural affiliation. This is followed by inferential analysis to examine relationships between variables such as language background, frequency of language use, and strength of linguistic identity. The qualitative data from the interviews are then examined through thematic analysis to uncover deeper insights into the personal and social dimensions of multilingual identity.

4.1 The Analysis of the Test Questions
"What is the average performance of students across different language skill areas?"

Table1. Gender & age of respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	64	64%
Male	36	36%
Average Age	-	23 years

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المجلة الليبية للدراسات الأكاديمية المعاصرة – الجمعية الليبية لأبحاث التعليم والتعلّم الإلكتروني – ليبيا
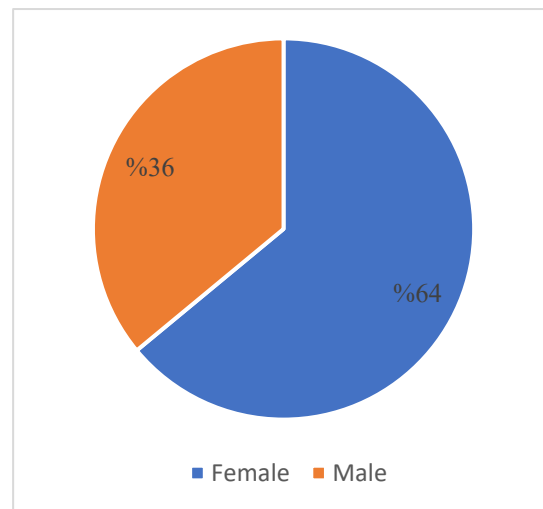E-ISSN:3005-5970 - المجلد: 3، العدد: 2، السنة: 2025

Figure 1. Students gender.

Regarding grammar, more than half of the participants (55%) said they pay attention to English grammar while communicating, while 60% stated that their knowledge of other languages helps them understand English grammar better. This supports the idea that multilingual competence can reinforce structural awareness and metalinguistic skills.

Table 2. Average percentage scores of students in Grammar, Comprehension/Vocabulary, and Phonetics, along with the total test average

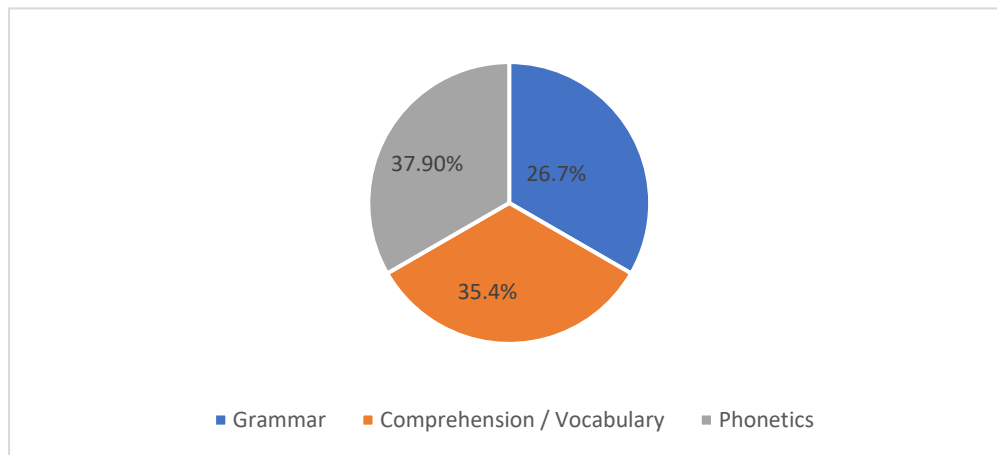| Section	Average Score (%)
Grammar	37.9%
Comprehension / Vocabulary	26.7%
Phonetics	35.4%
Test Total Average	**100%**

Figure 2. Average percentage scores of students in Grammar, Comprehension/Vocabulary, and Phonetics, along with the total test average.

The table shows the average performance of students in three main areas: Grammar, Comprehension/Vocabulary, and Phonetics. The overall test average is 44.5%, which is below the standard expected for language proficiency.

- Grammar had the highest average score at 47.9%, indicating that students have a relatively stronger understanding of grammatical structures.
- Phonetics followed closely with 44.9%, suggesting that students are somewhat familiar with pronunciation and sound patterns, though there is still room for improvement.
- Comprehension/Vocabulary scored the lowest at 33.8%, highlighting a significant weakness in understanding texts and using appropriate vocabulary. This could reflect limited exposure to authentic reading materials or inadequate vocabulary-building strategies.

Overall, the results suggest that while students have a basic grasp of grammar and phonetics, their ability to comprehend and use vocabulary effectively is limited. Focused interventions—such as extensive reading, vocabulary enrichment exercises, and integrated listening-reading tasks—are recommended to address these gaps.

Table 3 Distribution of respondents by gender, showing the number and percentage of male and female participants in the questionnaire.

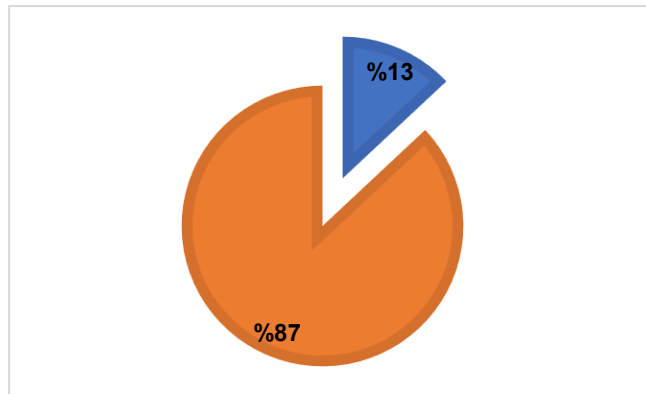| Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Female	4	13%
Male	26	87%

Figure 2 : Distribution of respondents by gender, showing the number and percentage of male and female participants in the questionnaire.

The data in Figure 3 reveals a clear gender imbalance among the respondents. Out of the total 100 participants, 87% (87) were female, while only 13% (13) were male. This disparity may influence the overall findings of the questionnaire, especially if the topic under investigation is sensitive to gender-based perceptions or experiences. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with this imbalance in mind, as it may reflect a limited representation of female perspectives within the study sample. Future research could benefit from a more gender-balanced participant pool to ensure more comprehensive and inclusive insights.
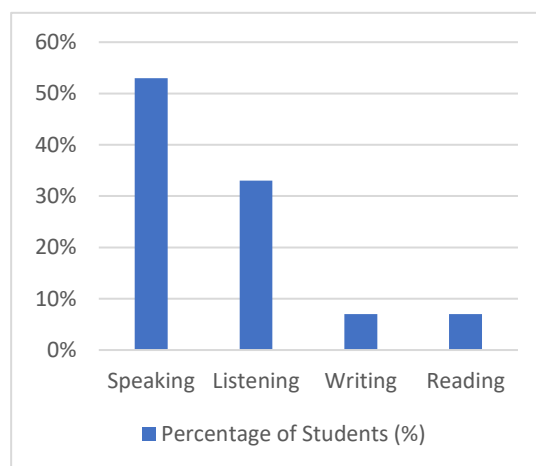
Table 4. Distribution of students according to the language skills they find most difficult, including speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

Language Skill	Percentage of Students (%)
Speaking	53%
Listening	33%
Writing	7%
Reading	7%

Figure.4 Distribution of students according to the language skills they find most difficult, including speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

The data in Table 4 highlights that speaking is the most challenging language skill for students, with 53% reporting difficulty in this area. This suggests that students may lack confidence in oral communication or have limited opportunities for speaking practice in academic or real-life settings.

Listening is the second most problematic skill, affecting 33% of the students. This could point to challenges in understanding native speakers, fast-paced speech, or unfamiliar accents.

On the other hand, writing and reading were reported as difficult by only 7% of students each, indicating that these receptive and productive skills may be relatively more developed, possibly due to greater exposure in classroom environments.

Overall, the results imply a need for greater focus on oral communication skills, including activities that promote interactive speaking and active listening, such as discussions, role plays, and listening comprehension exercises.

Table 5 :Summary of respondents' opinions on the impact of phonetics neglect, teaching quality at early stages, and the use of technology in improving English speaking skills.

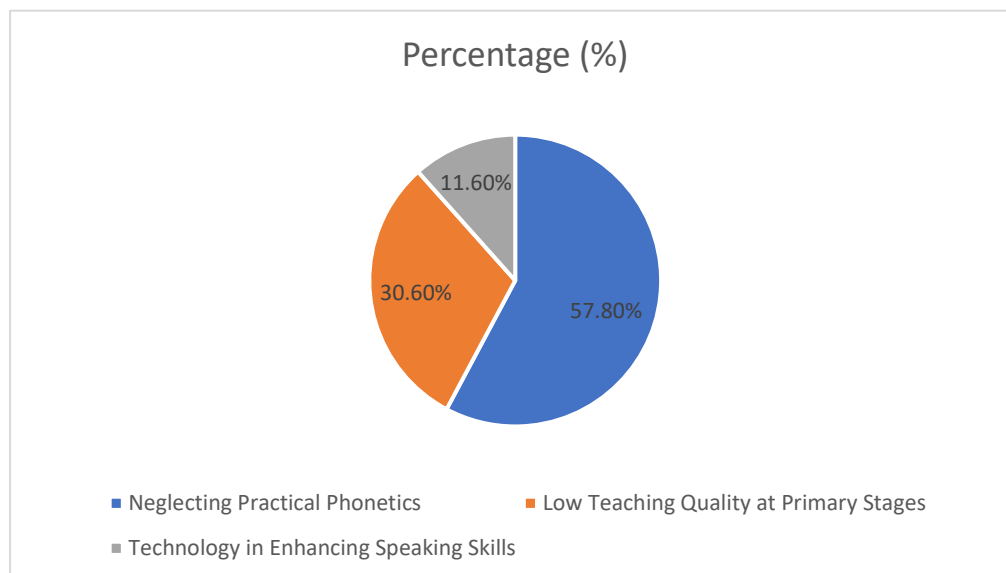| Aspect	Response	Percentage (%)
Neglecting Practical Phonetics	Agree	57.8%
Low Teaching Quality at Primary Stages	Strongly Agree	30.6%
Technology in Enhancing Speaking Skills	Strongly Agree	11.6%
Total	**--**	**100%**

Figure 5 :Summary of respondents' opinions on the impact of phonetics neglect, teaching quality at early stages, and the use of technology in improving English speaking skills.

- Neglecting practical phonetics was universally seen as harmful, with 100% of respondents agreeing that it negatively affects pronunciation and speaking quality. This reflects a strong consensus on the essential role of phonetic training in oral language development.
- When asked about teaching quality at the primary level, 53% strongly agreed and 47% agreed that poor teaching in early years significantly hampers fluency in speaking. This suggests that foundational instruction is perceived as a critical stage in shaping students' long-term language abilities.
- Regarding the use of technology, opinions were more mixed. While 20% strongly agreed and 27% agreed that it enhances speaking skills, the majority (53%) remained neutral, possibly indicating uncertainty or inconsistent exposure to effective technological tools.

Table 6 : Summary of respondents' perceptions regarding the impact of limited home exposure to English on speaking skills, and the perceived efficiency of current English teaching methods.

| Aspect	Response	Percentage (%)
Lack of home exposure affects speaking fluency and accuracy	Strongly Agree	87%
Lack of home exposure affects speaking fluency and accuracy	Agree	13%
Efficiency of current English teaching methods	Strongly Agree	20%
Efficiency of current English teaching methods	Agree	27%
Efficiency of current English teaching methods	Neutral	53%
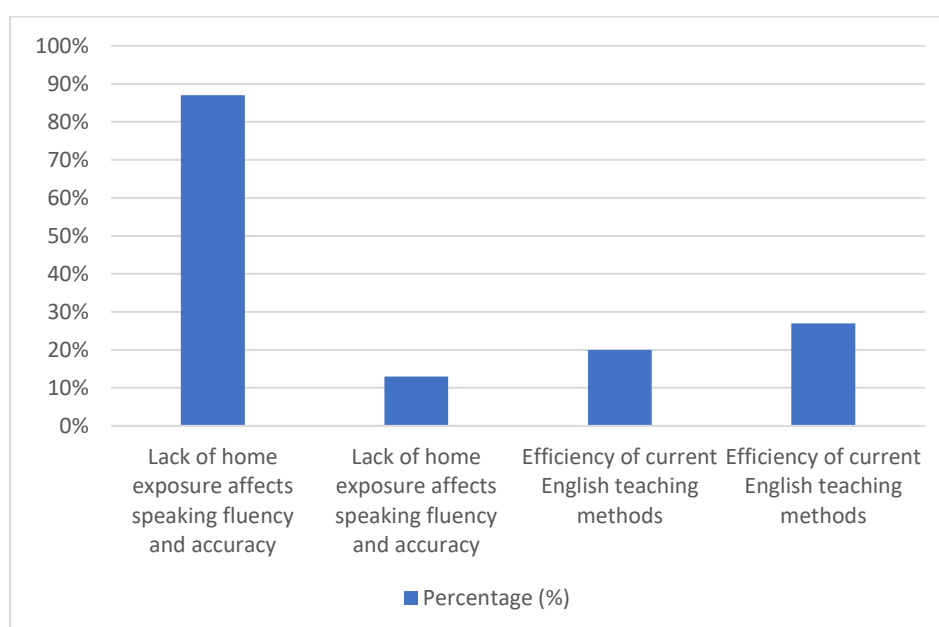
Fig.6 : Summary of respondents' perceptions regarding the impact of limited ome exposure to English on speaking skills, and the perceived efficiency of current English teaching methods.

Home Exposure: A vast majority (87%) of respondents strongly agreed that students who are not exposed to English or do not practice it at home will struggle with speaking fluently and accurately. This underscores the significance of consistent language input and usage beyond the classroom.

Teaching Methods: When evaluating the efficiency of current teaching methods, opinions varied. While 20% strongly agreed and 27% agreed, more than half (53%) chose a neutral stance. This neutrality may indicate a need for reviewing and modernizing current instructional approaches, perhaps through communicative and student-centered methods.

Overall, the responses suggest a strong need for enhanced home engagement with the English language and a critical re-evaluation of classroom methodologies to better support speaking skill development.

Table.7: Distribution of respondents' opinions on how the lack of exposure to English affects students' ability to speak fluently and accurately.

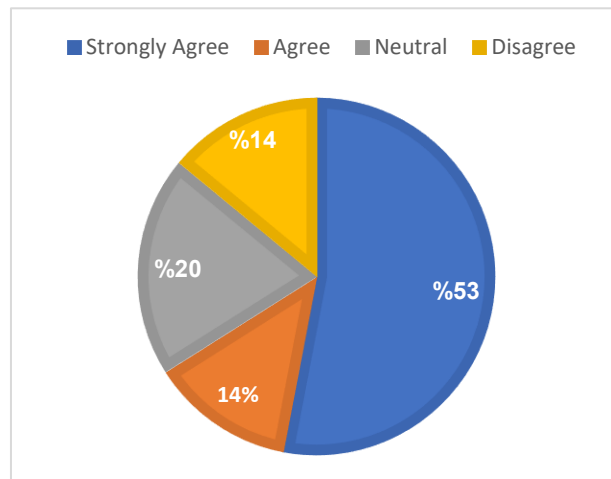| Response	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	53%
Agree	13%
Neutral	20%
Disagree	14%

Figure7 : Distribution of respondents' opinions on how the lack of exposure to English affects students' ability to speak fluently and accurately.

- 53% strongly agreed with the statement, indicating that over half the participants believe the absence of regular exposure has a major impact.
- An additional 13% agreed, bringing the total agreement to 66%, confirming the importance of language immersion.
- Meanwhile, 20% remained neutral, and 13% disagreed, possibly reflecting either differing teaching contexts or varying levels of student motivation and adaptability.

Discussion

The study's conclusions demonstrate the complex effects of multilingualism on English language learners' (ELLs') linguistic identities in multicultural settings. Participants stated that using and being exposed to a variety of languages improved their sense of self-worth, increased their understanding of other cultures, and expanded their sense of community among linguistic groups, language attrition, periods of linguistic uneasiness, or a sense that they had to repress their home tongue in order to integrate were caused by this imbalance. These results are consistent with earlier studies that found dominant language ideologies can marginalize minority identities and cause internal conflicts for learners who are juggling several cultures and languages.

It's interesting to note that learners reported better identification outcomes in settings that respected linguistic diversity and supported inclusive language policies. These students saw multilingualism as a strength rather than a weakness and felt more comfortable expressing themselves in multiple languages. This implies that social and educational institutions are important in promoting or impeding multilingual people's ability to establish healthy identities, the study emphasizes how critical it is to acknowledge multilingualism as a societal construct as well as a personal asset.

Conclusion

According to the study's findings, multilingualism is crucial in forming English language learners' linguistic identities, especially in multicultural settings where several languages and cultures coexist. Multiple language proficiency enables students to create dynamic, adaptable identities that represent their nuanced social experiences and cultural affinities. Many people find that being bilingual strengthens their sense of belonging in globalized societies, fosters intercultural understanding, and improves their ability to express themselves, learners may experience internal tensions or social pressures that diminish the value of their original languages. The necessity of inclusive language policy and pedagogical approaches that uphold the worth of various languages and identities in the classroom is highlighted by such dynamics, being multilingual is a resource for identity as well as language. In order to fully reap the benefits of multilingual education, educators, institutions, and legislators must acknowledge the close relationship between language and self and seek to establish settings that allow multilingual students to succeed academically, socially, and personally without compromising any aspect of their identities. These findings highlight the importance of creating more English-rich environments, both inside and outside the classroom, to support continuous language acquisition.

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