

The Relationship among EFL Learners' Language Ego Permeability, Socio-Affective Strategies, and Language Achievement with the Mediating Role of Ethnic Identity

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Abstract

Understanding the multifaceted factors that contribute to academic success in language learning is crucial in today's increasingly multicultural educational contexts. This study investigates the intricate relationships among language ego permeability, socio-affective strategy use, and language achievement in Iranian English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners, while examining the mediating role of ethnic identity. Utilizing a quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional design, the data were collected from 200 intermediate Kurdish and Azeri learners aged 17 to 22 at Iran Language Institute in Urmia. The instruments included the Language Ego Permeability Scale, the Socio-Affective Strategies Questionnaire, and the final scores for the academic achievement measures. The results of structural equation modeling (SEM) and Pearson correlation analyses revealed significant findings. The study further identified ethnic identity as a crucial mediator, enhancing the impact of both language ego and socio-affective strategies on academic achievement. The findings suggest that beyond linguistic competence, fostering socio-affective skills alongside a strong, positive ethnic identity can significantly boost academic performance in multilingual and multicultural contexts like Iran. This research underscores the necessity for holistic, interdisciplinary educational approaches that integrate psychological, social, and cultural dimensions, urging policymakers and educators to create supportive, culturally-responsive language learning environments.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid pace of globalization has elevated second language (L2) proficiency from an academic pursuit to a critical tool for intercultural communication, economic mobility, and social integration (Stein-Smith, 2018). For English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, mastering English opens doors to global opportunities, yet it also presents profound psychological and cultural challenges

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(Mammadova, 2023). Individual learner differences significantly influence L2 achievement, with psychological factors, encompassing motivation, anxiety, and self-concept, explaining variance in EFL proficiency, surpassing linguistic factors in predictive power (Dörnyei, 2014).

Language learning extends beyond linguistic mechanics, deeply entwined with learners' psychological realities. Psychological factors, broadly categorized into affective (e.g., emotions and motivation) and cognitive (e.g., memory and problem-solving) domains, form a dynamic interplay critical to L2 success, though their boundaries often blur (Dörnyei, 2013). Despite their importance, identity, as a key psychological construct, remains underexplored in EFL research (Hajar, 2017). Identity evolves through each L2 interaction, as Norton (2010) articulates: Every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors, they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. This investment in L2 reflects a fluid social identity, reshaped across time and space. Despite growing recognition of identity in second language acquisition (SLA) research, much of the existing literature has examined identity-related constructs in isolation, often focusing on either psychological dimensions (e.g., motivation, anxiety, and self-concept) or sociocultural dimensions (e.g., ethnicity, investment, and group affiliation) without sufficiently theorizing their structural interrelationships. Consequently, there remains limited empirical modeling of how intrapersonal constructs such as language ego interact with sociocultural identity markers to influence measurable language outcomes.

Language ego, a pivotal psychological construct, profoundly influences L2 acquisition. According to Guiora et al. (1972), language ego denotes the new linguistic identity that develops as learners engage with a second language, a process frequently characterized by vulnerability and defensiveness. Brown (2007) describes it as a new mode of thinking, feeling, and acting, a second identity navigating unfamiliar emotional landscapes. Mack (2018) views ego identity as the core of self-perception, guiding continuity, and future actions through personal exploration. Research illustrates its dual nature: permeable egos enhance pragmatic fluency, whereas the rigid ones are associated with a 25% lower willingness to communicate due to persistent errors (Elwood, 2011).

Although language ego, socio-affective strategies, and ethnic identity have each been examined in SLA research (e.g., Jiang et al., 2020; Tavakkoli et al., 2014), these constructs have predominantly been investigated independently or through simple correlational designs. What remains underexplored is a theory-driven structural model that explains how psychological flexibility (language ego permeability) and socio-affective engagement operate simultaneously, and whether their effects on language achievement are transmitted through sociocultural identity mechanisms such as ethnic identity.

Moreover, the contribution of the present study does not lie merely in combining these variables, but in examining their interplay within a multilingual Iranian context, specifically among Azeri Turkish and Kurdish EFL learners, whose ethnic affiliations are socially salient and educationally meaningful. In such contexts, ethnic identity may function not only as a background variable, but as a psychological resource that shapes learners' engagement, confidence, and academic investment. Drawing on Guiora's language ego framework, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and sociocultural perspectives on strategy use, the present study proposes that language ego permeability and socio-affective strategies influence achievement both directly and indirectly through ethnic identity. This theoretically-grounded mediation model addresses a significant conceptual gap. The gap is the absence of integrative structural examinations of psychological and ethnic identity constructs within the multilingual EFL populations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Socio-Affective Strategies

Socio-affective strategies, which are not academic in nature, focus on enhancing learning by fostering empathy between the instructor and the student (Longhi & Behar, 2024). These strategies take the emotions and attitudes into account, as highlighted by Oxford (1990). They also emphasize the student's connection to broader societal contexts, from the family to the global community (Boakye, 2016). Additionally, learners who have cultivated their socio-affective strategies are more likely to achieve success in language learning, as noted by Sinaga et al. (2025). Although social and affective strategies are powerful, they are less commonly found in L2 research (Awinindia, 2023). This might be because L2 researchers may not frequently examine such behaviors, and learners may not be accustomed to focusing on their own emotions and social relationships as integral parts of the L2 learning process (Oxford, 1990).

Socio-affective strategies draw on key theoretical frameworks to explain their role in enhancing L2 proficiency. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (1978, cited in Xu & Long, 2021) underscores the importance of social interaction in cognitive development, introducing the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners achieve more with guidance from peers or teachers. Socio-affective strategies, such as cooperative learning and peer interaction, leverage the ZPD to facilitate language development through collaborative tasks which enable learners to bridge the gap between the independent and supported performance (Lantolf et al., 2024).

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) and Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) further illuminate the emotional and observational underpinnings of socio-affective strategies. The Affective Filter Hypothesis posits those emotional factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence shape language acquisition, with a low affective filter, fostered by strategies like self-talk and positive classroom environments, which enhance language intake. Social Learning Theory highlights learning through observation, imitation, and modeling, where socio-affective strategies like role-plays and group discussions allow learners to internalize language patterns by emulating proficient users, thus strengthening communicative competence (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

Deci and Ryan's (2012) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) complements these by emphasizing motivation through autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Socio-affective strategies such as peer support and collaborative tasks meet these needs by fostering a sense of belonging and competence within the learning community, boosting intrinsic motivation. Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for understanding how socio-affective strategies enhance L2 acquisition by integrating social, emotional, and motivational dynamics.

While socio-affective strategies are consistently linked to reduced anxiety and increased engagement (Dörnyei, 2005; Oxford, 1990), existing studies predominantly employ correlational designs. Few studies have explored whether the effects of strategy use are transmitted via identity-related constructs. From a sociocultural standpoint, frequent engagement in collaborative and affect-regulation practices may strengthen learners' sense of belonging and group alignment, suggesting a plausible pathway to ethnic identity consolidation. However, empirical modeling of such indirect effects remains scarce in Iranian EFL contexts.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity refers to an individual's subjective sense of belonging to an ethnic group, encompassing feelings, experiences, and behaviors that define group membership (Umaña-Taylor, 2011). Ethnic identity is conceptualized as a multidimensional and dynamic construct

encompassing individuals' sense of belonging, commitment, and emotional attachment to their ethnic group (Fisher et al., 2020). Sociological and historical perspectives emphasize that it is socially-constructed and shaped by broader processes such as globalization, migration, and shifting political contexts (Terpenning, 2019). Developmental research further highlights that ethnic identity evolves through exploration and commitment across adolescence and adulthood and can be reliably examined across diverse groups (Maehler, 2022).

Within the context of this study, ethnic identity is conceptualized not merely as a demographic trait, but as a dynamic, multidimensional psychological resource that encompasses an individual's subjective sense of belonging, commitment, and emotional attachment to their group. While foundational developmental research highlights that ethnic identity evolves through exploration and commitment from adolescence into adulthood across diverse populations (Fisher et al., 2020; Maehler, 2022), its significance in the current mediation model lies in its capacity to influence academic outcomes. This is particularly evident in ecological systems where family ties and parental identification provide a stability that fosters resilience and positive developmental trajectories (Campbell et al., 2020), potentially buffering learners against the stress of navigating a new linguistic self.

In multilingual settings like Iran, ethnic identity is socially constructed and shaped by the interplay of globalization and power relations (Terpenning, 2019). For Azeri and Kurdish learners, this identity is cognitively embedded and contextually activated, influencing self-efficacy and the pursuit of achievement-oriented goals (Constante et al., 2023; Kim & Choi, 2019). These motivational frameworks suggest that when an identity is salient, it directs social interaction and intergroup dynamics (Dobai & Hopkins, 2022; Doces, 2025), which directly informs how psychological flexibility, manifested as language ego permeability, is translated into measurable performance. Rather than general identity development, these factors suggest that identity processes can either transmit intergenerational resilience or generate tensions, making it a critical mediator in the language learning process (Thornhill et al., 2022; Turjanmaa et al., 2025).

In SLA, this construct involves the navigation between a learner's ancestral group and the target language community (Trofimovich & Turuševa, 2015). The foundational concepts of additive and subtractive bilingualism (Lambert & Taylor, 1996) clarify that language achievement is most robust when learners can integrate an L2 while preserving their ethnic self-concept. This double-positive orientation prevents the identity threat often associated with rigid ego boundaries, allowing for higher motivation and reduced anxiety (Gatbonton et al., 2005).

While prior research has established correlations between identity and proficiency (Jiang et al., 2020; Trofimovich & Turuševa, 2015), the current study advances this by testing ethnic identity as the structural link that enables intrapersonal constructs like language ego and socio-affective strategies to impact achievement. In sum, ethnic identity functions as a psychological anchor (Melo-Pfeifer & Tavares, 2024; Yoon, 2011), ensuring that the emotional and social engagement of Iranian EFL learners leads to enhanced academic success rather than identity conflict.

Language Ego

Language ego, originally conceptualized by Guiora et al. (1972), refers to the psychological boundaries individuals construct around their linguistic identity. Rather than functioning merely as a personality trait, language ego reflects learners' emotional permeability when operating in an L2. While early conceptualizations emphasized vulnerability and defensiveness in L2 use, more recent SLA perspectives interpret ego permeability as a dynamic self-regulatory mechanism influencing willingness to communicate, risk-taking, and identity negotiation.

However, much of the empirical work on language ego has relied on general identity-processing frameworks (e.g., identity status models) rather than instruments specifically designed to capture L2-related ego permeability. For instance, studies using the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Balistreri et al., 1995) primarily measure exploration and commitment processes, which, although related to identity development, do not directly operationalize the permeability of linguistic ego boundaries. This conceptual overlap raises measurement concerns regarding construct specificity when language ego is inferred from broader identity typologies.

Tavakkoli et al. (2014) demonstrated that achieved identity types were associated with higher English proficiency among Iranian learners. Yet, while informative, such findings reflect global identity organization rather than L2-specific ego permeability. Consequently, there remains a need to distinguish between general ego identity development and the narrower construct of language ego permeability, which refers specifically to learners' psychological flexibility in adopting and performing a second-language self.

More recent SLA research emphasizes identity as dynamic, socially negotiated, and context-sensitive (Norton, 2010; Yazan, 2023). From this perspective, language ego permeability can be conceptualized as a fluid boundary-regulation mechanism that enables learners to integrate L2 practices without perceiving identity threat. This reconceptualization aligns more closely with mediation modeling, as ego permeability may indirectly influence achievement by fostering stronger identity coherence, including ethnic self-concept.

Research on language ego in SLA remains limited, particularly regarding instruments specifically designed to assess L2 ego. Existing studies have often relied on broader identity measures rather than language-specific constructs. For example, Balistreri et al. (1995) developed the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ), which categorizes identity into diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved types. Using this framework, Razmjoo and Neissi (2010) found that achieved identity was positively associated with EFL proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and reading. Similarly, Tavakkoli et al. (2014) reported that Iranian EFL learners with achieved identities demonstrated significantly higher proficiency levels than those with diffused or foreclosed identities. However, these studies focused on general ego identity rather than language ego permeability. Yazan (2023) proposed a framework for L2 teacher identity, yet this framework emphasized identity development processes rather than learner language ego. Likewise, Morsünbül and Atak (2013) demonstrated the psychometric validity of the EIPQ in the Turkish context, but the instrument remained grounded in Eriksonian developmental psychology and did not specifically measure psychological openness in L2 settings.

Research on ethnic identity in SLA has highlighted its positive role in language learning, motivation, and investment. Jiang et al. (2020), through a longitudinal case study of a Chinese ethnic minority learner, showed that ethnic capital and multimodal tasks increased participation, collaboration, and learner investment over time. Trofimovich and Turuševa (2015) also linked ethnic identity with L2 motivation and investment. Nevertheless, most studies on ethnic identity remain qualitative or case-based, limiting generalizability and leaving the structural relationships among ethnic identity, psychological variables, and academic achievement insufficiently explored. Existing research has largely treated ethnic identity as a predictor or background factor rather than as a mediating psychological resource. In multilingual contexts such as Iran, ethnic identity may strengthen self-coherence and academic resilience among Azeri and Kurdish learners, yet empirical evidence testing this mediating role remains scarce.

Studies on language ego further emphasize the role of ego permeability in facilitating L2 learning. Zakarneh (2018) found that thick language ego among Arab EFL learners negatively correlated with pronunciation and communicative confidence, while Farsad and Modarresi (2023) reported a moderate positive relationship between L2 ego and emotional intelligence, with

personality traits and cognitive styles contributing significantly to emotional intelligence. Although these studies support the importance of ego permeability and identity maturity in SLA, their findings remain fragmented, as some focus on proficiency, others on affective variables, and few integrate socio-affective or ethnic identity dimensions within a unified framework. Moreover, most prior research relies on correlational approaches, limiting causal explanation and theoretical integration.

Accordingly, the present study addresses these gaps by integrating language ego and ethnic identity within a sociocultural and affective SLA framework, examining ethnic identity as a mediating variable rather than a peripheral demographic factor, and employing structural equation modeling (SEM) to test these relationships simultaneously. The study is theoretically grounded in identity theory, affective SLA frameworks, and sociocultural perspectives, with the first research question focusing on the relationship between ego permeability and language outcomes, and the second examining the mediating role of ethnic identity in educational achievement.

In summary, although substantial scholarship exists on language ego, socio-affective strategies, and ethnic identity individually, the literature lacks integrative, theory-driven structural models that examine their simultaneous operation within multilingual EFL settings. Particularly in the Iranian Azeri and Kurdish context, where ethnic affiliation is socially visible and linguistically meaningful, there is limited empirical evidence testing whether ethnic identity mediates the effects of psychological and socio-affective constructs on measurable language achievement. Addressing this precise gap, the present study advances a mediation model grounded in psychological and sociocultural theory rather than merely combining variables in a single investigation. Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Is there a significant structural relationship among Iranian EFL learners' Language Ego and language achievement with the mediating role of ethnic identity?

RQ2: Is there a significant structural relationship among Iranian EFL learners' socio-affective strategies and language achievement with the mediating role of ethnic identity?

3. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Participants

This study targeted intermediate-level Iranian Azeri Turkish and Kurdish EFL learners at the Iran Language Institute in Urmia, Iran. Using convenience sampling, 200 participants were selected based on the institute's proficiency reports. The sample size was determined via SAM Plus analysis calculator (95% confidence level, .05 error probability). The sample comprised 109 Azeri and 91 Kurdish learners, with 120 females and 80 males, aged 17–22 years. Additionally, this sample size is justified for SEM analyses, given the multiple latent variables in the model and common rules-of-thumb recommending 10 participants per estimated parameter, ensuring reliable parameter estimation. This diverse group ensured representation of bilingual and multicultural backgrounds, enabling exploration of linguistic and cultural influences on EFL learning. The participant composition facilitated comparative analysis of language learning strategies and outcomes across ethnic groups. Azeri (54.5%) and Kurdish (45.5%) learners represented Iran's multilingual context, critical for examining ethnicity's mediating role in EFL acquisition. The inclusion of two major bilingual ethnic groups was methodologically intentional, as the study aimed to test ethnicity as a mediating variable in the structural model.

Instruments

This study employed three validated questionnaires and a standardized language achievement test to investigate language ego, socio-affective strategies, ethnic identity, and their impact on EFL proficiency among Azeri Turkish and Kurdish learners. The Language Ego Permeability Scale (Ehrman, 1999), a 15-item five-point Likertscale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), assessed learners' ego boundaries. Higher scores indicate greater permeability, linked to enhanced L2 success through comfort with new linguistic-cultural identities and confidence in mimicking native speakers. A study confirmed its reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$) for Iranian EFL contexts, ensuring robust measurement of language ego (Ghasemi, 2024).

The Socio-Affective Strategies Questionnaire (SASQ) (Oxford, 1990), an 18-item five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = always), measured social (6 items, e.g., "I practice English with my fellow students") and affective strategies (6 items, e.g., "I encourage myself to speak English despite fear of mistakes"), with 6 items gauging attitudes toward these strategies. The study reported $\alpha = .62$ for affective strategies in the main phase, consistent with prior Iranian validations (Fathi et al., 2024). While marginal, this reliability is acceptable for exploratory SEM and is acknowledged as a limitation. Reliability was satisfactory for social strategies ($\alpha = .64$) and marginal for affective strategies ($\alpha = .55$), consistent with prior EFL applications. Recent validations in Iran reported improved reliability ($\alpha = .71$ for social, $.62$ for affective), supporting its use for capturing strategy engagement (Fathi et al., 2024). The SASQ was selected to address the second research question, which investigated the relationship between socio-affective strategies and language achievement. Oxford's taxonomy remains one of the most theoretically established frameworks in language learning strategy research.

Ethnic identity was assessed using the nine-item Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief (EIS-B) (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015), validated for measuring multidimensional ethnic-racial identity (Appendix C). Its items, unchanged from the original EIS, ensure comparable validity and reliability ($\alpha = .82$ in 2024 cross-cultural studies). The inclusion of the EIS-B was theoretically driven by the hypothesized mediating role of ethnicity in the structural model. The scale was selected due to its multidimensional structure, brevity, and cross-cultural validation record, making it suitable for use with bilingual Iranian learners.

Finally, language achievement was evaluated via Iran Language Institute's validated final exam (multiple-choice format, covering grammar, vocabulary, listening, and conversation), with established reliability ($\alpha = .85$) and expert-verified validity, ensuring consistent proficiency measurement across participants. It covered grammar, vocabulary, listening, and conversation, with established reliability ($\alpha = .85$) and expert-verified validity, ensuring a robust standardized measure.

Procedure

To strengthen methodological rigor, multiple procedures were implemented to ensure validity and reliability. First, internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients in both the pilot and main phases. Second, construct validity was supported through the use of previously validated instruments with documented psychometric properties in comparable EFL contexts. Third, content validity of the achievement test was ensured through expert review and institutional standardization. Furthermore, prior to structural equation modeling, measurement model adequacy was evaluated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Factor loadings, model fit indices, and error variances were examined to confirm that latent constructs were adequately represented by their observed indicators. These procedures enhanced construct validity and strengthened confidence in the structural findings.

The study was conducted in two structured phases to ensure ethical issues, data reliability, and alignment with contemporary EFL research. In the pilot phase, 15 intermediate EFL learners tested the reliability of the instruments. The improvement in the EIS-B reliability coefficient from earlier internal assessments ($\alpha = .74$) to the final pilot ($\alpha = .82$) is attributed to the expansion of the pilot group to include a more balanced representation of both Azeri and Kurdish subgroups, which provided the necessary variance to stabilize the instrument's internal consistency for this specific bilingual context.

Participants were briefed on the study's aim—to explore language ego, socio-affective strategies, and the mediating roles of ethnicity in EFL achievement—fostering trust and engagement while addressing queries to ensure informed participation. The pilot phase also served to assess item clarity, response time, and potential ambiguities. Minor linguistic adjustments were made to enhance clarity while preserving the original meaning of the items, thereby strengthening face validity. Structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation was used to test the hypothesized relationships and mediation effects, chosen for its suitability for theory-driven latent variable models and simultaneous evaluation of relationships among constructs.

In the main phase, 200 intermediate Azeri and Kurdish EFL learners completed the updated questionnaires within a one-hour session, designed to balance thoroughness and comfort. Participants received clear instructions to provide honest responses, with clarifications offered to minimize ambiguity, ensuring data validity. Ethical standards were upheld through voluntary participation, assured anonymity, and the right to withdraw without consequence, aligning with research best practices.

Post-collection, participants' final exam grades (out of 100, covering grammar, vocabulary, listening, and conversation) from Iran Language Institute served as the language achievement measure, offering a standardized proficiency metric. Responses were rigorously reviewed, excluding incomplete or invalid entries to maintain data integrity. The cleaned dataset was prepared for statistical analysis to investigate correlations and mediating effects of ethnicity and gender. This two-phase approach, pilot testing for reliability, and a structured main phase with updated, validated instruments, ensured high-quality data and robust findings on the interplay of language ego, socio-affective strategies, and ethnic identity in the EFL context of Iran. Data screening procedures included checking for missing values, outliers, and multicollinearity before the inferential analysis. These steps enhanced the robustness and credibility of subsequent statistical procedures.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted systematically to ensure robust evaluation of the relationships among language ego, socio-affective strategies, ethnic identity, and language achievement. Initially, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to confirm the internal consistency of the scales. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test verified the normality of questionnaire score distributions, enabling parametric analyses. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed to summarize variable distributions.

Pearson correlation analysis, conducted via SPSS 20, examined bivariate relationships between language ego, socio-affective strategies, and language achievement, leveraging the confirmed normality of scores. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) in AMOS (version 8). Maximum likelihood estimation was employed to test the hypothesized structural relationships and mediation effects. CB-SEM was selected due to its suitability for theory-driven model testing and the evaluation of overall model

fit. This approach enabled simultaneous evaluation of relationships among latent and manifest variables, providing a comprehensive framework for testing the hypotheses of the study.

4. RESULTS

The first research question aimed to explore the existence of any significant structural relationship among Iranian EFL learners' Language Ego and language achievement with the mediating role of ethnic identity. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for Language Ego and language achievement with the mediating role of ethnic identity.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Language Ego Permeability and Academic Achievement with Ethnic Identity

Statistic	Language Ego	Academic Achievement	Ethnic Identity
Mean	71.7	66.7	20.15
SD	5.6	15.0	1.01
Variance	31.	225.0	1.04
Minimum	62	49	18
Maximum	72	98	22

The descriptive statistics for the primary constructs—Language Ego Permeability (LE), Socio-Affective Strategies (SAS), Ethnic Identity (ETH), and Language Achievement (ACH)—are presented in Table 1. The mean scores suggest a moderately high level of ego permeability ($M=71.7$) and strategy use ($M=57.28$). All variables demonstrated acceptable skewness and kurtosis ratios (below ± 1.96), confirming the normality of the distribution required for parametric testing.

Before testing the structural models, Pearson correlation analyses were conducted as preliminary checks to confirm the bivariate relationships between the variables. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation of the Language Ego Permeability and Academic Achievement with Ethnic Identity

	LE	ACH	ETH
LE (Language Ego)	1	.342**	.215*
Sig. (2-tailed)		.002	.031
N	200	200	200
ACH (Achievement)	.342**	1	.189*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002		.045
N	200	200	200
ETH (Ethnicity)	.215*	.189*	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.031	.045	
N	200	200	200

As shown in Tables 2 and 5, all constructs exhibited significant positive correlations. Specifically, Language Ego ($r = .342$, $p < .01$) and Socio-Affective Strategies ($r = .368$, $p < .01$) demonstrated moderate associations with Language Achievement. Having established these foundational

relationships, the study proceeded to Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the unique predictive power and mediation pathways of these variables while controlling for shared variance. All correlations were significant, supporting the inclusion of these variables in further modeling (see Figure 1).

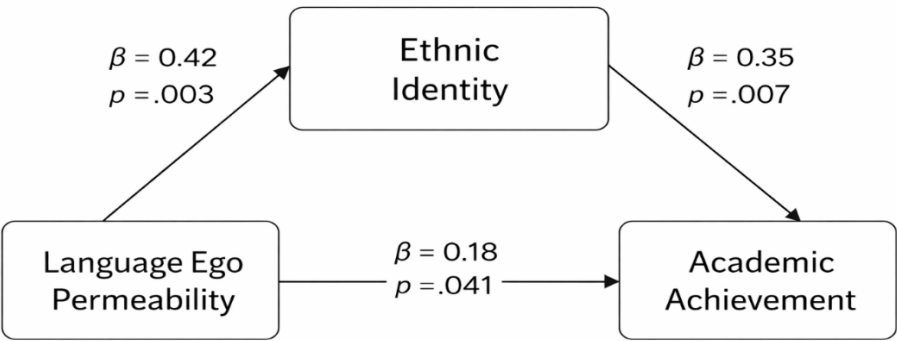


Figure 1: Structural model of the study (language ego permeability and academic achievement with mediation role of ethnic identity)

The structural equation model was tested to examine the hypothesized relationships among Language Ego, Ethnic Identity, and Language Achievement, considering Ethnic Identity as a mediator. For the first model, the path from Language Ego to Ethnic Identity was significant ($\beta= 0.42, p=.003$), as was the path from Ethnic Identity to Achievement ($\beta= 0.35, p=.007$). The direct path from Language Ego to Achievement remained significant after controlling for the mediator ($\beta= 0.18, p=.041$), indicating partial mediation. Bootstrapping analysis confirmed the significance of the indirect effect ($\beta= 0.15$), with a 95% confidence interval [0.062, 0.243] that did not include zero. This supports the mediating role of Ethnic Identity in the relationship between Language Ego and Language Achievement.

In conclusion, the SEM results confirm a significant structural relationship among Iranian EFL learners’ Language Ego and Language Achievement, with Ethnic Identity playing a significant mediating role. These findings highlight the importance of fostering a positive language self-concept alongside a strong sense of ethnic belonging to support learners’ language success. Table 3 shows the goodness of fit indices for language ego permeability and academic achievement with the mediation role of ethnic identity.

Table 3: Goodness of Fit Indices of the Language Ego Permeability and Academic Achievement with Ethnic Identity

Fit Index	Acceptable Fit	Model
χ^2/df	< 3	2.15
GFI	> 0.90	0.93
CFI	> 0.90	0.91
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.055

The hypothesized structural relationships were tested using two models to address the research questions. Model fit indices confirmed that both models provided a good fit for the data: $\chi^2/df=2.15$, GFI= 0.93, CFI= 0.91, and RMSEA= 0.055.

The second research question aimed to explore the existence of a significant structural relationship among Iranian EFL learners' socio affective strategies and language achievement, with the mediating role of ethnic identity. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for socio-affective strategies and language achievement with the mediating role of ethnic identity.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics Socio-Affective Strategies and Academic Achievement with Ethnic Identity

Statistic	Socio-Affective Strategies	Academic Achievement	Ethnic Identity
Mean	57.28	66.70	20.15
SD	6.40	15.00	1.01
Variance	41.70	225.00	1.04
Minimum	42	49	18
Maximum	76	98	22
Range	34	49	4
Skewness	-0.41	-0.36	-0.28
Kurtosis	0.52	-0.64	-0.71

The descriptive statistics presented for Socio-Affective Strategies, Academic Achievement, and Ethnic Identity reveal notable differences in central tendency and variability across the three variables. The mean score for Socio-Affective Strategies is 57.28, indicating a moderate to high level of use among participants. This variable also shows a standard deviation (SD) of 6.4 and a variance of 41.7, suggesting a relatively consistent use of these strategies across individuals, with scores ranging from 42 to 76. The skewness (-0.41) and kurtosis (0.52) values fall within the acceptable range of ± 1 , indicating approximate normal distribution and supporting the use of parametric analyses.

In comparison, Academic Achievement has the highest mean of 66.7, showing generally high performance among the participants. However, this variable also exhibits the highest variability, with a standard deviation of 15.0 and a variance of 225.0, indicating a wide range in students' academic performance. The scores for academic achievement span from 49 to 98, suggesting that while some students perform quite well, others may be performing closer to the lower end of the scale. The skewness (-0.36) and kurtosis (-0.64) values indicate no substantial deviation from normality, satisfying assumptions required for structural equation modeling.

Regarding Ethnic Identity, the mean score is 20.15, which falls within a narrow scale (with a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 22). The standard deviation is 1.01, and the variance is 1.04, indicating very low variability and a high degree of consistency among participants' ethnic identity levels. This suggests that most participants in the study have a similarly strong or well-defined sense of ethnic identity. Although the observed range is narrow, the skewness (-0.28) and kurtosis (-0.71) statistics remain within acceptable thresholds, suggesting that the distribution does not significantly violate normality assumptions. However, the limited range should be interpreted cautiously, as restricted variability may attenuate correlation coefficients and potentially reduce the magnitude of structural path estimates. In order to find the existence of a significant structural relationship among Iranian EFL learners' socio affective strategies and language achievement with the mediating role of ethnic identity, a Pearson correlation was run (see Table 5).

Table 5: Pearson Correlation for Socio Affective Strategies and Academic Achievement with Ethnic Identity

	SAS	ACH	ETH
SAS (Socio-affective Strategies)	1	.368**	.254*
Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.014
N	200	200	200
ACH (Academic Achievement)	.368**	1	.189*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.028
N	200	200	200
ETH (Ethnicity)	.254*	.189*	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	.028	
N	200	200	200

The Pearson correlation analysis presented in Table 5 reveals significant positive relationships among socio-affective strategies, academic achievement, and ethnicity. Socio-affective strategies (SAS) show a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation with academic achievement ($r = .368, p = .001$), indicating that learners who frequently employ socio-affective strategies tend to achieve higher academic outcomes. Additionally, SAS is positively correlated with ethnicity ($r = .254, p = .014$), suggesting that learners’ ethnic identity may be associated with their use of socio-affective strategies. Academic achievement is also positively correlated with ethnicity ($r = .189, p = .028$), indicating a modest but significant relationship. All correlations are statistically significant at the .05 level, confirming that these relationships are unlikely due to chance. These findings provide preliminary support for testing the mediation model through structural equation modeling. Figure 2 visualizes the results.

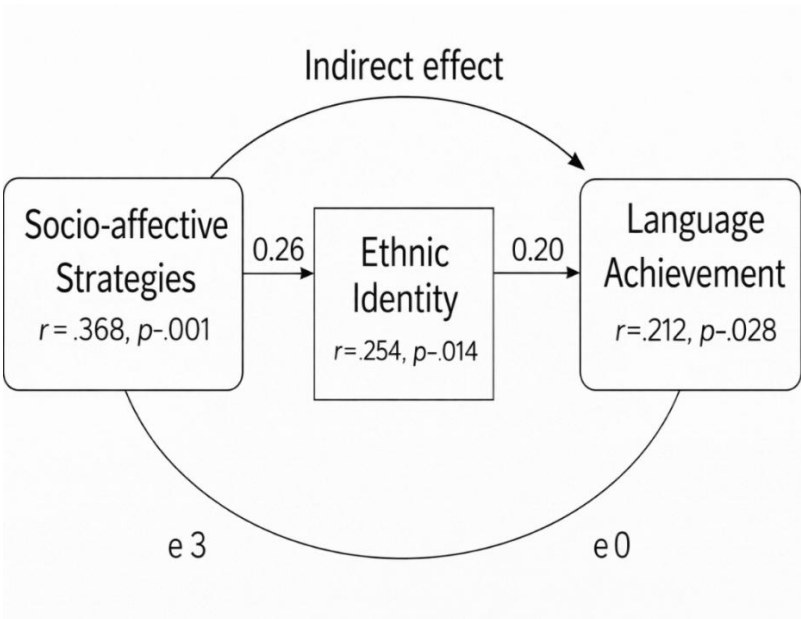


Figure 2: Structural model of the study (socio-affective strategies and academic achievement with mediation role of ethnic identity)

The hypothetical structural equation model diagram visualizes the relationships among socio-affective strategies (SAS), ethnic identity (ETH), and academic achievement (ACH). In the second model, Socio-Affective Strategies significantly predicted Ethnic Identity ($\beta = 0.36, p = .001$), which in turn predicted Achievement ($\beta = 0.29, p = .018$). The direct effect of strategies on achievement was significant ($\beta = 0.31, p = .006$). This path coefficient ($\beta = 0.31$) is distinct from the Pearson correlation ($r = .368$) as it represents the effect of SAS on Achievement after accounting for the mediating role of Ethnic Identity. The indirect effect was confirmed as statistically significant ($\beta = 0.10, 95\% \text{ CI}, [0.041, 0.182]$). To improve the clarity of the mediation analysis, the direct, indirect, and total effects for both hypothesized models are summarized in Table 6. This allows for a direct comparison of how Ethnic Identity functions as a structural link across different psychological predictors.

Table 6: Summary of Direct, Indirect, and Total Standardized Effects for Language Achievement

Predictive Pathway	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	Total Effect (β)	Result
Model 1: Language Ego Achievement	0.18*	0.15**	0.33	Partial Mediation
Model 2: Socio-Affective Achievement	0.31**	0.10*	0.41	Partial Mediation

***Note: β values are standardized. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Indirect effects were confirmed via bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.**

Based on Table 6, the direct path from Language Ego to Achievement was significant ($\beta = 0.18, p = .041$). When the indirect effect through Ethnic Identity ($\beta = 0.15$) was included, the total effect reached 0.33, confirming partial mediation. For the second model (Socio-Affective Strategies): The direct path from strategies to achievement was strong ($\beta = 0.31, p = .006$). The indirect effect via Ethnic Identity was significant at $\beta = 0.10$, resulting in a total effect of 0.41, also indicating partial mediation.

5. DISCUSSION

The present study focused on EFL learners' socio-affective strategies, language ego, academic achievement with the mediating role of ethnic identity. Regarding the first research question, the structural model demonstrated acceptable explanatory power, predictive accuracy, and overall fit, thereby validating the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships. These findings highlight the importance of considering both psychological (e.g., self-perception) and sociocultural (e.g., cultural affiliation) factors in promoting language learning achievement. Ethnic identity positively influenced achievement, indicating that the effect of Language Ego on academic outcomes operates indirectly through learners' sense of ethnic identity. This mediation underscores the interplay of psychological and sociocultural factors in language learning. The strong model fit and explanatory power therefore justify rejecting the first null hypothesis, emphasizing that learners' identity, particularly their ethnic affiliation, is central to understanding their academic performance in language learning contexts.

Rather than suggesting that language learning extends "far beyond grammar and vocabulary", a well-established principle in SLA, the unique contribution of this study lies in empirically testing a mediation model that integrates language ego and ethnic identity within an

under-researched bilingual population (Iranian Azeri and Kurdish EFL learners). The findings therefore refine, rather than redefine, existing SLA assumptions by specifying how identity-related constructs interact structurally to influence achievement.

Theoretically, these results are well supported. Learners with stronger Language Ego often view language learning as part of their personal identity, which strengthens motivation, resilience, and confidence, key drivers of success (Guiora et al., 1972). The mediating role of ethnic identity reinforces the socio-affective dimension of SLA. A strong, positive ethnic identity provides a sense of belonging, emotional stability, and security, all of which support academic achievement. In this study, learners who embraced both their ethnic background and their Language Ego displayed higher levels of success, suggesting that ethnic identity bolsters self-efficacy and commitment to learning. Importantly, our findings do not suggest that ethnic identity replaces language ego as the primary mechanism of achievement. Instead, the mediation effect indicates an interactional process: learners with permeable language ego appear to translate this psychological openness into achievement more effectively when supported by a coherent and positive ethnic identity.

Empirically, the significant relationships among the variables echo prior research showing that affective factors such as self-concept, cultural identification, and motivation strongly predict educational outcomes. The partial mediation effect indicates that while Language Ego directly impacts achievement, its effect is amplified when reinforced by ethnic identity. Moreover, the strong model fit adds structural validity to these findings. This points to a broader understanding of language learning as not merely cognitive, but deeply identity-driven. Educational interventions that nurture learners' self-concept and cultural identity could, therefore, meaningfully enhance language achievement.

The results are also in line with wider empirical evidence on the role of ethnic identity in L2 learning. Studies such as Schroeder et al. (2017) show that learners can retain their ethnic identity while engaging with the L2, adopting a bilingual or bicultural orientation that fosters both comfort and achievement. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates positive correlations between secure ethnolinguistic identification and L2 success (Trofimovich & Turuševa, 2015). This supports the model in which language ego influences achievement both directly and indirectly via the integration of ethnic identity, as learners with a bicultural orientation are better equipped to mitigate the anxiety that otherwise impedes communicative competence (Gatbonton et al., 2005). Such learners avoid the conflict and anxiety associated with identity loss, leading to stronger engagement and outcomes.

Context-specific studies, such as those of Diehl and Schnell (2006), show that ethnic identity may not always strongly predict L2 proficiency, raising the role of other mediating variables such as learning strategies, educational environment, or socio-economic status. For example, Hajar's (2017) longitudinal work on Syrian postgraduate students revealed that resources and background shaped L2 identity development and achievement. Similarly, language preference has been tied to long-term behavioral intentions, including migration decisions (Hojat et al., 2010), further linking ethnic identity with broader life trajectories. The present findings align more closely with bicultural adaptation models, yet the partial (not full) mediation effect indicates that ethnic identity is one mechanism among several, rather than a universal explanatory factor.

Turning to the second research question, the findings revealed a significant structural relationship among socio-affective strategies, ethnic identity, and achievement. Socio-affective strategies positively predicted both academic performance and ethnic identity, while ethnic identity also positively influenced achievement. Ethnic identity partially mediated the relationship, suggesting that learners who use socio-affective strategies, such as emotional regulation, peer support, and collaborative learning, tend to both perform better and develop stronger ethnic

identities, which in turn further enhance achievement. However, our results extend this framework by demonstrating that strategy use may also reinforce learners' sense of belonging and identity stability, which in turn contributes to academic performance.

These findings are theoretically and empirically justified. By fostering self-confidence and cooperation, these strategies also promote a secure sense of identity (Norton, 2010), reinforcing both cultural affiliation and motivation. The predictive role of ethnic identity aligns with sociocultural perspectives (Phinney et al., 2001), which emphasize identity as a source of resilience and motivation.

Our findings mirror those of Chamot (2005), who demonstrated that the deliberate application of socio-affective strategies allows learners to regulate their emotional response to the L2, thereby increasing their willingness to participate in collaborative tasks. High-proficiency learners often demonstrate a more sophisticated application of socio-affective strategies to regulate their emotional engagement and collaborative interactions, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between strategy use and language achievement (Oxford, 1990; Trofimovich & Turusheva, 2015). However, Rastegar and Karami (2013) found no direct strategy-achievement link, possibly due to methodological differences. Saeidi and Khaliliaqdam (2013) aligned with our results, demonstrating that socio-affective strategies reduced test anxiety ($F(1,95) = 12.34, p < .01$), supporting achievement. A study on Iranian EFL learners confirmed that socio-affective training increased speaking output by 22% (Fathi et al., 2024), reinforcing the need for strategy-focused pedagogies to enhance EFL outcomes.

The cited studies further contextualize these findings. For example, Zarei et al. (2019) examined teacher-implemented socio-affective strategies in Iranian classrooms and found moderate correlations with student achievement, suggesting that affective classroom climates support performance. Similarly, a research (Altay & Saracaloğlu, 2017) has linked language learning strategy use to enhanced cognitive engagement and self-regulation, indicating that socio-affective processes may indirectly enhance overall academic functioning. These studies support the present findings insofar as they demonstrate that socio-affective engagement relates to performance; however, they did not examine mediation through identity constructs. Thus, the current study contributes by structurally modeling identity as a linking mechanism rather than examining direct correlations alone.

At the same time, inconsistent findings in prior research (e.g., Rastegar & Karami, 2013) suggest that contextual, methodological, or cultural differences may shape the strength of these associations. This variability underscores the importance of modeling mediating and moderating variables rather than assuming uniform direct effects of strategies on achievement.

In general, the findings support a multidimensional understanding of language learning in which psychological openness (language ego), behavioral-emotional regulation (socio-affective strategies), and sociocultural affiliation (ethnic identity) interact dynamically. However, the results should not be interpreted as establishing causal claims beyond the tested structural relationships, given the cross-sectional design.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical support for a mediation model that integrates language ego permeability and socio-affective strategy use within the under-researched bilingual context of Iranian Azeri and Kurdish EFL learners. The findings reveal that academic achievement in these populations is structurally linked to the interaction between intrapersonal psychological flexibility and sociocultural identity. While language ego and socio-affective strategies directly predict achievement, ethnic identity functions as a critical mediator that amplifies these effects,

highlighting its role as a psychological resource in multicultural educational settings. These results carry meaningful pedagogical implications: learners should be guided to cultivate openness toward linguistic challenges, and educators should adopt culturally responsive practices that validate student identities to foster academic success.

These results carry meaningful pedagogical implications: learners should be guided to cultivate openness toward linguistic and cultural challenges, teachers should adopt holistic practices that validate students' identities and foster socio-emotional growth, and curriculum designers and policymakers should embed socio-affective training and culturally-responsive content into language education programs.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal designs to examine how language ego, strategy use, and ethnic identity co-develop over time, allowing for a clearer assessment of causal ordering. Cross-cultural comparative studies are also encouraged to determine if the mediating role of ethnic identity generalizes to other multilingual contexts beyond the Iranian Azeri and Kurdish populations. Additionally, future investigations could explore these structural pathways through qualitative lenses or intervention-based designs to further clarify the mechanisms of identity integration.

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