



RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

A Researcher's Journey

1. How did you become interested in research? What inspired you to pursue research?

While there is no single path, several common factors and inspirations have led me to pursue research. For instance, it is the combination of personal experiences, academic interests, and a commitment to addressing language identity-related challenges that inspire me to pursue research. To begin with, I am a language learner, and my own experiences in acquiring a second language spark an interest in language identity. Personal experiences with language learning, identity negotiation, and multicultural interactions have inspired me to delve into the field. Put simply, growing up in an environment where multiple languages are spoken has fostered a deep appreciation for language diversity and identity dynamics. Equally, too, I have observed how language learners' identities influence their learning processes and classroom interactions through my teaching experiences. This observation has piqued my curiosity about identity-related issues. As an educator, my desire to improve language education plays a significant role. I am motivated by a commitment to enhancing the language learning experiences of students and ensuring that language instruction is identity-conscious. Thereby, my recognition of the field's relevance in addressing real-world language learning challenges and facilitating inclusive language education has been a strong motivator. The field's potential to inform and improve language education practices is a compelling factor. Ultimately, I have got drawn to the theoretical and academic aspects of identity studies. I have become interested in understanding how language and identity intersect and how theoretical concepts can be applied to real-world language learning contexts. Throughout my PhD journey, I was exposed to influential scholars and mentors in the field which played a pivotal role. Indeed, interactions with researchers who are passionate about second language identity have inspired me to follow a similar research path.

Dr. Suad Al Wahaibi

On 12 September 2006, Dr. Suad officially commenced her professional journey in the Language Centre (Centre for Preparatory Studies), as a demonstrator after graduating from the College of Education with distinction. After getting her MA in Applied Linguistics with honors from Melbourne University, Australia, she committed herself to pursuing excellence academically and professionally. Earning her PhD degree in Education from the University of Sheffield, UK, has further reinforced her ambition in this direction.

In this interview, she takes us through how she developed a passion for conducting research despite the challenges she has faced.

2. What are your primary research interests?

I am curious about identity construction, motivation, and autonomy in language learning. A general curiosity about how individuals construct and negotiate their identities, including linguistic identities has led me to explore this area. Identity, as a complex and multifaceted concept, presents an intriguing research focus.

"I witnessed moments when language learners experienced a sense of empowerment through their language identity. Those instances were particularly memorable and significant."

3. What was the initial question or problem that led you to embark on your research journey?

Given the role of technology in contemporary life, I was intrigued by how digital communication and online communities can shape language identity. I was interested in investigating how learners express their identities in digital spaces so that I can create identity-conscious teaching environments and develop strategies for promoting positive language identities in the classroom.

As such, I was drawn to the rich narratives of language learners. I was interested in collecting and analyzing these narratives to understand how learners construct their language identities and the stories they tell about their language learning journeys.

Significantly, too, I was interested in the effects of globalization and how learners develop transnational language identities as they navigate globalized communication and mobility.

In a nutshell, the specific questions or problems that initiated my research journey could potentially reflect my interests, backgrounds, and experiences. These initial questions or problems served as the foundation for my research endeavors in second language identity.

4. Could you share the most significant or groundbreaking findings from your research?

While it's challenging to pinpoint the single most significant finding, I can highlight some key insights that have had a substantial impact on the field.

My research findings have stressed that technology and online communities influence language identity. Language learners engage in identity expression and negotiation in digital spaces. Importantly, too, the language learning histories used in my research have uncovered the intricate stories that language learners tell about their identity journeys. These narratives provide rich insights into the multifaceted nature of identity. Ultimately, the data of my research has emphasized that identity is not fixed but a dynamic, context-dependent process. Language learners navigate their identities differently in various social and cultural contexts.

As such, one of my research implications is to recognize identity as a resource that can positively impact language learning. When learners see their language identities reflected in the curriculum and are encouraged to embrace their identities, they are more motivated and engaged in the learning process.



Faculty Fellowship awarding ceremony as well as awarding CHETL Certificates - 17 April, 2023

While these findings are significant, it's important to recognize that second language identity research is a continually evolving field. New insights and breakthroughs continue to shape our understanding of how identity influences language learning and teaching. Researchers work to refine existing theories and explore emerging trends, ensuring that the field remains dynamic and responsive to the complexities of language identity.

5. How has your research evolved or changed over the years?

The evolution of my research is in congruence with the developments in the field of second language learning, which has evolved and changed significantly over the years, mirroring shifts in sociocultural, technological, and educational contexts. In turn, my research studies reflect a more holistic, dynamic, and context-dependent understanding of identity. It has expanded to include an array of perspectives, contexts, and research methods that contribute to a deeper comprehension of how identity affects language learning and teaching in today's diverse and interconnected world. Some key ways in which my research has evolved in alignment with the developments in the field include: Technology and Digital Identity, Identity as a Dynamic Process, Identity as a Pedagogical Tool, Applied and Educational Focus, Language Teacher Identity, Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Sociocultural Focus, and Cross-Cultural and Transnational Research.

"I have sought to explore how digital spaces and online communities impact language identity. Digital technologies have added new dimensions to language use and identity expression."



Presenting a research paper at Seoul National University in South Korea - May, 2017

6. Can you discuss any key milestones or accomplishments in your research journey?

I would like to highlight that my research accomplishments resonate with the evolving understanding of the complex relationship between language learning and identity. Thus, I have contributed to more effective and inclusive language teaching practices, valuing how learners construct and navigate their identities in a multilingual world. The following example illustrate my key milestones:

I have explored the impact of social media and online communication on second language identity development. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and other language learning apps have created new opportunities for learners to construct and negotiate their language identities.

As an educator, I have worked to integrate the findings from my identity research into language teaching practices. This has led to the development of pedagogical approaches that acknowledge and support learners' identity development.

As a researcher, I have employed narrative methods to explore individuals' experiences and stories related to second language identity. These language-learning histories have provided insights into the personal and emotional dimensions of language learning.

I emphasized the importance of investment, which includes emotional and motivational aspects of identity development, drawing on Norton's Framework of Identity.

7. What are the biggest challenges you have faced in your research journey, and how did you overcome them?

Some of the typical challenges include:

Data Limitations: Access to high-quality and diverse data can be a significant challenge. I often work on finding, cleaning, and preprocessing data for my studies.

Staying Current: Research fields, particularly in technology, can evolve rapidly. Staying up-to-date with the latest advancements and incorporating them into research can be challenging.

Publication and Peer Review: Getting research published in reputable journals or presented at conferences can be highly competitive. The peer review process can also be challenging.

Ethical and Regulatory Issues: Ensuring that research complies with ethical guidelines and regulations can be a complex and evolving challenge.

I typically overcome these challenges through collaboration with other researchers, resource sharing, persistence, continuous learning, and adapting to changing circumstances. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches and staying engaged with the broader research community are valuable strategies for addressing these challenges.

8. Have there been any unexpected discoveries or serendipitous moments during your research?

While my research may not have yielded serendipitous discoveries of the same magnitude as those in other fields, there have been instances where I uncovered valuable insights or made unexpected observations while studying second language identity. Here are a few examples:

Identity and Technology: As technology has become increasingly integrated into language learning, I have encountered unexpected dynamics related to second language identity. For instance, the use of online communication tools or language learning apps have introduced new elements to identity development, such as the creation of online personas or avatars.

Unintended Identity Shifts: In the course of identity research, my studies have found that individuals have undergone unintentional shifts in their language identity as a result of social interactions or educational experiences. These shifts were not always anticipated and underscore the fluid nature of identity.

development in second language learners.

While these examples may not be as dramatic as the accidental discoveries in other scientific fields, they represent the evolving and complex nature of second language identity research. Exploring these unexpected nuances have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of how learners construct and negotiate their identities in the context of language learning and teaching.

9. Could you share any memorable or unique experiences you've had while conducting your research?

Those experiences are just a glimpse of the diverse and often unexpected encounters I had. Here are some examples:

Discovery of Uncommon Identity Narratives: I encountered language learners with uncommon or unconventional identity narratives that challenged existing theories and notions of identity development.

Moments of Empowerment: I witnessed moments when language learners experienced a sense of empowerment through their language identity. Those instances were particularly memorable and significant.

Impact on Participants: I documented stories from participants who credited my research with making them more aware of their language identity or helping them navigate identity-related challenges. Those moments of impact were highly rewarding.

Deep Personal Connections: I formed deep personal connections with the participants in their studies. These connections led to profound insights and a more nuanced understanding of the individuals' language identity journeys.



Presenting a research paper at Oxford University - 2022



Best researcher certificate for the academic year 2020/2021 awarded on SQU day - 2 May, 2021

10. Can you describe the impact of your research on your field?

Pedagogical Insights: my research on second language identity provides insights into how language learners construct their identities in the process of learning a second language. This understanding can inform teaching practices, curriculum development, and materials design. It enables educators to create more identity-conscious and learner-centered language instruction.

Teacher Training: my research in this field can influence teacher training programs. It may encourage the inclusion of identity-conscious teaching approaches in teacher education, enabling educators to be more effective in addressing the needs of their students.

Policy Implications: The insights gained from my research on language identity can have implications for language policies at both educational and societal levels. Policymakers may consider how to create policies that support language learners in their identity development.

11. What motivates and drives you to continue your research journey?

My motivations are fueled by a combination of personal interests, academic goals, and a commitment to improving language education and understanding the complexities of identity in the context of language learning and teaching. Some key motivators include passion for language and culture, desire to empower learners, addressing social justice, contributing to theory, improving policy and practices, curiosity and exploration, sharing knowledge, mentoring and teaching and, overall, personal growth.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Al Wahaibi, S. (2021). Comparing Omani student-teachers' expressions of identities in traditional EFL classrooms and digital contexts. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies*, 15(4), 500-516.

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