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Investment in L2 learning among Iranian English language learners

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Abstract

Drawing on Norton Peirce's (1995) theory of investment and Darvin and Norton's (2015) expanded the model of investment, the present study aims to research investment in second language (L2) learning among Iranian English language learners. The participants included 852 male and female English language learners belonging to different age groups and English language proficiency levels. A 42-item questionnaire, developed and validated by the present authors (forthcoming), was administered online and by hand. The results showed that Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners moderately invested to learn English language and that there were significant differences in the extent of investment between male and female participants and different language proficiency levels (low- and high-proficiency learners). Moreover, the results of the study demonstrated that there was no significant difference in the extent of investment between different age groups (teenage and adult ones). The study concludes with suggestions for future research on investment in L2 learning and a discussion of how such research can impact language education policy in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Investment, Iran, EFL learners, survey

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The significant relationship between language learning and identity has been a matter of great importance to many researchers in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). This interest is explicable considering the paradigm shift in SLA from predominantly psycholinguistic models to sociological and anthropological facets (Block, 2007). In her research on identity (e.g. Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000, 2013a, 2013b; Norton & Gao, 2008; Norton & Toohey, 2011), Norton explored the relationship between language, identity, and language learning. She examined the conditions for social interaction to take place, and how power relations can limit or extend the range of identities that language learners can have in their classrooms and communities (Norton, 2013a). Norton Peirce (1995) integrated poststructuralist understandings of identity and human agency by introducing a construct she identified as "investment" (Norton, 2013b).

This term in SLA was initially used by Norton Peirce (1995) in her longitudinal research with adult immigrant language learners in Canada. In her study, she came to the conclusion that the available theories of motivation in the field of SLA did not match with the findings. Based on this, she argued that one problem of the psychological construct of motivation was its insufficiency in explaining how a learner may have a high level of motivation, but refuse to use opportunities for speaking in contexts where he or she experiences inequality (Darvin & Norton, 2016). Most theories considered motivation as a character trait of the language learner and assumed that the learners who could not learn an L2 did not show enough commitment to learn it (Norton, 2013a). In Norton's view, being highly motivated to learn a language does not guarantee the learner shows investment in the practices of a language classroom, especially if those language practices have problems such as being contradictory, racist, homophobic, or sexist. This can result in showing little progress in language learning (Norton, 2016).

Moreover, Norton argued that the psychological theories of motivation did not consider the intricate and complex identities of the language learners, and did not make a meaningful relationship between the learners' variable desires and commitment to learn a language, and their shifting identities (Norton, 2013a). The inequitable relations of power the learners negotiated in different situations were not also appreciated thoroughly in these theories (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). She believed that motivation was taken as unitary, coherent, fixed, and ahistorical "personality" which employed the traditional dichotomies of the learner (good/bad, motivated/unmotivated, anxious/confident, introvert/extrovert) in its classification of the learners (Darvin & Norton, 2016).

Drawing on her longitudinal study in Canada and informed by Weedon's (1987) and Bourdieu's (1991) works and theories, Norton Peirce (1995) sought to modernize contemporary conceptions of individual language learners, as having an essential, unique, fixed, and coherent core. She developed social theories complementary to dominant cognitive and psychological ones so that the complexity of language learning as both a social and cognitive process could be reflected (Darvin & Norton, 2016).

Considering the shift of focus from motivation theories to investment in SLA, the researchers paid more attention to the latter construct from 1995 onwards to fill the gaps in the previous considerations of language teaching and learning whose bases were the psychological construct of motivation. Norton argued that the construct of investment, which is known as a mainly sociological notion, may be influential in complementing the concepts of motivation in the field of SLA (Norton & Gao, 2008) by presenting a more comprehensive analysis of language learning process in which the language learner is identified as a social being who enjoys an active role in the course of language learning.

Literature Review

Early developments in investment in language learning

Norton Peirce's (1995) investment hypothesis in L2 learning describes L2 learners within a sociological framework and connects a learner's aspiration and willingness to learn a language, and their complex shifting identities meaningfully. Investment implies a commitment to the purposes, practices, and identities forming the process of learning which are continuously negotiated in various social relationships and power structures (Darvin & Norton, 2018) and through which a more complete image of the language learner can be reflected (Norton, 2013a).

As a significant sociological construct in SLA, investment was proposed by drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) theories of language, capital, and symbolic power (Norton, 2015) and also the dynamic view of identity to cover the aspect of continuous negotiation existing between the language learner and the social world (Haneda, 2005). In contrast to the instrumental motivation, investment regards language learners as possessing a complex identity, shifting from time to time and setting to setting, and produced frequently in social interactions. As a matter of fact, learner's investment in L2 is an investment in their changing identity (Norton, 2000).

Norton Peirce's investment hypothesis pivoted on the individual's changing desired identity, can be appreciated better in reference to the economic metaphors that Bourdieu (1977, 1991) uses, especially the notion of "cultural capital" (Norton, 2013b). Norton argues that learners invest in the target language provided that via learning it they can gain a greater value of material (capital goods, real estate, money) and symbolic advantages (language, education, friendship) that will raise the value of the learner's social power and cultural capital. This is a ground for gaining a broader range of identity positions from which the learner is enabled to speak, listen, read, or write (Norton, 2016). The learner's

cultural capital enrichment can lead to the re-evaluation of their understanding of themselves, their identities, and numerous chances for the future. Consequently, there is an essential connection between identity and investment (Norton, 2013b). In fact, if the presumed identity in L2 is of greater value/power in language learner's view, it can facilitate and improve the L2 learning process since it will help the L2 learner to take a positive approach and this learner is recognized as being active in achieving his/her desired identity in the L2 context (Norton, 2000).

The extent of the learner's investment in L2 is related to the dynamic negotiation of power in diverse situations and the right learners have to speak, so investment is a complex and contradictory construct which is in a state of flux (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2013a). Serving as a theoretical tool, investment can help researchers and teachers to scrutinize the circumstances necessary for social interactions to happen, and how and to what extent social relations of power bring forth or limit chances for L2 learners to speak and show commitment to L2 learning (Darvin & Norton, 2018).

The distinction between investment and motivation becomes clearer with reference to the different questions which are asked by these two constructs. While motivation scholars might ask, "What is the learner's motivation to learn English?", the important question for scholars of investment would be, "What is the learner's investment in the language and literacy practices of the classroom or community?" (Norton & Gao, 2008, p. 110).

For over two decades, Norton advanced her ideas and these were supported by emerging and established scholars in the international arena. Investment achieved a significant position in language learning theory and became a noteworthy construct with important implications for language policy (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Earlier research on Norton's constructs of identity and investment was mostly in North

America and considered the learner and the context of learning. Researchers such as McKay and Wong (1996), Skilton- Sylvester (2002), Potowski (2004), Bearse and de Jong (2008), and Haneda (2005) employed the notion of investment to explore the language learning development of learners in different skills and contexts.

Potowski (2004) explored how much four language learners in a fifth-grade Spanish/English dual immersion classroom employed Spanish language. In one part of his study, he sought to examine the rationale for the learners' language use via ethnographic methods and the construct of investment which implies that the principal goal of social interactions for people is to create a sense of who they are (Norton, 2000). Generally, the students used Spanish 56% of the time. As one trend in the study, the girls used Spanish 18.5% more than the boys did, irrespective of their first language (L1). He argued that the girls enjoyed conforming to the teacher's hopes and expectations. This was also proved in another study (Willett, 1995). Seemingly, using Spanish by the girls in the classroom was related to their investments in identities as well-behaved students or as being popular and funny ones, in being praised at school and home due to being proficient in the Spanish language, and whether they supposed Spanish was essential. In this research, the boys used English more than the girls.

In her study, Haneda (2005) reported how two Canadian university students from contrasting ethnolinguistic backgrounds were engaged in writing in Japanese in an advanced Japanese literacy course. Employing a theoretical and interpretive framework which was based on the constructs of identity, investment, and community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton, 2000; Wenger, 1998), Haneda argued that the learners behaved differently when they did identical classroom literacy activities. The learners' differential investment in writing and learning L2 was the result of numerous reasons such as differences in their life histories and trajectories, including past, present and their projected futures, their L2

learning trajectory, their shifting identities, their agency and their understanding of self as a writer or an individual, their attitudes towards L2, their strengths and weaknesses in L2, their multiple desires and hopes, and the imagined communities to which they aspired to belong.

Later research on identity and investment became more international. In 2008, for example, the construct of investment was the topic of a special issue of the *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*. Researchers discussed various subjects which included the investments of college students belonging to nonurban regions in China (Gu, 2008), the connection between content and English language interaction in an undergraduate classroom (Trent, 2008), and using an "English Club" among mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong to practice English (Gao, Cheng, & Kelly 2008). Norton and Gao (2008), providing an analysis of these studies, noted that identity and investment are essential points in trying to appreciate English language learners in China (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

In an English-speaking graduate school in the United States, Chang (2011) examined investment in two nonnative English-speaking (NNES) international students. Using the constructs of imagined communities and investment, Chang argued that these students could apply their own agency "to fight their academic battle" (p. 228) and, based on their own choices, invested in areas that would be increasingly marketable in their current and imagined communities (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Norton Peirce's (1995) investment hypothesis in L2 learning was examined in Samadi Bahrami's (2013) study in the community of Iranian MA EFL students. He investigated L2 learners' investment in L2 leaning to develop an enriched personality. He attempted to study the impact of EFL learning on Iranian EFL students' Multicultural Personality Traits (MPT) and its consequential effect on their English language proficiency. It was found that when all students were taken as EFL learners, the correlation between their MPTs and EFL proficiency was not a high

correlation, but when they were classified into high, mid, and low-proficiency groups, a strong positive correlation, (r = .62), was observed between high-proficiency EFL students' MPTs and their EFL proficiency, whereas the low proficiency EFL students' data demonstrated a very low correlation. The findings confirmed the hypothesis that EFL students with greater investment in L2 could attain both higher EFL proficiency and a richer personal identity.

In the African context, especially in Uganda, Norton and other researchers (Early & Norton, 2014; Mutonyi & Norton, 2007; Norton, 2014; Norton & Early, 2011; Norton, Jones, & Ahimbisibwe, 2011; Norton & Williams, 2012; Tembe & Norton, 2008) worked for over a decade to realize student and teacher investments in the English language, digital literacies, and language policy and how their investments affected SLA. These studies, generally, indicated that both students and their teachers, especially female teachers, were highly invested in new literacy practices. This investment happened since digital technology has expanded what is socially imaginable for both learners and teachers. This has, in turn, extended the range of identities available to community members. While it was not proposed by Norton and her colleagues that what was socially imaginable was also socially present in the African context, it was shown clearly that the development of valued digital skills on the part of students and teachers resulted in achieving increasing social power and cultural capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Norton developed her early theories of identity and investment in the 1990s. However, in the past two decades, the situation has changed since the world has experienced many upheavals. Globalisation, advancements in technology, and shifts in the global economic order have changed the social world dramatically. In such a mobile and unpredictable situation, learners can participate in unlimited spaces of learning and socialisation, both face-to-face and virtual, which advance with distinct and

increasingly invisible systemic patterns of control and structures of power (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

With respect to the way technology has revolutionized styles of living and productivity (Darvin, 2016), and has compressed time and place, and has led people into isolated spaces (Darvin & Norton, 2017), new questions, analyses, and theories of language and identity were needed. Hence, Darvin and Norton extended theories of identity and investment, and constructed a model of investment in 2015 by considering the requests of a more fluid, changing, and mobile world, in which language learners can participate in unlimited spaces of learning and socialization and prove themselves as legitimate speakers in different degrees (Darvin & Norton, 2015). In the next section, the expanded model is elaborated.

Investment in language learning in the digital age

In the 21st century, due to the existence of digital innovation, super-diversity, and mobility, the sociological construct of investment has become more complex and examining how it locates learners in this shifting communication arena, and how they claim the right to speak is critical (Darvin & Norton, 2015). In the 2015 model of investment, Darvin and Norton drew on the theoretical advances, which came into existence since the construct of investment was first developed two decades ago, and placed investment at the intersection of the three elements of identity, capital, and ideology (see Figure 1) to give information on how structures of power function, and provide a better understanding of the opportunities for language learners to practice agency (Huang & Benson, 2013). Recognizing how L2 learners claim the right to speak was another aim in this model. The model was designed to scrutinize how specific communicative events index macrostructures of power, and take notice of the institutional processes and systemic

patterns which create communicative practices in the technological world of the 21st century (Darvin & Norton, 2016).

Figure 1. Darvin and Norton's 2015 model of investment. Adapted from "Identity and a Model of Investment in Applied Linguistics," by R. Darvin and B. Norton 2015, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 35*, p. 42

The model's principal interest is in the greater appreciation for the connections between identity, capital, and ideology, and the urgent conditions for language learners to invest in the language and literacy activities of the classrooms. Via examining these three elements critically, the construct of investment directs teachers and researchers to inquire about the logic of the present world order and to talk about inequitable language, literacy, and learning practices. This examination makes it possible to explore how learners are controlled, positioned, or empowered as they move in diverse spaces and perform a variety of identities (Darvin & Norton, 2016).

Based on the 2015 model of investment, learners show investment in specific practices because they wish to gain particular material or symbolic resources. They also recognize that their already available capital can function as affordances, rather than constraints, to their learning. The appreciation of the learner's capital confirms their identity. Their identity, in turn, makes them legitimate speakers in numerous learning contexts (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The value of a learner's

economic, cultural, or social capital changes from time to time and setting to setting. This value is likely to be affected, but not totally restricted, by the ideologies of various groups or fields (Norton, 2015).

The 2015 model recognizes that in this rapidly globalizing world the spaces for language acquisition and socialization have become progressively unbounded and that the systemic forms of control have become more indistinguishable, so the range of identities that community members can have extends. This can multiply what is socially imaginable for learners and help them to become greatly invested in literacy practices (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

The model also indicates that the advantages of enjoying the freedom of fluid movement in and out of diverse spaces and not being marginalized and resistant in some aspect diffuse and even reconfigure power. This makes it possible for learners to choose to invest in or divest from particular language and literacy practices as they wish. In this way, learners have greater agency and power to show investment in learning which allows them not only to gain material and symbolic benefits, but also question, or resist and disagree with leading systemic practices and viewpoints in different fields (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Ideology reflects the position of language learners in specific contexts and how they consider themselves and others in those contexts. Incorporating the construct of ideology in this model helps with the analysis of the relationship between communicative practices and systemic forms of control at micro and macro levels. Since ideology is strong, it is possible that power structures do not appreciate the learner's possessed capital and do not give this capital the status of symbolic value. Moreover, the dominant systemic patterns of control make gaining the desired capital hard for learners. Ideology forms these institutional patterns, and it organizes habitus (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

The 2015 model of investment extends the question, “To what extent are learners invested in the language and literacy practices of their

classrooms and communities?", asked in Norton Peirce's (1995) earlier theory, to contain the following specific ones:

1. How invested are learners in their present and imagined *identities*? In what ways are they positioned by others, and how do they, in turn, position interlocutors in ways that grant or refuse power? How can learners gain from or resist these *positions*?

2. What do learners perceive as *benefits of investment,* and how can the capital they possess serve as *affordances for learning*?

3. What *systemic patterns of control* (policies, codes, institutions) make it difficult to invest and acquire certain capital? How have *prevailing ideologies* structured learners' habitus and predisposed them to certain ways of thinking? (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47).

The 2015 model presents a more complete investigation of the relationship between identity, investment, and L2 learning (Darvin & Norton, 2015) and contains key implications for language and identity theories (Darvin, 2016). Since the expanded model is a recent development in the literature, research drawing on it is not extensive. Recently, Barkhuizen (2016) has used this model in his analysis of the narratives of imagined identities of a preservice English teacher in New Zealand. In her research on identity and English language learning across the globe, Norton (2015) has shown the ways in which this model can be effective in the debates on learning English in the international arena. She draws on the model to improve the analysis of the research she has done with groups of English language learners in Iran, Pakistan, Canada, and Uganda and reflects on the three sets of questions crucial in the model among English language learners internationally.

In their two case studies of learners of contrasting geographical and social positions, Darvin and Norton (2016) used the 2015 model of investment to illustrate the ways structure and agency, functioning across time and place, are able to present or refuse learners the power of speaking. The model was used as a critical lens to understand the impact

of material conditions and ideological structures on the investment of diverse learners. The two participants in this study were a female language learner in rural Uganda, named Henrietta, who took part in a study on the use of digital resources for HIV/AIDS education and enhanced English language learning (Norton, Jones, & Ahimbisibwe, 2011), and a male language learner in urban Canada, named Ayrton, who participated in a study that examined the digital literacies of learners with contrasting socioeconomic backgrounds (Darvin and Norton, 2014). Darvin and Norton (2016) used the three constructs of the investment model in their investigation.

Regarding the construct of identity, the social position of Ayrton, belonging to a privileged class in a highly industrialized country, made technology a regular feature of his daily life. This provided him with all the affordances of learning. His access to resources enabled him to claim the identity of a technologically skilled user. Henrietta, on the other hand, did not have any experience with computers prior to participating in the digital literacy study. She believed that the knowledge achieved through the Internet would improve self-knowledge. Her imagined identity was to belong to the group of knowledgeable people.

With respect to the element of capital, Ayrton's access to the resources, knowledge, and social networks allowed him to be positioned as a legitimate participant in the numerous affinity spaces he had online. His interaction with other resourced learners in his currency trading course enabled him to increase both cultural capital, in the form of entrepreneurial knowledge, and social capital. For Henrietta, developing her digital literacy to belong to the group of sophisticated individuals was not sustainable. Both her own economic capital and the technological infrastructure of her local context were limited. Although her strong desires to connect with other people through technology and to enter the new transnational spaces of socialization to master literacies could be seen as a way to increase her social capital, it was not clear how this

perceived benefit might help her to gain the knowledge that could improve her social mobility.

For the element of ideology, Ayrton's investment in the imagined identity of a currency trader was accompanied by concrete measurements of success and the achievement of more economic capital. Moreover, his description of the migration experience mirrored available ideologies about globalism. In Henrietta's case, due to the discourses of globalization and technology that made her understanding of value, she identified herself as inadequate, and not knowledgeable. This hegemonic view is consistent with ideologies where the global is seen as more advantageous than the local, and the global North as more informed than the global South.

Although these two individuals' investment in the language practices of their communities was formed differently, due to prevailing ideologies and unequal levels of capital, both of them recognized the power of the digital technology and imagined more cosmopolitan futures. Data from Ayrton and Henrietta implies that critical pedagogy should not only consider the material situation of the present, but also the learners' desires as they envisage diverse social futures (Darvin & Norton, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

Darvin and Norton's (2015) investment model of L2 learning, and Norton Peirce's (1995) earlier theory of investment, that explains identity construction through engaging in social interactions, can be the most comprehensive L2 learning model encompassing all aspects of L2 learning (Samadi Bahrami, 2013). Investment as a sociological construct has been explored mostly in ESL contexts since Norton Peirce issued this construct in 1995, and there is a dearth of research on this topic in EFL contexts.

Given the considerable interest in the construct of investment on the part of applied linguistic researchers, this study is set on surveying

investment in language learning among Iranian EFL learners. Some researchers (e.g. Haneda, 2005; Samadi Bahrami, 2013) have investigated investment from various aspects, but to date, no study has used a validated questionnaire for exploring investment among L2 learners, neither in ESL nor EFL contexts. Although Haneda (2005) used the questionnaire as a source of data collection in her research on investment in Japanese writing, all the data in her study were examined qualitatively and there is little information on the questionnaire's validation and reliability index. This study investigated investment among Iranian EFL learners via a validated questionnaire. For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. How much do Iranian EFL learners invest in English language learning?
2. Are there any significant differences between Iranian EFL learners' investment and demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and English language proficiency level?

Investment in this study is primarily informed by the extent language learners show their commitment to the practices, goals, and process of language learning in the classroom and consists of six components of the (historical and social) commitment of learners to language learning, manifestation of multiple, dynamic, and evolving nature of identity, legitimacy (claiming the right to speak), achieving various capitals and resources (social, economic, symbolic, and cultural), opportunities to exercise agency, individuality, voice, and choice (language learner's agency), and finally emerging selves in L2. It was operationalized through a model and actualized in a survey instrument developed by the present authors (forthcoming).

Method

Participants

This study aimed to survey English language learners' investment in the Iranian context, so sampling the best representative group was a difficult and significant undertaking. For this survey, stratified random sampling together with cluster sampling was used. The provinces (i.e. Khorasan Razavi, Northern Khorasan, Tehran, Fars, Sistan and Baluchestan, Mazandaran, Yazd, and Ilam,) were taken as the strata; and the institutes, schools, and universities were selected as the clusters. Finally, the participants were 852 male and female EFL learners in Iran with different academic degrees and belonging to different language proficiency levels and age groups. The reason for this diverse selection of the participants was to reach better generalizability.

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) for the participants' age, gender, and English language proficiency level. Language proficiency was rated by the participants themselves based on their English language proficiency level at their institutes, schools or universities. To facilitate analyses and reports, language proficiency was reduced to two categories of high proficiency (henceforth HP including intermediate, high intermediate, and advanced levels) and low proficiency (henceforth LP including basic, elementary, and pre-intermediate levels). Age was also categorized into two groups of teenagers (11–20) and adults (20+).

Table 1.

Participants' Age, Gender, and Language Proficiency Level

Age		Gender		Language Proficiency level	
		Male	Female	LP	HP
Teenagers (11-20) (31%)	264	127 (15%)	137	77 (9%)	187 (22%)
Adults (20+) (69%)	588	241 (28%)	347	162 (19%)	426 (50%)
Total (100%)	852	368 (43.2%)	484	239 (28.1%)	613 (71.9%)

Table 1 indicates that the participants of the adult group take the higher number of participation (69%) followed by the teenage group forming 31% of the total participants. Table 1 further shows the frequency of male and female participants from different age groups. As the table demonstrates, there are more female participants than male ones with a ratio of 1.31 from whom 56.8% are female and 43.2% others are male. Moreover, the language proficiency level, age, and gender of the participants are presented in this table. It shows that 71.9% and 28.1% of the participants belong to the HP and LP levels, respectively.

Data Collection Instrument

The instrument employed in the present study was a validated questionnaire of investment in language learning developed and validated by the present authors (forthcoming). This questionnaire (see Appendix for complete questionnaire) was developed based on a hypothesized model of investment in language learning with six components and validated through confirmatory factor analysis. Its reliability index was 0.94 which was a high index of Cronbach alpha. To develop a reliable and valid questionnaire, the researchers went through some rigorous and systematic steps which included item generation, item checking with experts, item translation and revision, piloting and item analysis, validation, and reliability estimation. The validated questionnaire contained 42 items tapping the six components of investment in language learning in Iran. These components were the commitment of learners to language learning, manifestation of multiple, dynamic, and evolving nature of identity, legitimacy, achieving various capitals and resources, language learner's agency, and finally emerging selves in L2. Each item in the questionnaire was based on a six-point Likert-type scale including strongly agree, agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. This questionnaire explored the respondents' attitudes towards the English language, and their insights of its prominence in their personal lives, at school and in Iran in the digital age.

Data Collection Procedure

In order to collect data, the questionnaire was administered to 852 English language learners across Iran. They filled it out either online (88%) or by hand (12%) in their classes at institutes, schools, or universities. The researchers had also translated the items into the Persian language so that the respondents who were from lower language proficiency levels would be able to complete the questionnaire easily. In this way, the researchers could increase the return rate. After data collection, descriptive statistics and t-tests in SPSS were run as the main statistical methods.

Results and Discussion

Results for the Components of Investment Identified in this Study

As mentioned previously, the questionnaire utilized in this study was developed based on a model with six components. In this section, the descriptive statistics for each component are presented. Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation for each component based on the participants' responses to each item on the Likert scale.

Table 2.

Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Component of the Questionnaire

Component	A (Historical and social) commitment of learners to language learning	B Manifestation of multiple, dynamic, and evolving nature of identity	C Legitimacy (claiming the right to speak)	D Achieving various capitals and resources (social, economic, symbolic, and cultural)	E Opportunities to exercise agency, individuality, voice, and choice (language learner's agency)	F Emerging selves in L2
Mean	30.68	41.10	45.24	35.67	32.86	25.35
Std. Deviation	5.96	7.48	7.54	7.15	5.86	5.24

Results for the first research question

In order to answer the first research question, it was necessary to calculate the scores gained from the questionnaire. In this questionnaire, the scales were arranged from 1 to 6 with strongly disagree getting 1 point and strongly agree at the other end of the scale having 6 points. Consequently, each respondent obtained a total score from the questionnaire. This score varied between 42, as the minimum score, and 252, as the maximum score. Some of the items were reverse-coded before running the computation in SPSS because they were negatively keyed items.

To categorize the scores in a statistically appropriate way, the mean and standard deviation of the whole questionnaire was calculated. The scores which fell one standard deviation below and above the mean were regarded as low and high scores, respectively, and the scores falling between these two were considered as belonging to the moderate zone. The researchers interpreted the scores in this way: the higher the scores were, the more the participants showed investment in English language learning.

The results of the questionnaire administration showed that the mean score and the standard deviation gained from the questionnaire were 210.92 and 37.85, respectively. Consequently, the scores between 173.07 and 248.77 were taken as moderate and the scores below 173.07 and above 248.77 belonged to the participants who showed low and high extents of investment, respectively.

The findings obtained from the survey indicated that the majority of the respondents demonstrated a moderate level of investment in English language learning. More specifically, among the respondents, 90.1% belonged to those who moderately invested to learn English and 9.5% and 0.4% were those who showed low and high investment in English language learning, respectively. The reasons why Iranian EFL learners demonstrated a moderate level of investment in learning the English

language can be various and more in-depth mixed-methods studies are needed to focus specifically on the why of this issue. Now that the general image of Iranian English language learners' investment is clear, a narrower and deeper study such as an ethnographic approach recruiting a small group of language learners can bring a thicker source of data.

The number of participants who highly invested to learn English was negligible (0.4%). This can be informative for the authorities in charge of teaching English in Iran. The findings obtained were partly compatible with those of Norton Peirce's (1995) research. Although Norton Peirce's study was a case study on a small group and this study is a survey, the results of this part are similar to those of her research. In her study, the learners did not show high levels of investment in language learning. While they were highly motivated to learn and speak English, they were frustrated and uncomfortable to speak to people in whom they had a specific symbolic or material investment. There were particular social conditions under which these women were unlikely to speak. For example, Mai as one of the participants in her study, who had come to Canada for a better life in the future and her job security was dependent on the desires of management, was most uncomfortable when she wanted to speak to her boss. The ways in which these female participants created and responded to opportunities to speak English intersected in important ways with their investments in English and their changing social identities. Likewise, in the present study, although the respondents showed they were motivated to learn English (e.g. the high frequency of agreement responses to items 1, 2, 4, 8, 21, 24, 25, 26, etc. which showed learners' desires and strong motivation to learn English), just a few of them highly invested. Their desires might be in open conflict with various hindrances including teacher or class practices. If the circumstances of their language education could change, their opportunities to practice English might also change. The results obtained in our study are also consistent with those of Haneda's study (2005) in

that English language learners in Iran invest their time and energy in mastering L2 differently, as Haneda found in an advanced Japanese literacy course in Canada.

Results for the Second Research Question

The second research question in this study was comprised of three sub-questions. To facilitate data analysis and make results easier to understand, it was broken down into three distinct null hypotheses as follow:

H01: There is no statistically significant difference between male and female participants and the extent they invest in English language learning.

H02: There is no statistically significant difference between the extent of Iranian EFL learners' investment in learning and their age.

H03: There is no statistically significant difference between the extent of Iranian EFL learners' investment in learning and the level of their proficiency in English.

In order to test the first null hypothesis, a t-test was run to compare the scores attained from the male and female participants and to determine which group enjoyed a higher level of investment in language learning as measured by the questionnaire. Table 3 demonstrates the descriptive statistics (including the frequency of the participants, mean, and standard deviation) for this section.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics for Male and Female Participants

Gender	Frequency	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	368	205.76	45.72
Female	484	214.85	30.01

The results in Table 3 show that the mean for the female participants was greater than the mean of the male ones (male= 205.76, and female=

214.85). However, an independent *t*-test was run to ensure the difference was significant. The results of the means comparison are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4.
Independent Samples T-test for Gender

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means						
	F Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	53.532 0.000	-3.496	850	.000	-9.09244	2.60114	-14.19785 3.98702	-
Equal variances not assumed		-3.311	598.080	.001	-9.09244	2.74621	-14.48583 3.69904	-

As the results in Table 4 demonstrate, t(850) =- 3.496, *p*=0.00. This result indicated that there was a significant difference between the investment level of male and female groups. Therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that Iranian male and female EFL learners show different levels of investment in language learning, even though they are exposed to the English language in their lives similarly, particularly in their English language classes. The reason why Iranian male and female EFL learners are statistically different in the extent of their investment can be due to being unequally affected by the English language while they are learning it. Another reason could be associated with a larger number of female participants in this study. The findings of this part can be compared with those of Potowski (2004) in that a gender-based pattern was also observed in the participants'

investments in using Spanish in the Spanish/English dual immersion classroom

In order to test the second null hypothesis, another independent *t*-test was run to compare the investment level of the teenagers with that of the adults. Table 5 reports the results of descriptive statistics obtained for the participants' age.

Table 5.
Descriptive Statistics for Different Age Groups

Age	Frequency	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teenagers (11-20)	264	208.97	39.69
Adults (20+)	588	211.80	37.00

As Table 5 shows, the mean for the adult group was higher than the mean of the teenage group (teenagers= 208.97, and adults= 211.80). However, an independent *t*-test was run to make sure if this difference was significant. Table 6 shows the results for the *t*-test.

Table 6.
Independent Samples T-test for Age

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means					
	F Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
							Lower Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.901 .168	-1.009	850	.313	-2.82924	2.80453	-8.33384 2.67537
Equal variances not assumed		-.982	475.843	.326	-2.82924	2.88031	-8.48893 2.83046

Table 6 shows that t(850) = -1.009, p>.05. This finding indicates that the null hypothesis is supported. It was concluded that there was not a significant difference in the extent of investment between the participants of these two age groups. This insignificant difference can be justified by the fact that every age has its own advantages to learn an L2. Young learners can learn as well as or even better than older ones. On the other hand, the older learners have the potentiality to be more reflective and critical concerning their own self and identity. Apparently, older learners are more aware of their sense of being and the exotic language and culture.

To test the third null hypothesis, the extent of investment was compared in the low- and high- proficiency learners. Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics for this part.

Table 7.
Descriptive Statistics of the Participants from Different Language Proficiency Levels

LP	Frequency	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low Proficiency (basic, elementary, pre-intermediate)	239	201.76	48.02
High Proficiency (intermediate, high intermediate, advanced)	613	214.49	32.40

Table 7 indicates that the means for these two groups were 201.76 and 214.49 respectively with the high-proficiency group having a higher mean. However, an independent *t*-test was run to make sure the difference was significant. Table 8 illustrates the results of t-test for language proficiency.

Table 8.

Independent Samples T-test for Language Proficiency

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means						
	F Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	53.025 .000	-4.459	850	.000	-12.73186	2.85535	-18.33623	-7.12749
Equal variances not assumed		-3.777	325.984	.000	-12.73186	3.37120	-19.36392	-6.09981

Based on Table 8, t (850) = - 4.459, p = 0.00. This result demonstrates that the null hypothesis is rejected and that there were significant differences between the extent of investment of learners belonging to the LP and HP groups. The reason why HP EFL students exhibited more investment may be reflective of the fact that HP group had already recognized that if they were to learn the language professionally, they had to facilitate their language learning efforts with some means to increase their level of interest in language learning. This can have a high contributory role in helping them to prepare the ground for possessing a higher level of language proficiency. Moreover, the subjective (not objective) determination of language proficiency on the part of language learners themselves might be influential in this result. In addition, the large number of participants might have also been a reason for this finding. With fewer participants, a different result might have been obtained. The findings of this part of the research corroborate the results of Samadi Bahrami's (2013) study. In spite of the fact that Samadi Bahrami's (2013) research approach was different from our research– he concentrated chiefly on the integration and mutual role between language

and culture and its influence on the personality and EFL proficiency–his work on personality and language proficiency drawing on Norton's investment hypothesis in L2 learning was very helpful.

Conclusion

Considering the point that most of the sociolinguistic researchers have applied qualitative approaches in their studies, the current researchers attempted to overcome this limitation by employing a quantitative approach in investment research to reach more generalizability. Although qualitative approaches are generally preferred for doing sociolinguistic issues due to giving detailed accounts, their potential problems, for example being time-consuming, costly for administration and scoring, and less generalizable, must not be ignored (Khatib & Rezaei, 2013). The quantitative approaches can address these practical problems inherent in qualitative approaches.

The results of the present quantitative-based survey showed that the majority of Iranian EFL learners possessed a moderate level of investment in language learning. Moreover, the difference between the investment level of male and female participants was significant with females showing more investment in learning the English language. The same significant difference was also observed between LP level and HP level of language proficiency with the latter group investing more to learn English. The results also indicated that age was not a crucial factor in determining the extent of investment of the participants.

The results of this study can be helpful in that becoming aware of language learners' investment might assist language teachers, teacher trainers, materials developers, and authorities in the language education system to decide thoughtfully for the improvement of language education in Iran considering the fact that L2 learning brings about an opportunity for L2 learners to develop their personality through investment in L2

learning (Norton Peirce, 1995) and that this richer personality results in achieving a higher proficiency in L2 (Samadi Bahrami, 2013).

A pedagogical implication of the findings in the present study is that a crucial factor for learners', particularly adult learners', engagement in L2 classroom practices is L2 learners' impression of how involvement in the task is most meaningful for them and maybe the teacher's pedagogical aims is not as important as the learners' impression. This study draws EFL educators' attention to the point that individual learners' needs, aspirations, and hopes concerning their use of the target language must be valued, as each looks for and attempts to use the opportunities well to become the person they desire to be. The framework of the present study, established on the concepts of identity construction and investment, might offer a standpoint through which it is possible to consider the differences in L2 learners' ways of investment in the tasks and practices.

A further implication of this study is that instead of assuming a silent or inactive student to be "unmotivated", a teacher should suppose that the learner may not show enough investment in classroom practices. Since language teachers are in close interaction with language learners, they can be influential in increasing the extent of investment among language learners to intensify the sense of commitment to learn another language (Pittaway, 2004).

As the first survey research on investment in English language learning in Iran, the present study has some shortcomings. Concerning the limitations and delimitations of the present study, the first point relates to the data collection instrument. Although questionnaires have numerous advantages for doing research, for example being invaluable tools for ongoing research and large-scale surveys in a short time, meeting generalizability in results, being scored objectively, yielding rich data, extrapolating data easily, and obtaining demographic information, in doing research studies, it is recommended to mix quantitative

approaches with qualitative ones to complement the shortcomings in the data collected through each approach (Rezaei, 2017). The results of this study gave a general picture of Iranian EFL learners' investment in language learning. To reach a much thicker description, qualitative studies should be accompanied.

Although the questionnaire utilized in this study had been developed based on professional and academic acts and had shown a respectable degree of reliability and validity, future consumers of this questionnaire should pilot it again before they administer it. Moreover, this exploratory study was contextualized in Iran, so generalizability is limited to the Iranian context.

The urgency of further studies is felt to examine how paying attention to learners' investment in the language practices of the class can promote language proficiency among learners. Another avenue for further research is to investigate what opportunities L2 learners should have to increase the extent of their investment in learning across time and place, and how low-invested language learners might benefit from innovative approaches to language learning.

This study calls attention to the point that investment can be a useful tool for understanding students' choices and preferences. This construct emphasizes the point that language learning "is not just simply a skill that is acquired with hard work and dedication, but a complex social practice that engages the identities of language learners in ways that have received little attention in the field of SLA" (Norton, 2000, p.132). Thereupon, language teachers should provide opportunities for learners' improvement in their investment, while taking seriously the social identities of language learners and their multiple investments in the target language. Interestingly, the investment of learners in language and literacy practices that can shape their cosmopolitan future is the highest hope for language education in the 21st century (Darvin & Norton, 2016), so if the situation of the classroom does not provide them with

appropriate chances to take part in ways that are agreeable to them, their improvement in the target language will not be as great as what educators may desire (Potowski, 2004).

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Appendix

Investment in Language Learning Questionnaire

Dear language learner,

One part of my Ph.D. dissertation at ……. is examining the investment of Iranian language learners in language learning. You are respectfully invited to participate in this research study. This research is used for academic purposes only, and you are not needed to write your name. It should be pointed out that there is no right or wrong answers to the questions and your responses are just indicators of your opinions. So, please feel free to answer the items based on your real beliefs.

Please read the items carefully and provide your responses in the format requested. If you strongly believe in the statement select option 6, and if it is not at all true about you select option 1. If these two options are not true for you, choose an option between 1 and 6 which better expresses your opinion (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= slightly disagree, 4= slightly agree, 5= agree, 6= strongly agree).

In case you are interested to know of the results, you can put your email in the following box so that the results will be sent to you at the end of the study.

Thank you for your cooperation

Before answering the questionnaire items please complete the following information

Gender: Male Female

Age: 11-15 16-20 21-25 25+

English Language Proficiency Level:

Basic Elementary Pre-inter Intermediate High Inter Advanced

I like to speak:

British American Canadian Australian Persian-accented English

Education

Diploma Associate Bachelor Master Ph.D

City/Province:

No. of years you have been studying English:

E-mail:

No.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I find studying English more interesting than other subjects.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
2	I like to keep studying English in school, college or institute.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
3	I study English just to pass the exams not anything more.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
4	Learning English language is worth spending a lot of money and time.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
5	I hate those people whose Persian is mixed with English words.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
6	I think using modern technology in language classes can enrich the content of our lessons and consequently our learning.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
7	For me, it is meaningless to talk about personal changes after learning English (e.g. learning English does not have a great impact on my self-confidence).	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
8	Studying English enables me to create new thoughts.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
9	After learning English, I feel I have a hybrid identity (combination of both national and international identities)	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
10	After learning English, I find myself more sensitive to changes in the outside world.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
11	After learning English, I feel my	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

No.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	behaviors have become somewhat Westernized.						
12	I think learning English is a threat to my national identity, since I feel less a sense of belonging to my country and people if I speak English fluently.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
13	My engagement with digital modern technology in language classes has made me feel more empowered.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
14	By using digital modern technology for language learning, I experience identities that were once in my imagination.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
15	Initially I was silent in language class, but gradually I changed.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
16	I am afraid that other people will laugh at me when I speak English.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
17	If I am given more status and respect in the class, I feel more comfortable using English.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
18	If the language teacher is not patient with my English and does not care about me and my goals and wishes, I feel isolated and silenced in class.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
19	I would refuse to be silenced in class even if I were ashamed of my language.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
20	The language teacher must call me by name so that I can speak in class; otherwise, I will not speak.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
21	In the current digitally advanced society, I can better convey my ideas to others in English.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
22	I feel frustrated when I cannot use modern technology whose use is completely dependent on knowing English language.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
23	I like my instructor to connect the language learning material to the everyday, lived experiences of the learners.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
24	I am eager to learn English so that I can	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

No.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	enjoy respect from educated people (e.g. studying English helps me gain the approval of my teachers)**.**						
25	My limited language proficiency has placed constraints on my ambitions.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
26	I value English for the access it gives me to the public world- the outside world (e.g. by learning English I can find and meet new friends across the world).	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
27	I can earn money by learning English (e.g. I can be a tour guide)	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
28	I think by learning English I can have access to social networks across the world which are appropriate for my education.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
29	By using English in this high-tech world, I can earn more prestige, honor, and fame both nationally and internationally.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
30	My confidence and self-esteem have improved alongside the growth of my English proficiency.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
31	If I cannot communicate in English, I myself am guilty at not being able to do so.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
32	In my English classes, I experience a greater degree of freedom and control in the learning process, and this is enjoyable to me.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
33	Being proficient in English makes me have more confidence in expressing myself freely.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
34	In my language classes, I am accustomed to and expect to be told what to do (I always need to have the language teacher around to help me).	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
35	I think if I am fully involved in language learning activities, I can improve my level.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
36	I feel I can have more independence in the virtual interaction with English speakers	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

No.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	internationally than real interaction.						
37	I feel that gaining power through learning English is easier as I lead increasingly mobile and modern lives.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
38	The person I would like to be is the one who communicates in English very well both in face-to-face and virtual interactions.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
39	I am afraid of being perceived as less competent in English language classes by my teacher or peers.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
40	Learning English is important because the people I respect think that I should do it.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
41	I can imagine myself using English effectively to communicate with international friends or colleagues.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
42	When I become a very good speaker of English, with my English knowledge I will be able to do tasks that I am not able to do now.	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

Thank You!