

Ethnic Identity: A Path to Language Proficiency

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Abstract: *Research has shown that there might be a relationship between one's ethnic identity and their level of language proficiency. This study aimed to investigate the most influential ethnic identity factors among Baluch participants and (2) determine which of the extracted components of factor analysis contributes more to Baluch language learners' level of English proficiency. To this end, 120 Baluch advanced language learners were selected. The participants' level of ethnic identity was assessed by a 38 item 5 point Likert scale ethnic identity questionnaire. Meanwhile, a language proficiency test was administered to determine the language learners' level of English proficiency. The results indicated that factor 1 (customs, social relationships and language), and factor 2 (culture and literature) were the major influential factors. Further, the variance in the language proficiency of the Baluch participants was significantly explained by factor 1 (customs, social relationships and language) and factor 2 (culture and literature). In other words, it was noticed that customs, social relationships and language, and culture and literature significantly contributed to the Baluch participants' English language proficiency.*

Keywords: *Ethnic identity, language, proficiency, ethnic minorities, culture*

1. Introduction

There are countless individuals world-wide who, as a matter of necessity or interest, attempt to learn a foreign or second language. No matter how simple it may sound, establishing second or foreign language classes, workshops or language maintenance classes for these learners is definitely a nerve racking task. There is an important issue regarding whether foreign or second language learning and teaching have anything to do with external or internal factors and whether eliminating one or failing to include the other harms the whole teaching and learning procedure. As we may see, if the merits and innovation of approaches and methods lie in the opportunities they provide for learners, then it is necessary for the method or approach not to confine itself to either external and internal factors but to include both. This forces us to conclude that what matters here is definitely not a matter of preferring one group of factors over another, but a case about the degree of influence each group of factors has on the whole teaching and learning process (Brown, 2007). Reviewing the literature, we can find ample examples of methods and approaches that neglect the role of such factors, let alone include these attributes in their curriculum design (Richards & Rogers, 2000). A thriving field a variety of disciplines deal with

is identity. Identity preferences, identity formation, the way we conceive ourselves and the like have all been more or less discussed in the literature (e.g. Maalouf, 2000; Mah, 2005; Suleiman, 2003). However, there are also glaring gaps, the most eminent of which is the reluctance to take the study of identity into local contexts. The primary aim of the present research was therefore to fill the above gap, thus contributing to the study of ethnic identity by examining it in relation to English language proficiency in the context of Iran. The following paragraphs will explore ethnic identity in more detail.

1.1. Ethnic Identity and Ethnic groups

Identity is a multifaceted and complex notion, as one's identity is based on a myriad of factors such as religious orientation, culture, education, community influences, family values, and belief systems (Myhill, 2003). This sense of identity causes individuals to behave in certain ways. According to Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory, people first categorize themselves into groups, then identify themselves within a certain group. That is, when considering identity, individuals consider it from both social and personal perspectives. Social and personal identities are two distinguishable entities; yet, they cannot be regarded as separate because one cannot be isolated from a social milieu where interaction with others is inevitable.

Ethnic identity has been of great interest to scholars (e.g. Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Hale, 2004; and Hutchinson & Smith 1996), each of whom has provided a definition for it. According to Max Weber (cited in Hutchinson and Smith 1996, p.35) "ethnic groups are those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists". On the other hand, Fearon and Laitin (2000) define ethnic group as "a group larger than a family for which membership is reckoned primarily by descent, is conceptually autonomous, and has a conventionally recognized 'natural history' as a group" (p. 20). In a subsequent refinement, Fearon (2003, p. 7) defines a "prototypical" ethnic group as one that has as many of the following features as possible: (1) membership is reckoned primarily by descent; (2) members are conscious of group membership; (3) members share distinguishing cultural features (4); these cultural features are valued by a majority of members; (5) the group has or remembers a homeland; and (6) the group has a shared history as a group that is "not wholly manufactured but has some basis in fact". In a much similar way, Hutchinson and Smith (1996) define an ethnic group as "a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of a common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity" (p. 6). As previously asserted, the notion of ethnicity, or ethnic identity, is not an easy one to define. From a sociopsychological perspective, Alba (1990) defines ethnic identity as 'a person's subjective orientation toward his or her ethnic origins'. Berry and Laponce (1994) point out that there seems to be no consensus as to the definition of

the word 'ethnic'. Historically speaking, it has at certain times been used to denote 'race', and at other times taken on connotations of the word 'culture'. A definition which captures the conventional classification to a greater degree than previous definitions is Chandra's (2004) which indicates that ethnic identities are a subset of identity categories in which eligibility for membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent ("descent-based attributes"). Chandra believes this definition differs from previous ones in two ways. First, it introduces a distinction between categories of membership and the attributes that qualify individuals for membership in that category. Second, it empties the definition of characteristics such as a common culture, a common history, a common territory and a common language, which are only sometimes associated with the identities that we think of as ethnic and thus cannot be thought of as defining characteristics. For these reasons Chandra's (2004) definition is the one used in the present study. Since the present study intends to study the Baluch ethnic group, a brief description is presented in the next part.

2. Baluch ethnic identity

This ethnic group (the Baluchs) reside mainly in Baluchistan, which is a dry region in the south-eastern part of the Iranian plateau. It extends from the Kerman desert to the rest of Bam and Beshagard mountains, and to the western borderline of the Sind and Punjab provinces of Pakistan. Baluchistan is divided between Iran and Pakistan. Historically, the Baluchs moved to Makran from Kerman to flee an expedition of the Seljuk in the 11th century. At the time, the Baluchs were nomads. They had never had a centralized government and were living under a tribal system. Baluch is the title of several tribes, a small number of which live in the Republic of Turkmenistan. The Baluchs speak Baluchi, which is a Western Iranian language belonging to the Indo-European family of languages and which has been influenced by the eastern Iranian dialects. It has two branches of northern (Sorhadi) and southern (Makrani) Baluchs. Iranian Baluch tribes are divided into a number of clans, the most important of which are the Bameri, Balideh, Bozorgzadeh, Riggi, and SardaarZaie, Shahbakhsh, Lashari, Mobaraki, Mir MoradZaie, Naroyee, Nooshsiravani, and BaroHooyee, Baram-Zehi, and Shir-Khanzayee tribes. The Iranian Baluchs are mostly of the Hanafi Sect of the Sunni sect. A few tribes in the Sistan area are also regarded as Baluch, but they speak Sistani, which is an abandoned dialect of Persian.

Despite some large holdings on Baluchistan in the past, Baluchistan is extremely arid, and for the most part suited to only the most extensive forms of resource use, such as goat or camel husbandry. Perennial irrigation on any significant scale has until recently been available only at Bampūr. Other historically important agricultural areas are Kolwa, Dasht, Las Bela, Daštīārī, and Kacchi, the last three of which have been developed recently to varying extents but these depended traditionally on seasonal flood diversion and were less reliable. Otherwise, reliable cultivation is supported only in a certain number of well-defined locations, where cultivable soil and an accessible supply of water suitable for irrigation coincide, mostly in river valleys,

especially the valleys of the Māškīd and its tributaries, the Kech and the Sarbāz. Investment in *qanāts* (Baluchi *Kahn*; the standard term in Pakistan otherwise is *kārēz*) irrigation, which has always been important in the Māškīd and Kech basins, began to be expanded in the last century. Since the middle of this century, irrigation has expanded again as a result of the availability of cheap energy for pumping ground water—diesel in Iran and the national electricity grid which has been extended into Sarawan in Pakistan. *Kārēz* building is being expanded again in Makrān, financed by remittances from the Persian Gulf.

Compared to most of the other tribal or ethnic minorities of the Iranian world, the Baluch (in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) are probably more linguistically diverse and stratified and pluralistic. The nature of the topography has made communication difficult and the paucity and sparseness of natural resources have limited the size of settlements. Potential leaders have been unable to build up large confederacies or otherwise expand their authority beyond their immediate constituencies. Pashtuns, Punjabis, Sindhis, Bashkardis, Sistanis all experience natural conditions similar to those of their nearest Baluch neighbors. Apart from the use of Baluchi, as a lingua franca and a particular hierarchical type of political structure, most Baluch cultural features are also shared by their neighbours. Similarly, the history of most parts of the world is to some extent a function of interference from outside. The geography and ecology are directly related to the settlement pattern, which places special constraints on political development and other particular opportunities to outside influence. The structural factors are a function of both the settlement pattern and the cultural history of the populations that came to the area. The final result could not have come about if the history of Iran and India had not led to particular types of interference and withdrawal at particular times. What distinguishes the Baluch (as distinct from the Balōč) from their neighbours is presumably, therefore, the peculiar combination of their geography, culture, and dependency which has led them to subscribe to a common language and set of political ideas.

Although there are several ethnic groups in Iran (e.g. Turk, Lore, Kurd, Turkmen and Arab), this research focuses on the Baluch ethnic group because this group is closer to Chandra's (2004) definition of ethnic identity. Apart from this, the Baluchs seem to have a sort of ethnic pride which binds them even more together (Iran Chamber Society, 2011).

2. Background of the study

The relationship between ethno-linguistic identity and the English language achievement has been debated. Ellinger (2000) studied the relationship between ethno-linguistic identity and the English language achievement among native Russian speakers and native Hebrew speakers in Israel studying English as a foreign language at the advanced level at Bar Ilan University in Israel. He concluded that ethno-linguistic identity was a greater predictor of achievement than any of the other investigated variables. In addition, scholars have also studied the relationship between heritage language and ethnic identity (Brown, 2009). These studies have identified a

positive relationship between one's ethnic identity and the degree of heritage language fluency (Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001; Tse, 1997). However, there are some conflicting findings regarding the relationship between heritage language proficiency and ethnic identity. Mah (2005) conducted one such study surveying second generation Chinese adults (the children of those adults who had immigrated abroad and learned English in the homeland), and found that heritage language proficiency was only linked to the participants' ability to participate in cultural rituals such as ethnic activities, but not to ethnic pride or core values of Chinese groups. Similar findings were reported in Smolicz's (1992) study which was conducted in Australia. The research findings suggest that while Polish Australians held on to the idea that heritage language is a core value to their community as a group, Welsh and Chinese Australians did not believe that maintaining their heritage language was important to their ethnicity. Young Jo (2001), conducting a one-year ethnographic study of the Korean language learners (basic and intermediate levels) at the University of Illinois, investigated how second-generation Korean-American students form and transform their senses of ethnicity through their participation in Korean language classes. Young Jo (2001) concludes that "becoming an English speaker does not necessarily mean the loss of ethnic identity, and that learning Korean (a 'heritage' language) does not necessarily lead to homogeneous ethnic identity formation" (p. 26). In other words, although the classroom is certainly a place in which language knowledge is imparted, much classroom activity utilizes words and grammatical points as semantic mediators of culture, history, and even politics. In order to examine the changing status of the Turks in the Republic of Cyprus and the attitudes of Greek Cypriots towards them (the type of motivation and ethnicity that Greek Cypriots have in learning Turkish), Osam and Ağazade (2004) asked 1160, randomly selected Greek Cypriot 18 to 28 year old university students to respond to the background information questionnaire (in the form of Likert scale) and the attitude test consisting of 5 subtests (Subtest 1: Integrative and instrumental motivation, Subtest 2: Integrative motivation, Subtest 3: Social psychology, Subtest 4: Instrumental motivation, and Subtest 5: Ethnicity). In light of the findings, the researchers concluded that "ethnicity, in the case of Greek Cypriot students, plays an important role. As stated ethnicity is a powerful link with past, and an energizer with respect to present and future can clearly be seen from the attitudes of the Greek Cypriot students" (Osam and Ağazade, 2004, p. 284). Research indicates that a relationship exists between perceived accent and ethnic group loyalty in a conflictual situation (i.e. when the members of an ethnic group are in conflict with members of the target language group) and that such a relationship may have behavioural consequences. Based on the previously stated assertion, Michael (2004) investigated (1) whether such a relationship exists in a situation when there is no conflict between the two language groups involved (i.e. for native Chinese speakers learning English in Montreal), (2) what the behavioural manifestations of this relationship would be, and (3) which factors influenced this relationship. The findings obtained from the performance of eighty-four participants from mainland China residing in Montreal who listened to a native Chinese reading a passage in English (spoken with various degrees of foreign accent) and Chinese in a matched-guise procedure indicated that a relationship existed between

perceived accent and ethnic group loyalty in a non-conflictual situation and that this relationship had consequences upon native Chinese listeners' choices of speakers as leaders and members of their group. These consequences are different from those observed in earlier research in a conflictual situation. Results overall highlight the importance of group factors in L2 learning and suggest the need to consider ethnic group loyalty as a variable in both applied linguistic research and L2 pedagogy. Gatbonton and Trofimovich (2008) found that a strong belief in the importance of language in defining group identity (Language EGA) and strong support for one's own group's political aspirations (Political EGA) were significantly negatively correlated with measures of L2 proficiency; the higher the EGA, the lower the L2 proficiency.

3. The present study

3.1. Objectives of the study

Based on literature, the researchers assumed a similar relationship between ethnic identity, and English language proficiency in the Iranian context. In other words, the researcher's intention was to investigate whether lower or higher levels of ethnic identity (i.e. the participants' affiliation towards an ethnic group) among language minorities in the Iranian context had any effect on their levels of English language proficiency. The objectives of the present study can be formulated into the following research questions:

- 1) What are the most influential ethnic factors among the Baluch participants?
- 2) Which of the extracted components of factor analysis contributes more to Baluchs language proficiency?

3.2. The participants

In the present study, a sample of 120 advanced EFL learners participated. It was assumed that individuals studying at the advanced level best fit the purpose of the current study since they possess a better command over English and this aids them in performing better on the TOFEL test and responding to the questionnaire. The participants were volunteers residing in Zahedan (n=46), Saravan (n=22), Sarbaz (n=16), Chabahar (n=13), and Iran-Shahr (n=23). Moreover, language learners between 19 and 35 years of age were selected based on availability. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample.

Table.1.Distribution of Turk participants

Baluch Dominated Cities	n	%
Chabahar	13	11.83
Iran-Shahr	23	19.17
Sarbaz	16	13.33

Saravan	22	18.33
Zahedan	46	38.33

3.3. Instruments

Two instruments, namely an abridged version of the General Ethnicity Questionnaire (Tsai, et al., 2000) and a sample TOEFL test (Masan, 1983), were utilized to collect the necessary data for the present study.

3.3.1. The General Ethnicity Questionnaire

The original version of the General Ethnicity Questionnaire was developed by Tsai, Levenson and Carstensen (2000) for their studies of culture and emotion. Later Tsai, et al. (2000) abridged the questionnaire to fit the Chinese context. Comparable versions of the original instrument have also been developed for use with Mexican American and African American populations. The abridged version of the questionnaire was further modified by the researchers to suit the Iranian context. In fact, the original items on the questionnaire varied with respect to their specificity. Since the researchers were primarily interested in the meanings that this ethnic group attach to being Baluch, the items were worded in a general way so that they would be applicable to the Baluch groups. For instance, in each of the 38 five point Likert scale items, the term Baluch was substituted for the terms Chinese and American (see the appendix for the original version of the questionnaire). Overall, the new version of the questionnaire used in the present study consisted of two parts. The first section contains 38 items in the form of five-point Likert scale. The second section which was modified and extended for the purpose of the present study included two short answer questions through which the participants were required to provide the researcher with their demographic data (See Appendix A for the questionnaire). Furthermore, the reliability of the questionnaire in the present study was estimated through Cronbach's alpha. The reliability index was .910 which is satisfactory. On the other hand, the validity of the GEQ was not assessed in the following study because Tsai, et al. (2000) had already validated it.

3.3.3. The TOEFL Test

In order to determine the students' English language proficiency, the researcher used a sample TOEFL test (Masan, 1983). The test was composed of a listening comprehension section (which had 3 parts and 40 items), a section dealing with structure and written expressions (which had 2 parts and 40 items), and finally a section having to do with reading comprehension and vocabulary (which had 2 parts and 60 items). The reliability of the test for the present study estimated through Cronbach's alpha was 0.95, which is considered high.

3.4. Data analysis

The SPSS statistical software (version 17) was used for analysis of data. First, descriptive statistics of the data gathered through the instruments were obtained. In addition, since the

researchers were also interested in identifying the factors which may have a stronger effect on the participants' ethnic identity, a principle axis factor analysis was implemented and followed by two multiple regression tests.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Results of factor analyses

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for each item on the ethnic identity questionnaire administered to the Baluch participants. Most of the means, except for item 31 (How much do you view, read, or listen to Baluchi on TV?) and item 37 (How fluently do you write Baluchi?), were greater than 3.00. More than one third of the participants chose 4 (strongly agree) or 5 (agree) for the following items: (item 3) Now I am exposed to Baluchi culture, (item 7) Baluchi culture has had a positive impact on my life, (item 12) I relate to my partner or spouse in a way that is Baluchi, (item 13) I admire people who are Baluch, (item 14) I would prefer to live in a Baluch community, (item 18) I celebrate Baluchi holidays, (item 20) At restaurants, I eat Baluchi food, (item 21) When I was a child, my friends were Baluch, (item 25) Overall, I am Baluch. In other words, the participants considered these items more ethnical.

Table.2. Descriptive statistics for items on Baluch participants' ethnic identity questionnaire

N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
1	3.00	1.21	1	5	20	3.34	1.21	1	5
2	3.10	1.17	1	5	21	3.34	1.17	1	5
3	.29	1.04	1	5	22	3.02	1.18	1	5
4	3.18	1.11	1	5	23	3.06	1.28	1	5
5	3.20	1.19	1	5	24	3.05	1.26	1	5
6	3.20	1.09	1	5	25	3.30	1.19	1	5
7	3.30	1.12	1	5	26	3.26	1.21	1	5
8	3.36	1.28	1	5	27	3.28	1.13	1	5
9	3.49	1.09	1	5	28	3.21	1.23	1	5
10	3.25	1.10	1	5	29	3.24	1.06	1	5
11	3.24	1.10	1	5	30	3.00	1.29	1	5
12	3.40	1.13	1	5	31	2.99	1.15	1	5
13	3.39	1.13	1	5	32	3.23	1.12	1	5
14	3.30	1.14	1	5	33	3.16	1.10	1	5
15	3.13	1.24	1	5	34	3.11	1.15	1	5
16	3.36	1.09	1	5	35	3.17	1.23	1	5
17	3.24	1.20	1	5	36	3.20	1.13	1	5
18	3.35	1.19	1	5	37	2.94	1.13	1	5
19	3.25	1.05	1	5	38	3.26	1.24	1	5

The 38 items on the Baluch ethnic identity questionnaire were subjected to principle components analysis (PCA); however, prior to performing PCA, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. The Kaiser-Meinerly value was found to be .57 which is close to the recommended value of .6 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance (.000), supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. The principle factor analysis revealed the presence of 15 components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 13%, 5.7%, 5.3%, 4.8%, 4.5%, 4.4%, 3.9%, 3.7%, 3.6%, 3.4%, 3.2%, 3%, 2.8%, 2.7%, and 2.6% of the variance. Nevertheless, an investigation of the scree plot revealed a clear break after the second component. Based on the scree test, the researchers decided to retain two components for further investigation. This is more supported by the results of the Parallel Analysis which showed only two components with eigenvalues exceeding the corresponding criterion values for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size. Table 6 displays the pattern structure of the factor analysis and items loading on each factor.

The two component solution explained a total of 18.78% of the variance, with component 1 contributing 13.07% and component 2 contributing 5.71%. To aid in the interpretation of the two components, oblimin rotation was performed. We noted that there was a weak correlation between the two factors ($r=.25$). An inspection of the pattern matrix showed twelve items loading on the first factor. Apart from item 17 with a loading above .60, the other items showed loadings less than .60. Items 16, 18, 22 and 13 showed factor loadings above .50, while items 8, 31, 14, 12, 20, 15, 15 and 36 showed loadings above .40. The items concern customs (items 17, 16, 15, 20 and 18), social relationships (22, 13, 12, and 14), and language (items 8, 36 and 31); therefore, the factor was labelled customs, social relationships and language preference. The second factor which contains four items with loadings above .40 was labelled culture and literature because the items loading on this factor had to do with culture (items 4, 11, and 7) and literature (34). Table 3 shows the reliability coefficients of each factor as estimated by Cronbach's alpha. The results indicated a relatively high reliability coefficient for factor one ($\alpha=.72$) but a moderate reliability coefficient for factor two ($\alpha=.53$).

Table.3. Factor analysis for Baluch participants' ethnic identity questionnaire

No	Items	F1	F2
Factor 1: customs, social relationships and language ($\alpha=.72$)			
17	I engage in Baluchi forms of recreation.	.625	.069
16	I perform Baluchi dance.	.565	.030
18	I celebrate Baluchi holidays.	.552	.160
22	Now, my friends are Baluch.	.509	.100
13	I admire people who are Baluch	.506	.154
8	I believe that my children should read, write, and speak Baluchi.	.481	.129
31	How much do you view, read, or listen to Baluchi on TV	.449	.044
14	I would prefer to live in a Baluch community.	.446	.033
12	I relate to my partner or spouse in a way that is Baluchi.	.446	.116
20	At restaurants, I eat Baluchi food	.439	.349

15	I listen to Baluchi music.	.433	.235
36	How fluently do you read Baluchi?	.408	.155

Factor 2: culture and literature ($\alpha=.53$)

4	Compared to how much I negatively criticize other cultures I criticize Baluchi culture less.	.213	.640
11	I am familiar with Baluchi cultural practices and customs.	.024	.522
34	How much do you view, read, or listen to Baluchi in literature	.082	.518
7	Baluchi culture has had a positive impact on my life.	.019	.499

4.3. Results of multiple regression analyses for the two extracted components of ethnic identity

The results of factor analyses revealed that there were two factors underlying the ethnic identity questionnaire administered to the Baluch participants. Thus a multiple regression analysis was performed to see whether the two factors could significantly predict the participants' language proficiency. Table 4 shows the results of multiple regression analysis for the Baluch participants. Based on the results (Table 4), the variance in the language proficiency of the Baluch participants was significantly explained by factor 1 (customs, social relationships and language) and factor 2 (Culture and literature) ($R^2=.055$, $F(2, 117)=3.43$, $p<.05$). In fact, it was revealed that customs, social relationships and language ($\beta=-.190$, $p<.05$) and culture and literature ($\beta=-.176$, $p>.05$) significantly make a contribution to the Baluch participants' English language proficiency. Moreover, the results indicate that the two predictors (i.e. factor 1 and factor 2) explained 5.5% of the variance in the Baluch participants' language proficiency ($R^2=.055$, $F(2, 117)=3.43$, $p<.05$). In addition, the results of the multiple regression analyses reveal two facts: 1) The comparison of the beta values shows that customs, social relationships and language ($\beta=-.190$) has been a better predictor than culture and literature ($\beta=-.176$). 2) A negative relationship exists between factor 2 on the one hand, and language proficiency on the other. In other words, the stronger the ties to factor 2 (Culture and literature), the less proficient the individuals are in English.

Table.4 Results of multiple regression for the Baluch participants

Mode 1	R	R-square	Adjusted
R-Square			
1	0.235	0.05	0.039
			8.35
	Df	Mean square	F
Regression	2	239.64	3.43
Residual	117	69.82	-
			Sig.
β	sig		
Customs, social relationships and language			.190.040
Culture and literature		-.176	.056

4.4 Discussion

As previously asserted, the results show two interesting but contrary findings. On the one hand, culture and literature has a negative relationship with language proficiency, while customs, social relationships and language has a positive correlation. A possible explanation for the former is perhaps the fact that traditional Baluch culture de-emphasizes the value of educational achievement and its importance for guaranteeing success in the workplace. Failure to recognize the cultural value of academic achievement may demotivate Baluch students, thus resulting in less attention to their schoolwork, the result of which is lower levels of language achievement (proficiency).

Despite this, earlier research indicates that proficient bilinguals experience intellectual, academic, and social advantages over monolingual individuals (Genesee, 1987; Lindholm & Aclan, 1991; Roessingh & Kover, 2003). For instance, In Canadian contexts, proficiency in both English and Chinese for Chinese youth is likely to be accompanied by greater feelings of personal efficacy. On the one hand, mastering the dominant language may lead them to achieve educational success and to communicate better with the majority of members. On the other hand, mastering their ethnic language may offer an additional tool in the areas of ethnic identity, social-cultural involvement, and better job opportunities. Possibly Chinese youth with high confidence in both English and Chinese have a more positive self-evaluation, and this may encourage them to explore the meaning of their Chinese background in their lives or to question negative stereotypes or the disparaged status of their group in society. Similarly, bilingual proficiency may be a critical factor among Baluchs with confidence in a second or foreign language and Baluchi. Perhaps Baluch participants who are proficient in the two languages evaluate themselves higher on personal worth, academic competence, and interpersonal relationship than those with confidence in only one language or none. Further, as members of an ethno-linguistic minority group in Iran, Baluch youth may regard English proficiency as critical because mastering English influences success in schooling and affords access to greater educational opportunities that are pertinent to the validation of self. Mastering a foreign and/or second (Persian or English) language may provide them with a tool to achieve educational success and to communicate better with the majority of members.

5. Conclusion

Identities are complex, variable, elastic and subject to manipulation and may therefore influence the way we behave (Maalouf, 2000). In some cases the impact of identity is by far greater than we assume. One of the fields which have been of interest to researchers is the impact of ethnic identity on second and foreign language learning. Research indicates that identity and ethnicity play a role in language learning, whether second or foreign. Drawing on findings of the previous research, the present study takes ethnic identity into the Iranian context and identifies possible ethnic factors and the impact of each factor on foreign language learning. The findings suggest

that 'customs, social relationships and language' and 'culture and literature' as possible factors for the Baluch ethnic minority, and 'customs, social relationships and language' as a better predictor of the participants' language proficiency.

6. Limitations of the study

As mentioned earlier, research on ethnic identity and language proficiency in the Iranian context is shallow. In fact, the researchers did not come across any research precisely focusing on this topic. Therefore, more research with a larger sample is needed to conclude with certainty that ethnic identity has an impact on language proficiency. Moreover, the present study focused on language learners studying in language institutes; perhaps, the results may differ if the study is conducted in other educational settings such as universities. In addition, the present study captured a limited number of Baluch participants inhabiting in Iran. Conducting the research in other contexts, for instance in Baluchistan in Pakistan may have a different outcome.

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Appendix:

General Ethnicity Questionnaire-Baluchi Version (abridged)

Please use the following scale to indicate how much you agree with the following statements. Write down your response.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**
Strongly Disagree **Disagree** **Neutral** **Agree Strongly** **Agree**

1	I was raised in a way that was Baluchi.	
2	When I was growing up, I was exposed to Baluchi culture.	
3	Now, I am exposed to Baluchi culture.	
4	Compared to how much I negatively criticize other cultures I criticize Baluchi culture less.	
5	I am embarrassed/ashamed of Baluchi culture.	
6	I am proud of Baluchi culture.	
7	Baluchi culture has had a positive impact on my life.	
8	I believe that my children should read, write, and speak Baluchi.	
9	I have a strong belief that my children should have Baluchi names only.	
10	I go to places where people are Baluch.	
11	I am familiar with Baluchi cultural practices and customs.	
12	I relate to my partner or spouse in a way that is Baluchi.	
13	I admire people who are Baluch.	
14	I would prefer to live in a Baluch community.	
15	I listen to Baluchi music.	
16	I perform Baluchi dance.	
17	I engage in Baluchi forms of recreation.	
18	I celebrate Baluchi holidays.	
19	At home, I eat Baluchi food.	
20	At restaurants, I eat Baluchi food.	
21	When I was a child, my friends were Baluch.	
22	Now, my friends are Baluch.	
23	I wish to be accepted by Baluchs.	
24	The people I date are Baluch.	
25	Overall, I am Baluch.	

Please use the following scale to answer the following questions. Write down your response.

5 **4** **3** **2** **1**
Very much **Much** **Somewhat** **A little** **Not at all**

26	How much do you speak Baluchi at home?	
27	How much do you speak Baluchi at school?	
28	How much do you speak Baluchi at work?	
29	How much do you speak Baluchi at prayer?	
30	How much do you speak Baluchi with friends?	
31	How much do you view, read, or listen to Baluchi on TV?	
32	How much do you view, read, or listen to Baluchi	
33	How much do you view, read, or listen to Baluchi on the radio?	
34	How much do you view, read, or listen to Baluchi in literature?	
35	How fluently do you speak Baluchi?	
36	How fluently do you read Baluchi?	
37	How fluently do you write Baluchi?	
38	How fluently do you understand Baluchi?	