

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the general issues raised by the current study. It consists of the study's background, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, clarification of key terms of the study, and organization of the paper.

1.1 Background of The Study

Many people may assume that identity is an inherent and static trait, established at birth and everlasting throughout one's life. However, from an academic standpoint, identity is understood as a lifelong development. As Norton (2013, p.45) describes, the process of identity construction is about "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person foresees possibilities for the future". Following Gee's (2007) explanation, therefore, no one is actually entitled to a singular, fixed identity; rather, an individual's identity is constantly developing as they engage with and respond to the world around them throughout their life (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). In this sense, identity can be understood as "a way of talking about how learning transforms who we are and shapes our personal histories of becoming within the context of communities" (Wenger, 2010). Central to this process of learning and becoming is interaction, which language would play the key role in learner's identity construction. Following Weedon's (1997, as cited in Norton, 2013) quote: "language serves not only as a site for negotiating and contesting social structures and their implications but also as the space where individual subjectivity and identity are constructed". Consequently, a strong link of language with identity is widely acknowledged (Joseph, 2016, as cited in Mitchell et al., 2021).

The issue of identity has sparked extensive research across various fields for the past few decades, ranging from K-12 to tertiary levels (see Fisher et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2021; Raia, 2018; Rantanen, 2024; Topolewska-Siedzik & Ciecuch, 2018). In addition to that, one potential topic in this area is the link of learners'

identity and study abroad, given its popularity is increasing (see Kinginger 2011; Magnan & Lafford 2012; Benson et al., 2013; Wernicke 2014; De Costa et al., 2017). One growing branch of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research focuses on identity within the context of study abroad (SA) experiences. Earlier studies largely centered on language learners traveling to so-called “L2lands” (Coleman, 1998) to enhance their linguistic and cultural competencies (e.g., Freed, 1995; Jackson, 2008). However, as Kinginger (2015) notes, language majors now represent only a portion of SA participants. Pennycook’s (2010) view of language as a socially embedded, localized practice highlights the need to examine language use beyond classroom settings, which is essential for understanding language development in today’s study abroad contexts. Similarly, as Streitwieser (2014) notes in his edited volume on higher education internationalisation, the rise in global student mobility has reshaped the cultural, demographic, and educational dynamics in many countries, significantly influencing individual students’ study abroad experiences. Therefore, following Magnan and Lafford’s (2012) observation of students’ success in navigating their language learning abroad, one way in which study abroad identity research can be further studied is investigating a learner’s identity (re)construction across the different contexts identified (Norton, 2017).

With regard to research trends in the field of applied linguistics, Lie and Liu (2018) bibliometric analysis about research trends in applied linguistics revealed over the past decade, the topic of “identity” has become one of the most popularly studied topics within the field. However, the majority of research in this field situated within the context of Anglophone countries—in the Australia, New Zealand, Canada, UK, and USA—which could result in the western-derived framework, and thus guiding identity research might not be representative for language learners and users from the non-Anglophone countries (Sung, 2019; Taylor et al., 2013; Vasilopoulos, 2015), including Indonesia. In the field of language learning, the notion of investment has emerged as a critical lens through which scholars investigate how learners engage with a new language beyond conventional notions of motivation. As Darwin and Norton (2015) noted that

language learners' investment is driven by the anticipation that acquiring the target language will grant them broader access to symbolic (e.g. friendship, education, language) and material resources (e.g. money), thereby augmenting their cultural capital and reinforcing their social positioning. Canagarajah (2013) further highlighted the notion of investment by seeing how learners' engagement with a new language reshapes their identity, influencing not only their linguistic abilities but also their self-perception and social interactions. In addition to that, the study by Sa'd (2017) categorizes students based on their level of engagement with English have demonstrated how learners who perceive English as a tool for social mobility and global engagement tend to develop a higher positive sense of language identity. This notion aligns with Norton's (2000, 2013) assertion that learners who see greater opportunities through English tend to invest more in language acquisition, leading to a stronger integration of English into their identity. Therefore, a learner's agency and investment in language learning are essential as it provides a framework for investigating how learners navigate their linguistic journeys, shaping their identities through their lived experiences.

While studies have delved into identity construction and reconstruction among language learners, there remains a scarcity of studies sought at EFL learners' identities construction and reconstruction from periphery contexts, particularly the Indonesian EFL learners' context. Therefore, addressing this gap is crucial. Wirza (2018) provides a specific narrative case study focusing on Indonesian EFL learners, illustrating how identity is continuously shaped by learners' lived experiences. Her study showed that learners' experience identity shifts influenced by their interactions with teachers, peers, and cultural expectations. This aligns with Nematzadeh and Narafshan's (2020) findings on the construction and reconstruction of L2 identity, in which they noted learners constantly negotiate their personal and language identities through language exposure and social participation. Their study emphasized the dynamic nature of identity and the impact of personal history, social positioning, and language proficiency on learners' dynamic sense of self. Both of these studies draw an implication: further study might be needed as more growing interest on learners' identities should be

addressed in larger social settings given its importance in contributing to the development of English language teaching and learning practices and policies in the EFL context.

Drawing from the implications, learners' engagement in the study abroad might provide unique opportunities to their identity construction and reconstruction as English learners and users, given that EFL learners from periphery contexts, such as Indonesia, often grapple with making sense of their learning experiences and how their evolving learner identities significantly shape their personal and academic development (Widodo, 2017). One of the most popular student mobility programs in Indonesia is the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards—a flagship program of the Indonesian government that sends undergraduate and vocational students from all over Indonesia to study abroad for one semester. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by enriching the existing study in the field of how Indonesian EFL learners construct and negotiate their identities, situated from the stories of two Indonesian undergraduate students who have participated in the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards.

1.2 Research Questions

This study attempted to address the following research questions:

- 1) What motivates the EFL learners to participate in the international student mobility program?
 - How do learners' aspirations for international exposure influence their decision to participate in the mobility program?
 - What role do career and academic objectives play in motivating learners to participate in the mobility program?
- 2) In what ways do intercultural experiences during the mobility program and differences in academic environments between the host and home universities shape and construct the learners' identity as EFL learners and users?

1.3 Aim of The Study

The aim of this study was to explore how Indonesian EFL learners construct and negotiate their identities based on their lived experiences participating in the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) 2024 program. By focusing on the personal stories of each participant, the study sought to investigate how their identities are shaped and reshaped through their interactions with foreign academic, social, cultural, and linguistic contexts. Moreover, this study also strives to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on L2 identity by offering insights into the unique challenges and opportunities encountered by Indonesian EFL learners based on their lived experience throughout the experience of participating in the program, which consists of before the program, during the program, and after returning from the program.

1.4 Scope of The Study

This study focused on Indonesian undergraduate students who have participated in the IISMA 2024 program. The study particularly emphasized the role of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in shaping these learners' sense of self and their interactions within a foreign academic, social, and cultural context. It also explored the challenges and opportunities they encountered that may contribute to the construction and reconstruction of their EFL learners and users identities.

1.5 Significance of The Study

This study was expected to provide a theoretical significance to the overall discourse in the field of L2/Foreign language learner's identity construction studies. Many studies have dealt with the frameworks prior to this study, nevertheless, as Norton and De Costa (2018) emphasized, further study is needed to understand how learners' identities are shaped within today's rapidly changing yet socially unequal world. This is especially relevant for EFL learners from periphery contexts such as Indonesia, whose experiences in the international student mobility program reflect not only personal growth but also ongoing constructions of identity with cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic inequalities. By investigating the lived experiences of two undergraduate Indonesian EFL learners who have participated in a four

month period of IISMA program, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on identity in language learning, particularly for learners from periphery contexts such as Indonesia.

Practically, following Wirza's (2018) assertion, learners' narratives and perspectives can serve as powerful catalysts for informing and improving teaching practices and curriculum refinement. In this respect, students should be engaged in decision-making processes to the extent of learning practices in contexts of both a prescribed pedagogical curriculum—a structured educational plan mandated by an educational authority—and a negotiated classroom curriculum—a teaching and learning approach co-constructed between the teachers and the students, considering the students are the ones who acknowledge their own learning needs (Widodo, 2017). Therefore, by exploring the lived experiences of Indonesian EFL learners who have participated in the IISMA program, this study may provide valuable insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and education policymakers, contributing to the refinement of, specifically, English language teaching and learning paradigms in Indonesia.

1.6 Clarification of Key Terms

The following key terms, frequently referenced throughout the paper, are central to this study:

- 1) **Identity Construction and Reconstruction:** Following Kumaravadivelu (2012), identity construction and reconstruction is a continuous process influenced by the social, cultural, and situational settings individuals engage in. In the context of this study, identity construction and reconstruction refers to how the participants shape, construct, and negotiate their self-perception as English language learners and users based on their lived experiences from the early encounters with English up until they return from the IISMA program.
- 2) **Agency and Investment:** In this study, **agency** refers to the learners' perceived ability to make choices, take actions, and have a control over their learning and identity development in new academic and intercultural

settings. Thus, agency reflects how participants navigate challenges, assert themselves in unfamiliar environments, and shape their own trajectories as EFL learners and users (Eyckman, 2021). Meanwhile, **investment** refers to the learners' commitment to learn the English language as a means to access valued cultural and academic resources. Following Norton (1995), this study views investment as linked to identity, highlighting how learners engage in new environments with the hope of beneficial outcomes by learning English language.

- 3) **Periphery Context:** According to Cambridge Dictionary, periphery is defined as “the outer edge of an area”. Therefore, “periphery” in this study is focused on expanding on-going study of learners' identity construction and reconstruction from non-native English speaker students; and in this case is Indonesian students (e.g., Wirza, 2018).

1.7 Organization of The Paper

This paper will be organized into five chapters. The description of each chapter is as follows:

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the study's background, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, significance of the study, clarification of key terms of the study, and organization of the paper.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents relevant theories which serve as the basis for the present study. This chapter consists of five sections namely: identity in general, L2/ foreign language learners' identity, study abroad , IISMA, and related previous studies.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology employed to conduct the present study. It consists of research design explanations, participants of the study, data collection methods, and data analysis methods.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the research data, followed by a detailed explanation and interpretation of the findings.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study, along with recommendations for future research and reflections on the study's limitations.