



**Universidad de Guanajuato  
División de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades  
Departamento de Lenguas  
Maestría en Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza del Inglés.**

**Exploring Language Learner Identity, Learner Socialization and Language  
Learning in Young English Language Learners**

**TESIS**

**Que Para Obtener el Grado de Maestría en Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza  
del Inglés**

**PRESENTA**

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## **Prólogo**

El presente proyecto de investigación busca explorar las amplias áreas de formación de identidad como aprendiz de la lengua inglesa, socialización del aprendiz y desarrollo personal. Todo lo anterior se examina desde la perspectiva del salón de clases, el aprendizaje y enseñanza del idioma inglés. Los factores que podrían afectar la identidad como aprendiz de la lengua inglesa y el propio aprendizaje de la misma se examinan dentro del espacio escolar. En este entorno didáctico toman parte los estudiantes, el maestro del idioma y la manera en que la dinámica de aprendizaje se lleva a cabo.

Este estudio examina la manera en que los procesos de socialización del aprendiz dentro del salón de clases afectan su identidad como y el proceso de aprendizaje de los alumnos. El sitio en el que se llevó a cabo esta investigación es el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad de Guanajuato, México, en el campus León. Los participantes en este estudio son quince niños aprendientes del idioma inglés, quienes estudian el idioma como parte del programa *KIDS* que se ofrece en este centro.

Para llevar a cabo el proyecto, se utiliza un paradigma de investigación cualitativa, empleando la etnografía como método de investigación. Se busca responder la pregunta: ¿cuáles son los factores que afectan la identidad como aprendiente de niños estudiantes del idioma inglés? Siguiendo la metodología etnográfica, particularista e interpretativa un estudio de caso instrumental resultó apropiado para realizar esta investigación, ya que este estudio examina un espacio social específico dentro del entorno del salón de clases.

Los instrumentos de recolección de datos fueron: entrevista grupal, *five-minute papers* y diario del investigador. A través del desarrollo de esta investigación, se pudo encontrar que existe una correspondencia entre el aprendizaje del idioma y la identidad como aprendiz del mismo. También es aparente una relación entre el papel de la socialización, pertenencia al grupo, identidad como aprendiz y el proceso de aprendizaje. Fomentar comunidades de aprendizaje que favorezcan el desarrollo de una identidad positiva como aprendiente del idioma representa una ruta en la que se puede mejorar el proceso de aprendizaje del idioma, la socialización dentro del salón de clases y el propio proceso de enseñanza.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to Chata, my aunt, to Favia, my sister, to my grandmother, Favia and to Jesús, my padrino.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1. Introduction**

This investigation explores the areas of learner identity, language learning and socialization processes within the field of ELT (English Language Teaching). The central purpose is to examine the factors that affect learner identity and how it influences language learning. Firstly, in this chapter I broadly discuss the research area and the significance it has in relation to this particular research. Secondly I review the background and context of the issue under investigation in order to provide a general framework, and connect it with the particular study I present. Additionally, I examine the academic terminology that characterizes the discussion of this study in order to provide contextualization for relevant concepts. Finally, the purpose of this study is discussed in order to inform the audience about the rationale behind it. I also present the potential contributions of the study in regards to the practical applications it has in teaching.

#### **1.2 Background and Context of the Study**

The area under investigation is characterized by an extensive body of research that has been conducted previously. The ample research work that can be found in the literature (Anwaruddin, 2012; Block, 2013; Bucholtz & Hall; 2005, 2008; Canagarajah, 2004; Jenkins, 2004; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Norton, 2008; Ushioda & Dornyei; 2009) serves as the basis for discussing relevant theories and views in regards to identity development and language learning. The present area of research involves the discussion of multiple concepts, theories and viewpoints. Identity development deals with mental mechanisms that are related to the thinking processes that children go through during the initial phases of their early childhood. The consideration of these underpinning notions is important in order to understand concepts that develop from such origins.

By understanding basic concepts about identity, its connection with language learning can be more clearly explored through the consideration of the ways in which mental operations function in this regard. Language learning is a complex process which correlates to the equally complex construct of identity development. Language learning processes may be influenced by the identity as learners that individuals hold about themselves. In this sense, it could be said that there exists a correlation between language learning and learner identity. The importance of the present study relies on the issue that

language learners and teachers might not be entirely conscious about the relevance that learner identity represents in language learning.

### **1.3 Identification of Gaps**

The extensive research that has been carried out in the area (Deaux & Burke, 2010; Jenkins, 2004; Norton, 2008; Stets, 2005; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Ushioda & Dornyei, 2009) has allowed the body of knowledge to expand and has allowed scholars to promulgate theories, principles and models in regards to identity development and language learning. Taking the above into consideration, it seems pertinent that teachers of English put into practice such theoretical knowledge. An expansion of the exploration of the relationship between learner identity and language learning is fundamental in order to enhance language learners' experience in the classroom. However, there seems to be a need for accentuating the importance of learner identity in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. In this regard, teachers have the opportunity to directly contribute to their learners' identity development.

Language teachers have a privileged position within the classroom, they represent a role model for learners and they have the ability to positively influence learners' identity. Being aware of this advantageous position allows teachers to pay attention to the issues that surround learner identity, language learning and socialization processes within the language classrooms. The way language teachers are seen by students may influence the way language learners perceive themselves and their language learning in general. Frequently teachers are conscious about the importance of their role in influencing learners' identity and language learning, but they lack the knowledge about how to help learners develop a more positive identity. Teachers must become knowledgeable on the different ways their language learners' identities are affected within the language classroom.

As mentioned above, the body of knowledge on identity, classroom interaction, language learning and language teaching is expected to be put into use by teachers. What teachers do in the classroom with their students might be highly influential for their language learning and for their identity development. As Toohey and Norton (2011) suggest "pedagogical decisions can reinforce subordinate student identities, and limit students' access not only to language learning opportunities, but also to their imagination of more desirable identities" (p. 430). For this reason, the need for making teachers aware of the

elements that interplay in the development of their students' identity is highly essential. Putting into practice theoretical knowledge on learner identity development might represent a way in which teachers can improve the language learning experiences of their students. Regarding this, it could be argued that practical knowledge is the manifestation of teachers' understanding of theoretical knowledge. Tsui (2012) argues that practical knowledge "can be understood by examining teachers' everyday practice and the thinking behind it" (p. 18). Providing teachers with an overview of the procedures and key elements underpinning this research might give them valuable tools for implementing a number of ideas into the classroom. In other words, it is important to understand the ways in which learners' identity is influenced in order for teachers to be able to help their learners have a positive learner identity.

#### **1.4 Purpose of This Study**

This study explores the possible factors that may affect the learner identity formation process of young English language learners. The research question that guided this research is the following:

*What are the factors that affect young English language learners' identity formation process?*

Understanding these factors may represent an opportunity for teachers and members of the ELT community to help children develop a positive learner identity. In order to go about doing so, a qualitative paradigm to research was followed. A particular type of ethnography was implemented as the method to approach the research. Govea, Vera and Vargas (2011) describe a type of ethnography which is *particularistic* which is at the same time, *interpretative*. This type of ethnography: "Intends to discover the meanings within the observed social interaction" (Govea, Vera & Vargas, 2011 p. 34). This variety of ethnography allows the ethnographer to increase his or her interpretative ability through a higher level of analysis. As part of the type of ethnographic research that this study follows, and given the fact that it examines a specific social space within the EFL classroom, an ethnographic instrumental case study permits the researcher to be part of the community unobtrusively (Kraay, 2012; Clevenger, 2014; Patton, 2014). As data gathering techniques I implemented a group interview, five-minute papers and a research journal. Young English language learners' ideas, perceptions and beliefs about themselves, their learning process, their classmates and teachers are examined.

The development of this study provided relevant results that led to discussion of the local implications for teachers in this particular context. Within such results, the importance of learner socialization was highlighted, which may represent an opportunity for teachers to develop a deeper understanding of the EFL classroom dynamics. It is necessary to raise awareness about the relevance of socialization processes in the classroom that allows learners to create their particular learning community. Such learning community offers learners an opportunity to develop affinities towards the varied aspects conforming their social space. Having a solid perception of their role within their social space (the EFL classroom) also provides them with a more stable self-image, allowing them to have an enhanced language learning experience.

### **1.5 Contribution of the Study**

Similar studies have explored the areas of learner identity, language learning and socialization processes within the EFL classroom. Several studies in identity development have explored learner socialization, communities of practice within the EFL context, identity theory and language learning, learner difficulty and learner identity (Anwaruddin, 2012; Boylan & Mari, 1996; Hirano, 2008; Tarone, 2007).

For scholars, researchers and teachers in the field of ELT understanding the elements that contribute to a successful language learning process is highly fundamental. Understanding what is behind learners' learning processes may represent a way in which language learning can be enhanced. The theoretical background that informed this study is reflected in the different issues raised throughout the project. The locality of this research implies that further research in the area should be conducted. Teachers are encouraged to recognize the need for understanding learners in a better way, which will help them enhance their learners' language learning process. This study provides a model that can be replicated and the different elements discussed here can be taken into consideration by teachers in order to put into practice some of the suggestions offered here.

### **1.6 Organization of the Thesis**

In this chapter the area of investigation, background research and overall purpose have been explained.

In Chapter 2 I offer a review of the literature that pertains to the study. I offer an overview of different concepts and terms that need to be addressed. Furthermore, I present perspectives in identity that contrast with each other in some aspects, but that also are informed by each other. A general examination of mental processes in children's thinking, learning and socialization is provided.

Chapter 3 I presents the research methodology that structured the systematic execution of the study. A qualitative paradigm to research was followed, under an interpretative type of ethnography as method for collecting data, through the use of group interview, five-minute papers and a researcher journal as data gathering techniques.

I provide a discussion of the data in Chapter 4 and the main themes that emerged from the analysis. Each theme is developed providing evidence from the data obtained through the research techniques. The overall findings that each theme addresses are presented and discussed in this chapter.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I offer a discussion about the in main findings obtained from the data analysis. In this chapter I offer a discussion of the possible implications for teaching and the recommendations I consider relevant for further research in the area.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The present research project focuses on the exploration of young language learners' identity formation process. The site of research for this study is the school setting, and more specifically, the language classroom. The research question to be addressed is:

*What are the factors that affect young English language learners' identity formation process?*

The intention is to examine such aspects of the process of early identity formation and to analyze their role in language learning. The study examines the constituents of the process of identity formation in early stages of development of children's thinking capacities.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature that pertain to the area of study. It intends to inform the audience about the theoretical content and concepts that are most relevant to this study, so that the background and contextual information is synthesized. In doing so it is also aimed to offer relevant evidence from theory to the arguments that are expected to appear as part of the discussion and findings. The review of the literature involves a number of arguments concerning pivotal claims which will be analyzed in terms of strengths and weaknesses. The diverse perspectives that exists in relation to a given theory, research or idea that are significant to this study will also be compared. In this chapter the reader will be presented with a critical review of concepts related to the following topics:

- Concept of Identity
- Children's Thinking
- Concept of Learner Identity
- Learner Socialization

### **2.2 Concept of Identity**

As the central issue of the study, the concept of identity will be examined from various perspectives. Stryker and Burke (2000) argue that identity is "Ubiquitous in contemporary social science, cutting across psychoanalysis, psychology, political science, sociology and history" (p. 284). Primarily, a general concept of identity is explored, which comes

from the field of psychology. The construction of an individual's identity begins at an early stage in childhood, hence it seems pertinent to begin the exploration of the elements that constitute it. There exist various perspectives from which identity is seen by researchers across disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, among others. Identity is rather complex and it comprises notions of self, others, personality, individuality and similarity. Identity is a concept with extensive applications and elements, which, therefore is expected to be addressed from a number of perspectives. Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, and McDermott (2006) remark that "the wide variety of conceptualizations and definitions of identity have led some to conclude that identity is so elusive, slippery, and amorphous that it will never prove to be a useful variable for the social sciences" (p. 695). This view shows that the concept of identity involves a wide range of possible interpretations and viewpoints from which it is addressed. There are perspectives of identity development that focus on a cognitive and psychological viewpoint, centralizing the role of individuality in identity development. Other perspectives opt for analyzing identity from a sociological perspective, arguing that identities are constructed socially.

Powell (2004) proposes analyzing identity formation from a psychoanalytical perspective, in which he examines conflicts of identity resolutions. He begins to examine the process of identity formation from an internal angle; this is, analyzing how individuals' process of construction of their own selves, stating that "self-esteem, which refers to self-worth, self-respect or how one regards or feels about oneself, is a concept that is constitutive to the self-concept, which is the perception about identity and achievements" (p. 78). In this regard, the author additionally argues that "this process is the start of forming a 'self' or 'thinking of self'" (p. 78), in which children begin to form their individualization, wherein they also initiate the building of features of their personality.

Coinciding with Powell's view, Carter (2013) analyses the theory of identity from the perspective of the self. He highlights the way individuals distinguish themselves through particular characteristics that define the self. However, he makes the distinction between the type of identity that is unique to individuals, and the type of identity that binds the self to others, thus, acknowledging the existence of multiple identities. Carter (2013) recognizes that: "Identity is an internal positional designation that represents meanings actors use to define themselves as unique individuals (person identities), role occupants

(role identities), or group members (social identities)” (p. 204). Both authors acknowledge the individuality of the nature of identity, in view of the fact that it conveys personal and unique characteristics of the self. Nevertheless, the role of social relationships in identity development must be addressed more in depth, since language learners occupy a position within their learning community.

*An individualistic perspective* of identity generates from the individual’s subjectivity and deep internalizations of the self. But, how can a person deem himself or herself as individually unique without the interposition to others in society? Then, the concept of identity includes notions of uniqueness but at the same time it represents connection to others’ individual characteristics. For that reason, it has been noted that identity sometimes denotes contradiction; as Buckingham (2008) suggests that identity implies both similarity and difference. From an early stage in their cognitive development, individuals identify themselves with unique characteristics of their personality, which differentiates them from the rest; however, individuals also identify themselves with others, which implies a wider relationship with groups or communities. In the language classroom this phenomenon can be observed with children and teachers as well. Regarding identity formation, there are several concepts which imply different aspects of an individual’s life.

From an early phase in life, children begin to develop a sense of affinity towards a number of different general aspects. An individual’s own self-perception initially comes from within, generated from their psychological processes of building who we are; however, as Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that “Accounts that locate identity inside the mind may discount the social ground on which identity is built, maintained, and altered” (p.587). Thus, it seems to be important that individuals also recognize the social structures that permit the identification to external aspects of life. The features that characterize those connections with the different ambits in life may represent a sense of identity towards members of a specific group or community. Such identity may indicate that the individual perceive him or herself as an equal or similar member of the community. However, an individual’s identity also denotes uniqueness since that a person is irreplaceable and has characteristics that cannot be replicated completely. In this regard, we can acknowledge an internal positioning of the self while recognizing others as important elements in one’s identity.



As a sociocultural phenomenon, identity is closely linked to relational and interactional situations. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that the importance of seeing identity from a sociocultural perspective lies on the fact that linguistic interaction is the primary foundation of identity. They also offer a concise concept of identity: “identity is the social positioning of self and other” (p. 586). This can serve as an example of the importance of an individual being part of a community, since individuals are social by nature. As indicated, identity is constructed and negotiated through the use of language in interaction; social relationships and the way individuals engage in verbal communication are essential components in identity construction.

Stryker and Burke (2000) discuss the *identity theory*, related to a previous work by Stryker (1980), labeled *structural symbolic interactionism*, which explores the way social structures and the self have a symbiotic relationship. This identity theory deals with two aspects of the process of the self: “The first aspect concentrates on examining how social structures affect the structure of self and how self affects social behaviors, whereas the second concentrates on the internal dynamics of self-processes as these affect social behavior” (p. 285). Individualistic and social perspectives are acknowledged by the authors, nevertheless, they do not provide a clearer way in which both can interrelate and inform one another. In fact, the two views are opposite to each other, and as the authors put it “relatively speaking, the first neglects internal dynamics of self-processes, while the second neglects ways in which external social structures impinge on the internal processes” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.285). This view separates one aspect from the other, although it might be valuable to look at internal self-processes and social structures as informing one another, rather as antagonistic.

Buckingham (2008) harmonizes in a clearer manner the way both perspectives interrelate. He suggests that:

On one level, I am the product of my unique personal biography. Yet who I am (or who I think I am) varies according to who I am with, the social situations in which I find myself, and the motivations I may have at the time, although I am by no means entirely free to choose how I am defined. (Buckingham, 2008, p. 2)

This statement seems to refine the ways in which individual and social perspectives of identity contribute to the development of individuals’ sense of self. For Jenkins (2004) to talk about identity is simply to talk about its relationship with society structures:

“[identity] is the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference” (p.5). Jenkins stresses the importance of social structures and processes in the formation and reformation of identity, which goes in tune with the second aspect of Stryker and Burke’s (2000) identity theory. It has been said previously that internal processes of constructing and reconstructing the self-lead to continual changes. In this sense, it seems reasonable to reconsider more profoundly the transformative attribute of identity, given that, just as internal psychological processes of self, social processes and structures characteristically lead to change.

Taking into consideration the changing nature of identity, it has been extensively seen as dynamic and in constant evolution. As Jenkins (2004) puts it: “Not even death freezes the picture: identity or reputation can be reassessed, and some identities – sainthood or martyrdom, for example – can only be achieved beyond the grave” (p.5). Alexander (1992) discusses the issue of seeing identity as a result of a constant process of constructing our “selves”, he argues that there is “the suggestion that the key to identifying one of the criteria for the re-identification of persons (personal identity) is the capacity that many human beings have of constituting their “selves” (p. 83). Here it is evident that the notion of identity is in constant construction and re-construction. The author also mentions that individuals engage in interpreting and reinterpreting their reality and their physical and psychological properties that constitute their individuality.

In the lines of identity seen from an individualistic viewpoint, Alexander (1992) also suggests that “In order to do justice to the notion of personal identity, the self should be treated as an "emergent" entity, or that one must take a "subjective" view of the self as self-constituting, or that the self has the capacity to create itself” (p.83). This idea goes in line with Carter’s (2003) view of identity as a unique feature that comes from within an individual. Identity, then, can be understood as a construct that does not have a finite end, but that is in continuous construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. The author also emphasizes that the construction of identity can be seen from an internal perspective, one from which the individual surges and that is particular and unique to that person. In this sense, identity is seen as a subjective idea which each individual possesses and construes personally. Furthermore, Block (2013), in accordance with Powell (2004), positions himself in favor of a “more psychological angle when most language and identity research

tends to be predominantly social” (p. 15), without neglecting the importance of an interrelation between social structures and individual agency.

As discussed previously, identities change over time, therefore it is logical to assume that individuals have multiple identities. They are constructed depending on a number of circumstances in an individual’s life. Burke (2006) examines how identities change, and his focus is on exploring the theoretical mechanisms that make this change possible. He proposes the concept of Identity Control Theory (ICT), hypothesizing that “while identities influence the way in which a role is played out, discrepancies between the meanings of the identity standard and the meanings of the role performance will result in change” (p. 81). It can be supposed, then, that identities change due to the fact that people have idealized roles that certain people are required to play, given particular circumstances. Kumaravadivelu (2012) describes how identity was perceived during the days of modernity, which consisted of individuals having to “constitute their identity in tune with pre-existent and relatively unchanging societal norms” (p.10). Kumaravadivelu discusses how during the days of modernism identities were seen as something fixed, imposed and delineated, rather than self-constructed. This view recognizes the roles that are sometimes pre-established in society, and that individuals are expected to accommodate to.

Similarly, Burke explains the roles that we find in society, and how identities change according to those expectations. Burke’s (2006) Identity Control Theory (ICT) accounts for a possible way in which identity change can be theoretically explained. Burke argues that within the ICT “an identity is viewed as a set of self-relevant meanings held as standards for the identity in question” (p. 81). His view is somewhat more or less restrictive, in that he explores the changes individuals experience in their identities according to their situations and contexts. In contrast to modernism view of identity, postmodernism sees identity as something more flexible and acknowledges its continuous reformation. Kumaravadivelu (2012) states that “postmodernism treats individual identity as something that is actively constructed on an ongoing basis. It sees identity as fragmented, not unified; multiple, not singular; expansive, not bounded (p. 10). This view goes more in tune to the current research, since individuals themselves possess the ability to exercise power over their own identities. Language learners experience changes in their identity as learners, and that, precisely, is the focus of this research.

Language students develop a role, an image which is unique to them, but which at the same time is used to relate to others in the classroom. Buckingham (2008) states that when we identify with others “we imply that our identity is partly a matter of what we share with other people” (Buckingham, 2008, p.1). This is relevant for ELT and language learners, because in the classroom each participant (including the teacher) has a role and an image of themselves as part of that group. This study is focused on how interactions between English students represent a window through which one can understand the role of the participants in such particular group. Jenkins (2004) asserts that “all human identities are by definition social identities. Identifying ourselves or others is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation” (p.4). This idea gives an important significance to the role of social relations and interactions with members of a group. In this sense, the social space, or language learning context, where interactions are to take place is an important aspect of the identity formation of young learners.

### **2.3 Children’s Thinking**

Now that the main concepts and perspectives in regards to identity formation have been addressed, it seems pertinent to explore the way young children mentally process their world. Narrowing the focus of this study to the main participants, who are children, a discussion about mental processes in identity formation is required. In addressing the early stages of identity formation in children, it seems the examination of the way children begin to see the world and form mental representations of it is critical in understanding children’s identity. Children’s mental representations are at the center of their cognitive development, and the way their thinking is organized is significant to their identity formation. The way children begin to structure their knowledge base is often achieved through assistance from a more expert individual. Children begin to structure their own thinking and problem solving strategies, which set up considerable characteristics of their personality and identity.

The initial mental representations and mental operations that children build are crucial elements in the development of their individual identity, since they establish the ground from where mental operations will continue to develop. In this regard, individual perspectives to identity, as discussed previously, seem to inform the way children develop their identity and personality. However, the fact that children need external agents in their scaffolding processes contradicts the idea that identity is almost entirely build within the

mind. Bjorklund (1995) describes children's theory of mind as "children's developing concepts of mental activity" (p. 207), and she additionally states that "having a theory of mind implies recognizing different categories of mind, such as dreams, memories, imagination, beliefs, and so on, and having some casual-explanatory framework to account for the actions of other people" (p. 208). This notion about children's thinking processes seems to be based primarily upon internal and individualistic mental operations; however, the theory of mind also involves notions and conceptualizations children create about others, such as in the case of parents, siblings and so on, who serve as platforms for developing their cognitive abilities.

The theory of mind was first introduced in 1978 by Premack and Woodruff, when they questioned the existence of a theory of mind in chimpanzees. Their broad definition of theory of mind is concise: "an individual has a theory of mind if he imputes mental states to himself and others" (Premack & Woodruff, 1978, p. 515). Their definition of theory of mind includes the making of "predictions about the behavior of others" and includes the mental states of "purpose or intention, as well as knowledge, belief, thinking, doubt, guessing, predicting, liking and so forth" (p. 515). This concept of a theory of mind often involves ideas we have about other people, which are gradually built through interactions with those people. Social structures are then deemed to have a fundamental role in the development of identity. Identities go through a constant process of change, adaptation and evolution, which greatly depends on the relationships we have with others. The theory of mind proposed here recognizes the role of internal mechanisms of thought, while also recognizing that such mechanisms are lived and refined through interactions with others.

Examining the way mental processes begin to form is closely related to the view of identity as a psychological construct. Although it has also been argued that identity is essentially social (Jenkins, 2004; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000), Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that "A traditional scholarly view of identity as housed primarily within an individual mind, so that the only possible relationship between identity and language use is for language to reflect an individual's internal mental state" (p.587). This perspective does not, however, imply ignoring the role of social structures in the formation of identities. The authors assert that in order for others to perceive an individual's sense of identity it is necessary to begin from that individual's mind, and this is possible through the use of some type of discourse.

Considering language as the medium through which individuals formulate their thoughts, we can consider that a child's initial mental operations will begin to be formulated through their early understandings and learning processes of their mother tongue. In other words, children begin to make sense of their early representations of the world through cognitive processes that begin to be modeled through language. The primary function of language is for individuals to engage in communication, which naturally requires the participation of others in an interaction. Hapeé (2003) examines the theory of mind, previously discussed, and asserts that there is the question about the ways individuals build representations of others and of self in their minds. She states that researchers question "whether the same cognitive mechanisms required for attributing thoughts and feelings to others is also necessary for attribution of mental states of self" (p. 136). As children begin to develop their thinking skills, it is natural for them to rely on others, namely parents and family members, in order to begin to build their own representations of who they are. In this sense, children begin to conceptualize the world by means of the representations they gradually build about others.

Identity formation processes involve the way we perceive others and also the way we perceive ourselves. As discussed, children begin to build portrayals about others based on their understandings of themselves and their world. Children's identity is partly constructed through conceptualizations of others and conceptualizations of self. Brewer (2001) offers a notion of identity that connects the psychology of the individual with social processes or structures, assuming that "all conceptualizations of social identity refer in some way to the idea that an individual's self-concept is derived, to some extent and in some sense, from the social relationships and social groups he or she participates in" (p.117). This notion of identity suggests that an individual's self-concept results from social interaction. Along these lines, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) propose a similar view in regards to the origination of identity in social interaction, but they also include the notion of linguistic interaction: "Identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon" (p. 588). The relationship between identity, social interaction and language is reinforced, suggesting that identity emerges and is shaped within social participation.

Looking at identity as originated from both individualistic and sociological dimensions, “Enables us to view identity not simply as a psychological mechanism of self-classification that is reflected in people’s social behavior but rather as something that is constituted through social action, and especially through language” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p.588). This idea about identity resulting from social interaction reduces the relevance of internal mechanisms in children’s thinking processes to a certain degree. Block (2013) discusses the issue of diminishing the importance of psychological processes in the formation of identity. He argues that maintaining a social view of identity presupposes that the self is merely a social construct, lessening the role of the psychology of individuals. Analogously, the theory of mind, as discussed by Hapeé (2003), highlights the relevance of introspective awareness in the identification of one’s own self. The author argues that “without self-awareness, an individual might not know how she is going to act until she acted, nor why she acted as she did” (p. 138). Thus, it could be supposed that the formation of self-identity requires self-awareness, which entails deep mental introspection processes as to be able to develop beliefs about oneself. Nonetheless, the image an individual creates of him or herself will continue to be modified as he or she engages in social interactions.

The mental operations that individuals require in order to construct their identity involve both, internal mechanisms of self-identification and the external components of social interactions. As mentioned, identity is largely social, but at the same time, self-identity is a representation of what individuals consider other people think about them. Similarly, identity comprises others’ ideas about ourselves and our own beliefs about who we are. These ideas are better illustrated by Stets and Cast (2007), in their work on identity and self-verification: “knowing who one is and having that verified in interaction allows one to move from situation to situation with relative ease because one’s beliefs about oneself have been proven to be reliable and trustworthy” (p. 522). Their description nicely binds together the role of individuals’ self-perception and social interaction in identity construction. When individuals, and in this particular case, children, begin to construct their identity through the multiple internal and external mechanisms, they have somewhat cohesively proclaimed their beliefs about who they are. Then, through social interactions, those ideas can be reassured by others, aiding the individual in stabilizing their self-identity. Similarly, Brewer (2001) aims to unify notions of self-identity and larger social structures, defining person-based social identities as a term “intended to refer to

definitions of social identity that are located *within* the individual self-concept” (p.117). Brewer had previously argued that self-identities are molded within social interactions, leaving aside the internal mechanisms of individuals in creating a self-image. In this regard, individuals’ social identities derive from their particular beliefs about themselves.

## **2.4 Concept of Learner Identity**

The role of individual and social perspectives in identity development has a strong influence in the development of an individual’s sense of *self*. Language learners carry their own individual identities, which have been molded through mental operations and interaction with others, and they occupy a position within the EFL community. Individuals’ social identities are largely influenced by their role in a group. Children go through learning experiences as part of their socialization in the classroom, which may influence their process of learner identity formation. Therefore, the concept of learner identity is largely significant in this study given that it has implications for teaching and for learning. This study focuses mainly on the ways in which various factors affect learners’ identities, in order to explore the possibility of their learning of English being enhanced. Anwaruddin (2012) states that “students construct and change their identities as they go through the processes of learning English as a foreign language” (p.8). Thus, it can be argued that learner identity is constructed as students interact in the classroom and develop an image of themselves in relation to their role in the group. In this study their behavior and general reactions to everyday interactions, activities and situations in the classroom will be a window into their identity formation process. Mellen (2002) states that our complex identities become ‘multiplied’ by social interactions. Students socialize in their language classroom and they envision various images of themselves due to their engagement in social interaction.

### **2.4.1 Social and Individual Perspectives in Learner Identity**

Identity has been seen predominantly as a social process. For the purposes of this study, the identity formation process of language learners will be seen as primarily social. Nonetheless, internal mental processes of individuals in their construction of identity will be also seen as largely crucial. As mentioned in previous sections, a more psychological view of identity is proposed by Block (2013), suggesting that most investigations in identity and language tend to be largely social. Block (2013) does not neglect the importance of social structures in the formation of identity, but indeed he actually



proposes the possibility of “Bringing together the social world and the psychological world in the study of language and identity” (p. 23). This idea acknowledges the importance of social structures and the psychology of individuals, but gives a substantial importance to individual’s mental and psychological structures. Block (2013) continues to show approval of granting importance to social structures in the development of identity, as well as to individual agency, arguing that “The importance of social structures in shaping and constraining individual agency depends on the notion that there is some stability in said social structures and that not all aspects of identity are up for negotiation at any given moment” (Block, 2013, p. 36). His idea seems to merge together social structures and the psychology of individuals. Additionally, he maintains that there exists some sort of stability in social structures, which allows individuals to reach a sense of consistency in their lives.

A similar attempt to bridge together individuality and sociality in identity formation is discussed by Jenkins (2004). He argues that there are two parts of identity theory; one which moves from the social structural sources of identity, and the other focuses on identity processes going from internal, mental and cognitive. Both parts of identity theory necessitate social interaction in order to reach solidification of the self. Jenkins (2004) claim that:

The former arrives at behavior by moving from social structures to commitments to relationships through the consequent salience of the identity to behavior. The latter moves from internalized identity standards and perceptions of self-relevant meanings, through a comparison of the two that either verifies the identities or indicates a discrepancy, to behavior that repairs the discrepancy by altering the situation or creating new situations. (Jenkins, 2004, p. 288)

The author distinguishes two sides of identity theory, and he seems to understand them as separate from each other. However, the author also clarifies that these processes are in fact interrelated. Jenkins sees behavior as the point where social structures and internal perceptions of *self* connect the notion of identity. Thus, behavior can be seen as the manifestation of identity, through social interaction where those identities are confirmed. Furthermore, Jenkins (2004) argues that “The tie between identity and behavior exists in their common meaning” (p. 289). The above can possibly mean that intrinsically, identity implies that behavior is a part of it, just as behavior also denotes that identity comes into play. In other words, being a social person who engages in interaction certainly indicates

that identity plays a part in said interactions, which shape identity, but that at the same time are shaped by identity.

Language learners are placed within a social situation in the school domain, where they are required to perform a role. The educational context predetermines the expected behaviors from learners, which, as discussed above, shape and are shaped by identity. Identities of learners are somewhat shaped by the educational expectations established by educational authorities in general. Thus, it can be claimed that language learners develop their identity as learners inside the social group that exists in school. Especially for children, these socialization processes are important since they are beginning to make interpersonal connections. Their classroom represents the social space where their individuality is part of the whole social group, which takes place in the language classroom. Therefore, identities are shaped, in part, by the group environment and social structures of the classroom, but at the same time, each language learner forms part of the entire social group. As Buckingham (2008) illustrates:

Individual selfhood is a social phenomenon, but the social world is constituted through the actions of individuals. As such, identity is a fluid, contingent matter—it is something we accomplish practically through our ongoing interactions and negotiations with other people. In this respect, it might be more appropriate to talk about identification rather than identity. (p. 6)

The above view clarifies the symbiotic relationship between identity and social structures. Social structures shape identities, but at the same time, identities are shaped by social structures. Individual identities are then greatly important, in that they shape the unique dynamics of a social group, and in that they provide the individual learner with a sense of self and stability in who they are.

#### **2.4.2 The Language Learning Community**

Within the language learning environment, members of a community participate in it in different ways. The way learners engage in social interaction also involves the learning process and the social space where it takes place. Cekaite (2006) states that “The classroom has been reconceptualized as a fundamentally social site for language learning” (p.14). As discussed previously, specific roles in a particular social space, such as the learning community, are frequently pre-established, creating expectations as to how people should behave. In the school context learners who are active participants in a

classroom also develop roles that become characteristic to that particular group. Language learning processes represent experiences for learners who go through constant changes in their identities as learners. As Cekaite (2007) argues, “Learning cannot be seen as the unilinear development of a single learner identity” (p. 45). Furthermore, learners cultivate a sense of belongingness as a result of similarities among all participants. Sharing a purpose, namely, learning English, represents a common goal that creates cohesion and unity in the group. The EFL classroom, therefore, may be seen as a community of practice where language learners share commonalities. Group identity is built throughout socialization and finding affinities among participants of such particular group. In line with the idea of the EFL classroom as a primarily social space, Cekaite (2007) centers on the process of socialization in the educational setting, arguing that the classroom may be looked at as a community of practice. Socialization within the learning community involves active interactions among teacher and learners, which are modeled by the classroom discourse. Learners engage in participation through their use of L2, completing language tasks that promote classroom interaction and construction of a sense of group belonging.

The EFL classroom seen as a community of practice is a way in which the educational domain can be explored. The social interactions that take place within the EFL classroom relate to the overall practice that members of such community share: learning English. With this shared purpose, the learning community build a shared social identity, which is constructed collectively among members of the group. A community of practice mainly concerns an educational domain in which learning processes, social interaction and learner identity can be explored. Wegner (2009) provides his broad conception of a community of practice, before explaining his more specific definitions:

The concept of community of practice does not exist by itself. It is part of a broader conceptual framework for thinking about learning in its social dimensions. It is a perspective that locates learning, not in the head or outside it, but in the relationship between the person and the world, which for human beings is a social person in a social world. In this relation of participation, the social and the individual constitute each other. (p. 1)

He coincides with previous conceptions of learner identity as constitutive of a larger social learning community. Language learners occupy a role in the community of

practice, engaging in social interactions that permit them to incorporate their individual identities as part of a shared group identity as language learners.

As discussed previously, individuals' identities are influenced by social structures; each individual learner constitutes a fragment of the whole language classroom, where individual learner identities play a significant role in building group identity. Anwaruddin (2012) argues that "To understand learner identity, we have to keep in mind that we always go through constant cultural socialization. This socialization process helps us respond to and cope with various types of stress we encounter. How we cope with them also helps us shape and understand our own identities" (p. 14). In this regard, the socialization that takes place in a language classroom shapes, and is shaped by the identities of each learner.

As individuals are part of a wider social space, such as the language classroom, individual identities, then, are also reshaped as a result of constant socialization. In this regard, the position that each learner takes within the language community represents a significant aspect for the whole negotiation of group identity and individual identity. Norton and Toohey (2011) comment on the idea of positioning in the EFL classroom, where a number of aspects come into play for determining the status or role that learners occupy. They state that "Identities are contingent, shifting and context-dependent, and [...] while identities or positions are often given by social structures or ascribed by others, they can also be negotiated by agents who wish to position themselves" (p. 418). According to the above statement, identities in a group such as the EFL classroom are predetermined to an extent by the social impositions representative of the school setting. However, learners possess their own individual identities, which interplay among the community forming social identities where each individual holds a position.

Language learners are members of the language classroom community creating a social space where social interaction remains constant. As discussed in previous sections, identities are molded through linguistic interaction, being language an important element of such encounters. Children, as language learners, enter the new social space where they build a relationship with classmates and teacher; each participant in that social space already comes with an identity of their own. Tarhan and Balban (2014) argue that:

Identity is a dynamic construct negotiated by individuals in a social setting rather than a state attained or reached. In this sense, L2 can be seen as a social formation necessary to negotiate meaning about self within a social context used as a tool to organize one's former and current experiences for knowledge. (p. 184)

Language learners share a common purpose within their language classroom, which is learning English. Each individual will develop a sense of belongingness to that particular learning group, but at the same time, their own individual identity as learners will be negotiated and in constant evolution as they engage in social interaction. When learners engage in interaction within a group that shares a common goal, their L2 performance throughout their learning process may possibly represent a factor for their learner identity formation. Motivation to learn the language plays an important role in their identity formation, since it may affect the way they perceive themselves as learners.

As mentioned, the learning of English represents one shared goal among language learners within their community of practice. Additionally, individual learners may have their own personal reasons for learning the language. Language learners may develop an interest in learning the language as a result of being part of the language learning group, which can be seen as the desire to feel as a member of the group. Motivation to learn the language then may arise from the sole fact that learners are now members of the L2 learning community. However, Ushioda and Dörnyei (2009) argue that: "The process of identification theorized to underpin integrativeness might be better explained as an internal process of identification within the person's self-concept, rather than identification with an external reference group" (p. 3). Here, the authors relate motivation to the notion of integrative orientation, which, as they argue is a genuine and personal interest in the culture of the L2.

The development of L2 cultural awareness might be associated to motivation to learn a language. Therefore the interest in learning a new language can be based upon an interest on the culture of the language children are learning; nonetheless, Ushioda and Dörnyei state that motivation to learn a second language may originate from the own individual's self-concept. Summing up, along with the authors' claims, motivation to learn English, among other sources, comes from affinity towards the culture of the L2, and from the individual learner self-concept. Furthermore, I consider that the learning community that language learners build by having a common purpose may represent another source for their motivation, which conduces once more to the notion of group or collective identity.

Their motivation to learn the language may possibly be based on the sense of affiliation or membership to the particular learning community they have built.

As children enter a new social group in their language classroom, expectations about how that group will be like begin to form. Children bring their identity and motivation to learn the language into the language classroom, but also a motivation or desire to be a member of that group. Canagarajah (2004) asserts that “what motivates the learning of a language is the construction of the identities we desire and the communities we want to join in order to engage in communication and social life” (p. 117). Here, Canagarajah brings into play several elements that contribute to the formation of learner identities. He asserts that individuals have an ideal that they seek to attain, identities that individuals pursue. Within learning groups such as the classroom, those identities facilitate the entrance to those particular social groups, where learners feel a part of that community. With the sense of belongingness to a certain community, individuals experience a sense of security in regards to their role and what that particular social group represents to them as a whole. Maldonado and Hernández (2010) comment on the notion of collective identity. They define collective identity as:

The psychological tie that allows an individual to unify with their group, considering three characteristics: sense of group belongingness, awareness that by being part of that group the individual will be assigned a positive or negative attribute, and feeling certain affection derived from the recognition of belonging to a group. (p. 323)

The authors stress the importance of group belongingness in developing a collective or group identity. Each language learner participates as a member of the language classroom as a group, carrying their own individual identity with them. They feel the identification with their group by noticing that they are different from other groups. Once more, individual identities play an important role in collective identities, since each individual language learner perceives his or her own personal difference from other groups, which reinforces their sense of belongingness.

Motivation to learn the language has been argued to have an influence in the learner identity formation process. Motivation comes from multiple sources and each particular learner may perhaps encounter different reasons for desiring, having to or needing to learn the language. Norton (2008) recognizes a relationship between the formation of identities

in the language classroom and motivation to learn the language. She argues that motivation to learn an L2 may come from that particular language itself. She proposes that the term ‘investment’ is useful in describing the learner’s desire to learn an L2, taking into consideration what learners will obtain or achieve by learning it. Norton (2008) claims that “if learners ‘invest’ in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital” (p. 3). This seems to indicate that the learner’s motivation may be understood as an ‘investment’, and that the learner is capable of foreseeing the benefits from learning that second language. However, it could be argued that young language learners may need to reinforce their awareness and critical thinking when considering the benefits of learning English for their future. Furthermore, the author claims that “the notion of investment conceives of the language learner as having a complex, nonunitary identity, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social interaction” (p. 4). Along these lines, Canagarajah (2004) asserts that “identities are multiple, conflictual, negotiated and evolving” (p. 117). In the classroom context individual learners are assigned a role, sometimes implicitly, which conveys presupposed expectations about how the learner should behave. Generally speaking, children already have a notion about what they should behave like in the classroom when they come in, which gives them an idea about what to expect from their learning process. However, learners come into the classroom with their own individual identity. Learners benefit from the classroom context as a social space where they engage in negotiation of those identities among members of that particular group.

## **2.5 Learner Socialization**

Learners are members of their learning community and they are part of a constant social interaction process. Socialization processes within the EFL classroom are highly influential in the development of an individual identity, since learners develop not only one, but several identities which are constantly changing. One way in which such identities change is through their socialization within the classroom, since social relationships influence the way they see themselves and the ways they see others. Identities are not fixed and permanent constructs, but constantly evolving and changing ones. As Fägersten (2006) asserts “Identities are rather co-constructed, negotiated, and even imposed through interaction. This perspective on identity as achieved through interaction assumes the concept of identity as emergent rather than pre-existent and

waiting to be expressed linguistically” (p. 24). His view of identity as socially constructed reinforces the idea of learner identity as a product of social interaction within the EFL classroom. Therefore, learner identity might be seen as emergent from the communicative exchanges between members of a given social space, and which is in constant evolution depending on such communicative exchanges.

Social structures and socialization processes are in constant evolution as well, which leads individuals to change. Learner socialization seems to be a key element in the development of learner identity and in the learning process. Thus, the relationship between language learning, learner identity and learner socialization processes must be addressed. Mercer (2016) states that “people are social beings and the focus is on our construction of self through social interaction” (p. 16). Language learners develop their identity as they engage in classroom interaction with their peers. Learners require others to be acknowledged as members of a community, which provides them with recognition and stability within their *self*. Coll and Falsafi (2010) clearly illustrate the above, arguing that “In order to be, the individual requires the co-recognition of himself and others of this being. Hence, having an identity is to have a sense of recognition as someone” (p. 217). Therefore, the processes of social interaction within the classroom are pivotal components that shape learners’ identities within their EFL community.

Being a member of the community of practice (EFL classroom) implies that we actively participate in the interactions that characterizes such social space. Said participation as part of the EFL classroom takes place in the form of language activities, conversations among classmates and teacher, and any other practices that characterize the community. In certain occasions members of the learning community do not engage in as much participative interaction as other members. This circumstance may also lead to a change in the overall group socialization and group identity. Learners who exhibit a lower degree of active participation in the learning community may be affected by factors related to their individual identity, their own personality or even difficulty in engaging in social interactions and making friends among the learning community. Norton (2001) discusses non-participation of learners in the language classroom, linking it to notions of identity and learning communities. She notes that “Our relation to communities of practice involves both participation and non-participation, and that our identities are shaped by combinations of the two. Non-participation in some communities is inevitable because our experiences include coming into contact with communities to which we do not



belong” (Norton, 2001, p. 161). Some learners present a rather timid behavior and are perceived as having difficulty socializing and engaging in the interactions that pertain to the learning community. These members may perhaps feel as non-belonging to the community, which may in turn affect their learner identity and their language learning.

The instances where language learners demonstrate struggles to participate and incorporate into the learning community may represent opportunities to become aware of the factors that are involved in such situation. A learner may feel as detached to the learning community for a number of reasons which may be due to previous experiences, attitudes, expectations and personal issues. Learners may have difficulty feeling identified to the group and thus may have difficulty engaging in social interaction in the classroom. Wegner (2009) examines the situations where newcomers enter a community. In the case of this particular research project, the participants in the EFL group are all newcomers since they are enrolled in the first level of the English program for children. For this reason, the group identity will be constructed collectively from its beginning by each member of the community. Wegner (2009) comments on the above as follows:

This process can cause identification as well as dis-identification with the community. In this sense, identification involves modulation: one can identify more or less with a community, the need to belong to it, and therefore the need to be accountable to its regime of competence. (p.3)

The socialization process that takes place within a community may be affected by feelings of dis-identification by some members, causing the overall group identity challenged and therefore to have difficulty being consolidated. Learners who exhibit difficulty actively participating in the learning community may possibly have difficulty learning the language and therefore, feeling capable of communicating through it and relating to the group.

The concept of language socialization is discussed by Duff (2007), and she connects second language socialization and language learning. She argues that members of the language learning community engage in socialization that also involves the use of the language being learnt, as well as the first language. She states that:

‘Language socialization’ refers to the process by which novices or newcomers in a community or culture gain communicative competence, membership, and legitimacy in the group. It is a process that is mediated by language and whose

goal is the mastery of linguistic conventions, pragmatics, the adoption of appropriate identities, stances (e.g., epistemic or empathetic) or ideologies, and other behaviors associated with the target group and its normative practices. (Duff, 2007, p. 310)

Following the previous idea, it can be understood that learners in the EFL classroom construct their group identity through linguistic socialization, focusing on the way they communicate in their L1, but at the same time, sharing the common goal of L2 learning. This may help understand the difficulties that some learners face in incorporating to the learning community, since the language being learnt may not be representative of what they want to take from the community. Some learners have difficulty learning the language, and therefore, they associate such difficulty with being accepted as part of the learning community, where they perceive to have failed at language socialization.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a critical overview about concepts, perspectives and theories regarding the formation process of identities. The concept of identity was discussed from a variety of perspectives, with the intention of providing a clear and more general account of the main area of study in this research. The focus of this study is to examine the way principal identity theories are connected to the way young learners of English construct their identities. A discussion about how children develop their thinking skills and individual differences was provided with the intention of facilitating the understanding of children's individual identity development. The role of social structures in the formation of individual identities was essential in order to understand how collective identities are formed. Group identities are collectively constituted of each member's individual identity, which provides its symbiotic attribute. Young English learners are part of social groups in their classroom, which allows them to engage in interaction and to be considered members of that particular group. Their socialization process provides them with multiple sources of identification within their group. At the same time, learners identify features of their own individuality that makes them different and unique. As members of a collective identity within their group, but as individuals as well, young language learners begin to develop their identity as learners. The relationship between their learner identity and their language learning process is the main focus of this research project.

The following chapter will describe the research methodology that was implemented in order to carry out this study. In order to explore the relationship between children's identity as language learners and their language learning process a methodology for research needs to be established, along with the paradigm and the research techniques, data analysis techniques and data coding techniques. In Chapter Three the structure of the research project is explained systematically.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I offer an overview of the methodological approach followed to carry out the present investigation. First, I explain the research paradigm and research techniques that were employed, as well as the context, participants and the data analysis procedures. In addition, I emphasize that this research project centers in exploring the factors that affect learner identity and language learning.

### **3.2 Methodology**

The methodology chosen for this project is oriented to explore the possible answers to the following research question:

*What are the factors that affect young English language learners' identity formation process?*

There exist multiple paradigms of research from which one can opt in order to carry out an investigation. However, for this research project it will be only distinguished between quantitative and qualitative paradigms. Johnson and Christensen (2013) recognize two research paradigms: qualitative and quantitative. They define *paradigm* as “An approach to thinking about and doing research” (p. 30). The authors state that quantitative research focuses on the confirmatory scientific method while qualitative research follows the exploratory scientific method. For this research project I have opted to follow a qualitative paradigm of research, which according to Corbin and Strauss (2014) “[...] is not meant to have a lot of structure or rigid approach to analysis” (p.1). This does not mean that qualitative research is not formal or that it is simple to carry out, but that qualitative research is more interested in analyzing human behavior through informed interpretation.

The nature of the present research project is essentially social, and qualitative research allows to explore students' opinions, feelings, behaviors and perceptions, among other aspects. For this reason qualitative research represents a suitable alternative to carry out this investigation. According to Creswell (2003), “Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspective. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally” (p.9). For accomplishing the task of interpreting the data from the participants, I will immerse myself in the context of the research.

For the above reason I will choose ethnography as the methodology that provides the systematical basis and principles to conduct this investigation. Cushman (2002) describes ethnography as “focused on problem-solving through constructive intervention in an interpolated culture” (p. 926). This means that the researcher will focus on the important factors that are part of a phenomenon, trying to generate an explanation and possibly a solution to a social problem. In Emerson’s (1995) words, “Ethnographers are committed to going out and getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of other people” (p.1). The role of the ethnographer is crucial, since he or she engages in the everyday activities of the community under investigation, and needs to be especially careful in maintaining the objectivity of his or her analysis. Ethnography, according to Pritchard (2011), requires the ethnographer to actively participate within the community of investigation. The position I hold within this project as the researcher allows me to be an active participant in this particular group of participants. I am able to observe closely, interact with members of the group and analyze patterns, attitudes, and behaviors and so on. The participants in this study are children, and as Yon (2003) writes: “ethnographic research is doubly attractive for the qualitative child-centered and culturally sensitive insights it offers to this field of research” (p. 412). This situation sometimes may represent an obstacle since children are usually difficult to get clear information from. In this regard, it is important to mention that I am immersed in the research context as the English teacher, which strengthens the use of Ethnography as the main methodology.

Through ethnography, according to Creswell (2003), “The researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting data” (p. 14). Pure ethnography involves the complete immersion of the ethnographer into the community under study, allowing him or her to observe and gather first-hand accounts of their behavior, customs and overall lifestyles. The EFL classroom setting may signify a space where ethnography is suitable for observing and analyzing the community’s practices. As the English teacher within the EFL classroom, I am also a member of such community, and this position might bring me the advantage of obtaining more authentic and real data. However, I would not do pure ethnography given the conditions of the study, therefore I will take the methodology as a model and follow a particular type of ethnography which is suitable for this research.

A particularistic and interpretative type of ethnography is described by Govea, Vera and Vargas (2011), which has the characteristic of focusing on a particular social space, allowing the ethnographer to be introspective without violating the natural harmony of the group. This type of ethnography “Intends to discover the meanings within the observed social interaction” (Govea, Vera & Vargas, 2011 p. 34). The nature of this type of research permits the ethnographer to develop his or her analytical capacities in regards to the observed dynamics within the community under study. Furthermore, the authors argue that “the immediate objective of an ethnographic study is to create a real and truthful image of the group investigated, but its main intention is to contribute to the understanding of ampler sectors of the population with similar characteristics” (Ibid, p. 30). This means that through the close investigation of the EFL classroom community, the ethnographer can contribute to the description and understanding of the most outstanding characteristics of such group. In the ethnographic tradition of research there exist a number of variants which suit particular research purposes. An instrumental case study examines a particular social space or community, allowing the researcher to come up with outcomes that serve such specific case (Clevenger, 2014; Kraay, 2012; Patton, 2014). This investigation centers in a particular learning community within the EFL classroom, of which I am part, and the role I play within such group is as an insider, since I am part of the context.

Given the role I play as the researcher in this project, I have the opportunity to interact with the participants within the research context. The term *participant observation* refers to the role of the researcher in the site of the research, in which he or she is able to observe different situations, phenomena, behaviors and patters, as well as participate actively in such activities and interactions. Fox (1998) states that in participant observation the researcher has two roles: as observer and as participant. The author argues that “the researcher’s presence is unlikely to affect the setting, because his or her presence as a researcher is masked by the role of participant” (p.27). This advantage allows me to participate in the classroom as the teacher and also to experience the participation in interactions with the students. Furthermore, the participant observer learns the culture or sub-culture of the research, thus, the observer can interpret the world in the same way the community does.

### **3.3 Context and Participants**

The setting where this research project develops is a language center, which part of the University of Guanajuato. This language center is located in León, Guanajuato, and there are multiple language courses offered to general public, as well as to students of the University of Guanajuato. There are language courses for adults, teenagers and children. The program for which I work is the *Kids* program, which consists of four basic levels of English language, designed as level 100, 200, 300 and 400. As the English teachers of students in level 100, I have the opportunity to observe their process of socialization into a new academic environment and how they adapt to their new group with a variety of different students. The participants come to this language center to take English classes, and they come from different primary schools, which some are private and others are public. There are ten boys and five girls in this group, which totals fifteen participants, and the age of the participants varies from nine to eleven years old.

As mentioned in the previous section my role as their teacher allows me to be an observer of the general interactions and dynamics of the group, facilitating the interpretation and analysis of the data. In general I can observe the ways they have begun to adapt to their group, classroom, physical environment and the general attitudes of the group towards the language, the teacher, their learning and their classmates. I have had the opportunity to observe their interactions, activities, experiences and socialization. As their teacher I also am a part of the community of research, which is helpful in maintaining a natural interaction and not damaging the natural environment that has been built among the group.

### **3.4 Data Gathering Tools**

For the collection of data for this research project I have opted for ethnographic techniques such as semi-structured interviews, researcher diary/journal, focus groups and observation. Collecting qualitative data involves the consideration of the research question and the objective of the research project in order to obtain valuable information that is relevant for the study. These techniques explore people's social and historical contexts, and as Newton (2012) argues "the goal of qualitative data analysis is to uncover emerging themes, patterns, concepts, insights and understandings" (p. 344).

### **3.4.1 Observation**

Observation was one of the techniques used to gather data. As a research technique, participant observation "Combines participation in the lives of the people being studied with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data" (Fetterman, 1998, pp. 34-35). As part of the context of the research, I was able to observe and reflect on the interactions going on in the classroom. In language classrooms, observation can be an effective alternative to research, as Salmani (2006) states, since it implies keeping a record of the activities going on in the classroom. Observation in the language classroom can be done as well by the use of video tapes and audio tapes. I have recorded part of my classes for almost every day for about three months. This allows me to look at the area of research from a different perspective the types of interactions taking place in the classroom. In order to explore the ways in which students' identities are affected by diverse factors, the application of observation techniques is a purposeful option for analysis (Pitchard, 2011). In this way, the observer can notice patterns, approach to teaching, teaching techniques employed, relationship among students and teacher, among other aspects.

### **3.4.2 Researcher Diary/Journal**

Observation is connected to the writing of a researcher journal, since the aspects observed in class can be better expressed on a diary. This technique can also be understood as fieldnotes, since it provides accounts of the situations happening on the research site. Emmerson (1995) maintains that: "Fieldnotes are accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner" (p.2). Bell (2010) argues that journals "Can provide valuable information about work patterns and activities" (p. 173). The researcher journal will allow me to keep a record of the things I observe in the EFL classroom context, which is useful in capturing what happens chronologically.



### **3.4.3 Interviews**

Another data gathering tool I used was individual interviews. These semi-structured interviews were applied to some of the participants, in order to examine its usefulness. Bell (2010) states that semi-structured interviews flexible and one advantage is its adaptability. Dörnyei (2007) states that “Semi-structured interviews include a set of prepared guiding questions, but at the same time, the format is open-ended, which helps the interaction to be more fluid and open to exploration” (p. 136). The researcher gives space to the interviewees to discuss or draw on a specific aspect that the participant wishes to explore. Bell (2010) argues that “A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do” (p. 157). During the interviews, children may comment additional aspects that at the moment seem important, in that situation I can continue the conversation and gather possibly unique information.

### **3.4.4 Group Interviews**

After conducting the individual interviews it was noticed the need for a more naturalistic environment in the collection of data. The terms *focus groups*, *group interviews* and *group discussions* are similar in nature and the main point is to generate a different climate from the single interviews. For this research project I will refer to this technique as a *group interview* since I will play the role of an interviewer and moderator. In this technique I will have a semi-structured interview as the basis for the questions that generate interaction and discussion. Flick (2009) points out, that the moderator should promote a natural and open discussion of the issues presented, and should “prevent single participants from dominating the interview, and to encourage reserved members to become involved in the interview (p.190). In general, Flick argues that group interviews and group discussions “correspond to the way in which opinions are produced, expressed, and exchanged; it becomes a tool for reconstructing individual opinions more appropriately” (p. 190). This technique will allow the interaction to be more fruitful and thus, to generate a richer quality of the data.

### **3.4.5 Five Minute Papers**

As part of the data collection I administered several *five minute papers* throughout the semester to the participants. These papers consist of a question which they have to answer as extensive as possible, in an anonymous manner in order to ensure their most honest responses to the questions. The questions were aimed to explore aspects related to their identity, sightseeing things such as their experiences, their feelings, opinions and thoughts towards different issues in the English classroom as well as in their primary schools. The objective of this technique is to gather data that they provide openly and with a sense of freedom to express their thoughts as it is anonymous.

### **3.5 Data Collection Process**

Having explained the data collection techniques used in this research project, this section aims to explain the processes required to carry out data for each technique. It is also justified the reasons for selecting such techniques in relation to the research question, their limitations as well as their advantages and relevance for this project.

#### **3.5.1 Observation**

Given the objective of this research project, which is to explore the identity of my students, observation seemed to be a suitable choice for analyzing classroom interaction and dynamics. As an ethnographic technique, observation allowed me to perceive the way my students interact, how they seem to group and how they socialize in the classroom. For me one of the reasons why I decided to use this technique is because it provided direct access to the community under study; systematic nature facilitated the examination of the group in their natural setting. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I conducted participant observation, which according to Fetterman, (1998) refers to the combination of participation in the interaction of the community being studied, while maintaining professional distance which allows adequate observation and recording of data. Participant observation facilitated my involvement in the community; moreover, this advantage is reflected in the fact that I am already their teacher and I did not have to alter the natural environment of the community.

### 3.5.2 Teacher Diary/Journal

During the process of data collection I kept a teacher diary, writing descriptions of the events and situations regarding the research project. This technique is directly linked to observation, since the diary functioned as a space for me to reflect and make sense of the things I was observing. Alaszewski (2006) states that a journal is an organized record of facts and events over the period of time that the research will prolong. In the journal I also include some of my interpretations based on what I perceive. Ortlipp (2008) argues that keeping a research diary is a common tradition in qualitative research, and that it is useful in terms of reflecting and interpreting situations that occur during the research process. Ortlipp (2008) writes: “Keeping self-reflective journals is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity, whereby researchers use their journal to examine personal assumptions and goals and clarify individual belief systems and subjectivities” (p. 697). Through the writing of this journal I was able to examine my own reflections in a deeper way, allowing me to reconsider and sometimes confirm my own assumptions and beliefs in regards to the classroom interactions.

Through reflecting on the activities under observation I wrote what Emerson (1995) calls *fieldnotes*. As an ethnographic technique, fieldnotes are written in reference of the events under study, which in this case is the language classroom. As a disadvantage, writing fieldnotes are sometimes accused to be biased, given the role of the researcher-ethnographer as a participant in the community of study. Emerson (1995) argues: “But writing descriptive accounts of experiences and observations is not as straightforward and transparent a process as it might initially appear” (p.2). Along these lines, Goodwin (2011) writes: “There is a concern for maintaining scientific objectivity when reporting on observational research” (p.78). The researcher needs to make clear that objectivity is always pursued. Emerson states that with ethnographic notes “Research and writing commitments qualify ethnographic immersion, making the field researcher at least something of an outsider” (1995, p. 2). This way the researcher can overcome such limitation, maintaining the distance as an observer, but being part of the community as a participant.

### 3.5.3 Interviews

The process of conducting interviews was decided after noticing the amount of information obtained from the application of the two previous techniques. Although observation and a reflective journal are excellent sources of data, there was still a need for obtaining information directly from the participants. As Bell (2010) states, one of the first steps in conducting interviews is the planning stage, followed by the piloting of the interview. I designed the interview questions in relation to the research question, intending to explore the factors that affect students' identities in the language classroom. The conduction of an interview provides nonverbal elements which can increase the quality of the information, as Opdenakker (2006) states, mentioning that a face to face interview can use social cues to enrich the interaction. Voice, intonation, and body language are some examples of the cues that a face to face interview can add to the gathering of information. These insights can never be perceived uniquely through observation and keeping a reflective journal. Bell states that "a skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do" (Bell, 2010, p. 157). For this reason, the role of the interviews in the data collection process was of high relevance and importance.

After piloting the interview, I made the necessary changes and conducted five more interviews to one girl and four boys. At this stage of the research project I was no longer the English teacher of the participants, which forced me to interview them in a slightly different context. I interviewed them individually in a classroom of the same school; I implemented a face-to-face, semi-structured interview. As Dornyei (2007) states, semi-structured interviews include a set of prepared guiding questions, but at the same time, the format is open-ended, which helps the interaction to be more fluid and open to exploration (p. 136). One advantage of the interviews is that during an interview, clarifications can be made and perhaps new questions arise so the interviewer can manage the interaction. In the case of my research topic.

Although interviews provided useful information, I still noticed that the students felt somehow nervous and therefore they could have provided more information. For instance, in some cases interviewees might supply answers that they think the interviewer wants to hear. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) comment on this issue stating that "an

individual can give one version of the world in an interview and another in a conversation with friends” (p. 120). A natural conversation with colleagues or family is hardly the same as the interaction in an interview. To intend overcoming this limitation, Creswell (2003) suggest conducting an interview in a setting where the participant is given allowance to openly discuss and add information about a topic (p. 19). Flick (2009) states that “the interviewee is separated from all everyday relations during the interview, and it does not equal everyday interactions” (p. 190). He also comments on this limitation stating that trying to explore attitudes, opinions and practices of people in isolation from the natural contexts where they occur should be avoided (p. 189). However, the setting where the interview was conducted was actually familiar and natural for the context under study. In an attempt to collect more data that might be covered during the individual interviews, I will conduct one group interview.

#### **3.5.4 Group Interviews**

The following step in the collection of data was the implementation of a group interview or a focus group. I decided to execute such technique with the purpose of obtaining richer and more valuable information which could assist in answering the research question. According to Flick (2009), group interviews permit the researcher to collect data in context and to create a situation of interaction. Another reason for conducting group interviews is that it creates a communicative environment and the participants are stimulated to share their ideas more freely. Flick (2009) states that “In real or natural groups, the members already know each other” (p. 194), which is the case of this group interview, and it prompts the “interactive aspect of data collection” (p. 197). With this technique, I pretend to complement the collection of relevant data that can help answer the research question.

#### **3.5.5 Five Minute Papers**

The last technique used for this research project is the five minute papers. Murphy (2001) states that this technique is helpful in exploring the perceptions of students in relation to their class, their learning process, experiences and expectations. This was especially helpful for this research project since students were actually responsive and they provided interesting thoughts about different aspects. In various moments throughout the semester I handed a sheet of paper to each student with a question written in it. They had to write a response to one open ended question regarding their language learning. Their answers

had to be written extensively as in a few lines or a paragraph. Murphy states that “learner responses to such questions are especially useful if the teacher emphasizes that the purpose is to provide formative feedback on how the course is going” (2001, p. 502). I followed this advice and students seemed to be highly reflective in writing their answers. Five-minute papers are a great way to know students opinions in relation to a specific topic, that is why in order to assure their most sincere ideas are being shared, I guaranteed their responses were confidential, and they could confirm this since they did not write their names on them.

There are, however, some limitations to the technique. Murphy (2001) writes: “if students are asked to compose them too often, they lose interest and may even begin to resent being asked to do so... once every two or three weeks is often enough” (p. 504). I asked students to compose five-minute papers in their first language so they felt more comfortable expressing themselves. Also I asked them to write five five-minute papers throughout the whole course. This assured me that students would remain interested in expressing their ideas, especially if they noticed their comments were being taken into consideration.

### **3.6 Data Analysis Procedures**

The following chapter will provide samples of the data collected, nonetheless in this section I show a few samples of data generated from the techniques discussed above. The analysis procedures used to examine and interpret data are important in order to notice patterns, relevant issues and develop the themes originated through the analysis.

#### **3.6.1 Codification of Data**

As outlined in the above question, I used five different data collection techniques. This helps appreciate the theme of study from diverse angles, in order to build a better interpretation. For the he codification of data I will use as an example Goodwin’s (2011) chart to organize the codes. The techniques used are codified the following way:

<i>CODE</i>	<i>TECHNIQUE</i>	<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>DATE/DURATION</i>	<i>SOURCE</i>
JET1	Journal entry	Language Center	April 20, 2015	Class observations
JET2	Journal entry	Home	April 26, 2015	Class observations
JET3	Journal entry	Language Center	May 5, 2015	Class Observation
JET4	Journal entry	Language Center	May 12, 2015	Class observation

JET5	Journal entry	Home	May 13, 2015	Research reflection
JET6	Journal entry	Home	May 14, 2015	Research reflection
JET7	Journal entry	Home	May 15, 2015	Research reflection
JET8	Journal entry	Language Center	August 19, 2015	Interview reflection
STINT1	Interview	Language Center	August 19, 2015	Dinorah
STINT2	Interview	Language Center	August 19, 2015	Miguel
STINT3	Interview	Language Center	August 19, 2015	Valentín
STINT4	Interview	Language Center	August 19, 2015	Héctor
STINT5	Interview	Language Center	August 19, 2015	Fidel
Q1ST1-14	Five-minute paper	Language Classroom	March 2015	Fourteen students
Q2ST1-13	Five-minute paper	Language Classroom	March 2015	Thirteen students
Q3ST1-13	Five-minute paper	Language Classroom	April 2015	Thirteen students
Q4ST1-13	Five-minute paper	Language Classroom	April 2015	Thirteen students
Q5ST1-14	Five-minute paper	Language Classroom	May 2015	Fourteen students
GINT	Group Interview	Language Center	September 2015	Fourteen students

Table 1. Data coding description.

### 3.6.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The following chapter will provide in-depth samples and analysis of the data. The recognition of emerging relevant points from the data as well as patterns and themes is a rigorous process. According to Patton (2003) “*Inductive analysis* involves discovering patterns, themes and categories in one’s data” (p. 110). I aim to follow the inductive approach for analyzing data, given the fact that the data was collected without previous knowledge of what it would emerge.

### **3.7 Data Analysis Process**

In this section I explain the reasons for deciding on an analysis approach, as well as the encoding of the data.

#### **3.7.1 Data Encoding**

The process of data encoding was based on the name of the technique being used. For the journals the code is: JET1, which means Journal Entry Technique One. For the individual interviews with students the code is: STINT1, which means Student Interview One. For the five-minute papers the code is: Q1ST1, which means Question One Student One until student thirteen. Following that logic Q2ST4, for example, means: Question Two Student Four. And finally the group interview's code is: GINT, which means Group Interview.

#### **3.7.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

As mentioned in the previous section, the analysis and interpretation of the data collected will be done through the identification of patterns through an inductive analysis approach. Patton (2003) states that “findings emerge out of the data, through the analyst's interaction with the data” (p. 110). Through this process of analyzing the data I will offer my interpretation of it. It is often argued that the researcher may offer a biased interpretation of the data; it is easy to immerse in the community of study and in the data so much that the interpretations often lack objectivity. Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013) state that the researcher is situated in the real world and interprets what is visible (p. 113); objectivity will be ensured through neutral analysis of the data.

### **3.8 Ethics**

This last section is one of the most important aspects of a study. It is crucial to inform our intentions to the participants during the collection of data. I firstly explained to the parents that I was doing a research on identity formation. Participants agreed to collaborate with this project, however, their parents have the authority to decide if their information can be used. The ethical responsibility that I have as a researcher is important to consider because all the information that I receive is part of the subjects' confidence in me. The participants were informed and asked for permission to use the information they provided. Their actual names are not mentioned and each participant as a code for the purposes of identification of data samples within the paper. Creswell (2003) argues that “Researchers need to respect the participants and the sites for research. Many ethical



issues arise during this stage of the research” (p. 73). It is not ethical to inform to participants partial information and do something different afterwards. I made sure that the participants were in agreement, and that their parents would sign the letter of consent.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has described the methodological approach and techniques for this research project. The purpose of this study is the exploration of the factors that affect students’ identity in the language classroom. In order to accomplish such objective I will conduct research under a qualitative paradigm which is interested in examining people’s behavior, attitudes, opinions, and feelings. This paradigm offers me the opportunity to discover patterns in what participants share during the collection of data. The techniques used for data collection are observations of the classroom community in their natural setting, along with a reflective journal or fieldnotes in relation to the observations. Semi-structured interviews are also implemented in which a series of questions aimed to explore the area of study are addressed with the openness that allows participants to generate further discussions around issues they consider relevant. A further group interview is implemented, since the individual interviews seemed to have provided important information, but perhaps not a complete framework of the issue under exploration. The group interview has the purpose of creating an environment of interaction which promotes a more natural communication and sharing of ideas. Finally, five five-minute reports were administered to all of the students, addressing different questions that explored their identity. Data encoding assures an easier management of and reference to the data samples throughout the data analysis. I will follow an inductive approach to data analysis which consists of identification of patterns, themes and categories generated from the data.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the discussion of the data obtained from the current research. The data collection techniques were carefully selected and piloted in order to obtain valuable data. The data collected from the different techniques was of great relevance and it permitted the exploration of the research question. The analysis of the data samples was carried out with the focus on the research question at all times. The research question explores the factors that affect learner identity in the English language classroom. Throughout this chapter I will provide data samples to illustrate the themes that arose from the recognition of patterns.

The themes that emerged from the analysis of the data are listed below:

- Students' Perceptions and Expectations Towards School and Learning
- Students' Perceptions Towards their Teachers
- Learner Socialization and Identity Formation
- The Role of Learner Styles/Preferences in Identity Formation
- The Importance of their Self-image in Identity Formation

The following sections explore the emerging themes from the analysis and interpretation of the data. Data samples are provided in order to illustrate the discussion of each theme.

### **4.2 Students' Perceptions and Expectations Towards School and Learning.**

In this section I present the data samples where students provide examples of their perceptions and their expectations towards their school and learning. Several data samples showed how students had important things to say in regards to their overall learning experiences. The experiences that learners gather throughout their academic lifetime may influence how they learn and engage in social interaction with their language peers in upcoming learning experiences. The experiences that children undergo in their primary school may affect the way they perceive learning and school in general, therefore affecting their language learning process. The following quotes show students' views about their primary school's physical setting:

I feel fine, well, more or less...in my school there are times where it is dirty because some girls from first grade leave the space really messy. (GINT4)

One thing that I don't like is that the kids from primary leave trash and the cleaning lady has to clean everything. (GINT2)

These two quotes reflect the way students perceive their physical space. Both of them talk about how a disordered or unclean environment affect them in individual ways. The first quote mentions that the setting is often dirty and she identifies other classmates as the reasons that lead to that issue. The participant does not explicitly say that she is affected by that situation, but she remarks that the space in which they carry out their activities is unclean. In the second quote the participant seems to disapprove the fact that other classmates leave the setting cluttered and that the janitor has to clean it. This shows that perhaps the participant is aware of the issue and he shows empathy towards the extra work that has to be done by the janitor. Children may be affected by their physical space in different ways, for instance they may feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed. They show awareness of the situations that affect how they feel in a messy space.

The group environment inside the primary school classroom is another factor that appeared to affect how the learner socializes in the group. This socialization relates to the way children perceive their learning environment and may transmit those perceptions to their ELT classroom. These quotes seem to evidence how some situations in their classroom affect how they feel in regards to their classmates:

I feel bored. Well, some kids are always doing stuff and there were problems. (GINT4)

My friends are OK, but there is one who is very annoying, and there is another one who got really mad and started to throw everything away. One time he grabbed ruler and he threw it to a boy, it didn't hit him, it was gonna hit him, but he bent down. (GINT6)

In these quotes the participants mention how their classmates show problematic behavior. This issues affect learners because they are part of a group in which this type of conduct is present. The first extract shows that the participant's mood is affected by such issues, since some classmates create problems in their classroom. The second participant states that apart from his classmates, there are other students who show problematic behavior in the classroom, even aggressive or violent actions. These negative situations regarding their classmates seems to affect them in a way that they may feel uneasy to be part of that learning community.

Accounts from what students perceived and expected from their school in general were captured in the reflection journals as well. From observation in class and from what students commented during particular moments in the classroom, I reflected upon certain aspects that seemed to be relevant for students. The following extract from a journal entry illustrates how students feel about being in the language classroom and how they relate their experiences to their primary school as well:

I notice how some students feel comfortable in the language classroom and how they compare certain issues they find in their primary school. Annette was talking to Dinorah during a break and they were in the classroom before going out to the patio. They were talking about some difficulties they have in their primary schools where their peers seem to be hard to interact with and how they sometimes prefer to stay in the classroom instead of going out during break. They mentioned that they felt comfortable in this school (the English class) and that they feel confident when talking to most of their classmates. It seemed to me that they were able to recognize that in their language classroom they have a more positive learning and experience due to a more welcoming atmosphere. (JET1)

From the previous reflection it can be noted that the students seem to project a positive attitude towards their overall participation in the language classroom. Being members of the classroom appears to positively affect the way they engage in social interaction because they feel appreciated by the other children. Furthermore, the participants openly acknowledge the differences they notice between the problems they have in their primary school and how they feel accepted by members of the group. The perceptions they have in regards to school in general might be influenced by such experiences of difficulty in socializing and so they might feel surprised when they perceive a more welcoming environment in their English classroom.

In regards to their primary school, the participants provided more feedback via the five-minute-papers. In the following extract from a participant it is visible that the student has the capacity to recognize and critically consider the way he is being taught:

In my primary school I don't feel good because they don't teach us right. (Q2ST6)

The participant shows awareness about the ways in which classes should be taught. However, we do not have the complete notion of the reasons for this student to assert such statement. What could be analyzed is that the participant might have had certain

expectations about his experiences in the primary school, which are not being met. His experiences might have been unsatisfactory, and so his perceptions towards the quality of teaching he is receiving may indicate that he notices lack of professionalism in his teachers.

Concerning the way children perceive the how they are taught, the following extract from a reflection journal entry addresses a similar situation:

During class today we were looking at the ways we can use *there is/there are* and we were reviewing the topic with objects around the classroom. Fidel and Abril were having difficulty differentiating the singular and the plural and I noticed so I went to their seats and asked them if everything was clear. They seemed to not want to ask a question (they seemed resistant), but Fidel asked about how to use the plural and the singular. Then I asked the rest of the group to respond to the question and soon they provided examples and explanations to their peers. Abril told me aloud: I didn't want to ask a question because I thought you were going to call me out for not knowing. (JET5)

From this reflection extract, the two children clearly demonstrate that their past experiences in other learning moments in their lives have a strong influence in the way they perceive school and learning today. Their expectations in regards to the way teachers generally respond to their doubts or difficulties in class seemed to be determined by the way they had been taught in the past. The girl seemed surprised that the (the language teacher) was actually willing to help her out with her doubt, and that I did not react angrily to the fact that she was confusing the singular and plural forms. This reflection suggests that children are deeply affected, either positively or negatively, by the way their teachers treat and teach them, and therefore, this forms a particular way in which learners perceive their learning process. The expectations towards school are also affected by their learning experiences, and this extract illustrates it as the girl was notably surprised that the teacher helped her with disposition.

Another participant shared her thoughts through a five-minute-paper:

I like that we can bring our toys, and they give us easy assignments. I don't like when they give us a lot of homework and that they don't explain. I like when teachers treat us the same. (Q2ST12)

This participant values the way in which teachers in her primary school allow the children to bring personal objects. This may bring to the participant an opportunity to help her lessen the feeling of tension or pressure. The extract also shows that perhaps too much work may lead to anxiety. Besides, she remarks that not receiving explanations from the teacher on difficult tasks may be discouraging. Her expectations towards her primary school, teachers and learning seems to be connected to a satisfactory learning experience. The above seems to be linked to the importance of an equal treatment from the teacher, which is significant for the student and her identity as learner. The previous extracts which report the perceptions of children towards the way they are taught, their teachers and school in general indicate how teachers play a central role in learners' identity formation. Norton and Toohey (2011) highlight that "Pedagogical practices have the potential to be transformative in offering language learners more powerful positions than those they may occupy either inside or outside the classroom" (p. 417). In this regard, teachers could take advantage of their position and be more attentive to their teaching practices and how they affect their learners.

The physical space in which students interact was mentioned repeatedly. Participants mention how they feel about the physical spaces of their primary school and their English school. The following quote illustrates how one participant feels regarding his classroom:

I didn't like the classroom that we have. It is the same that we had last year and the same teacher. It is better to have a change. (GINT6)

According to the extract, the physical environment that students are immersed in holds a significant role for them. This participant states that for him, it is better to have a change, which in turn he associates to his classroom and the teacher. He connects having the same classroom with feeling that he has not progressed in his learning process, or that he did not achieve enough learning goals. Having the same classroom and the same teacher for two years may provoke him to feel unrecognized and trapped in the same learning position. This may affect his identity as learner, because he is actually progressing in his learning, but not having a change makes him feel as he knows less, or as he has not advanced.

As mentioned, the physical environment has an influence in how they perceive learning in general. Sometimes other aspects related to their school are important for children to feel comfortable and therefore have a better attitude towards their school.

My school is fine because there are many patios, there are places where each group can play. (GINT9)

I feel good about my primary school, I only wish there were more water dispensers and that we were allowed to run. (Q1ST6)

The quote above shows aspects of the school's physical environment. The data unveils the importance of having big spaces for socializing. The participant feels comfortable in those spaces, which can impact his identity because he feels better within that environment. Similarly, the second quote from a five-minute-paper shows that the student acknowledges a lack of water dispensers, and he sees it as an inadequacy. Physical activities such as running is a natural necessity of young children who constantly need to move, and being forbidden to do so represents a negative aspect. When the school limits children's freedom to do activities such as running and doing more active actions it could generate in children a subconscious view of school as a strict and unpleasant place. On the contrary, being in a pleasant physical setting affects students in a positive way, since they perceive such environment as comfortable and secure; they feel in confidence and that boosts their identity in a positive way.

A similar view in regards to students' needs about physical movement is shown in the following quote from a five-minute-paper:

I feel good because the teacher plays videos in class, but she doesn't allow us to run and so the break becomes very boring, and I like to go out in the patio with my friends. (Q1ST9)

This participant mentions a positive aspect about her English teacher, highlighting that she enjoys the way she is being taught. At the same time she relates her teaching to the limitation of running inside the school, which she in turn associates with the break being boring. The participant emphasizes that she has a need as a young learner to also socialize with peers, while acknowledging that the teacher sets rules and limitations.

The physical setting inside the classroom seems to affect to a certain degree how students perceive their role in the school. If they feel comfortable and perceive the space as a welcoming place to learn, they will most likely develop a good relationship with the environment. The following quotes reflect how two participants feel about their English language classroom:

I think that the classroom is very big, and there is a lot of echo. (GINT3)

It's just that, when we are working you can hear the sound of the alarm...and sometimes it distracts me when I'm working. (GINT2)

These two quotes illustrate how the participants feel about the space in their classroom. They mention how the physical space affect them, even in a subtle way, and how that alter their learning process and daily activities. The first quote shows that the participant probably feels annoyed by the echo in the classroom, and that may be unsettling, even to a small degree. The second quote illustrates how external factors about the physical space are small obstacles for him during class. He mentions he gets distracted, and taking into consideration that such physical setting is where they will engage in learning experiences, it is important to have a good perception of it.

Students have their own perceptions towards how they are being taught and what they learn. Some students state that they feel as if they were doing easy activities in the English classroom. This has to do with how they perceive learning, since participants have their opinions regarding the content of the class. The following data samples exemplify participants' opinions about their English classes:

Mmm, it's like, they don't teach us right...or it bores me. They teach us very simple things. (GINT6)

I feel bored...I wanna go out and play...I wanna talk to my friends. (GINT4)

Both data samples show that students expect more from their classes. The first quote mentions that it is boring because he has to do easy activities; the second one also mentions that he feels the class gets boring when he finishes earlier than the rest of the group. These statements may reflect a lack of meaningful or challenging activities in the English classroom. The data reflects how the students feel about not having enough stimulating activities, and that it makes them feel bored. It impacts their identity since they may believe they are capable of doing more, but due to the simple tasks, they may feel as if they were less capable.

Another aspect of their English classes that was repeatedly mentioned, is the time schedule. They mention that the time of the class is not convenient for them taking into



consideration their other academic activities and that they are often tired for the English class. The following quotes illustrate how participants feel about this:

When I feel the worst is when I'm really tired...we have to get up at six, then all week I have special classes, and when I get to the English class I'm really tired. (GINT1)

I don't like to come here sometimes because I get up really early, then we go and drop our brother at his school, and then I go to my school and after that I come here to the English class. (GINT3)

The first quote shows that the student feels tired after a long day, and he still has to go to English class. He mentions that he is busy during all the week and then he does not have much energy for English class. The second quote also mentions how a busy day makes him be exhausted when he has his English class. This situation is nobody's fault since their primary school is always in the morning, and obviously their English classes will be after school. The important aspect of these opinions is that they may perceive their English classes as something that makes them feel tired and exhausted. From the data that constituted this theme, it could be said that this may generate an idea of their English class as something they have to do as an obligation, rather than something they enjoy. Although in other data samples students reassured that they liked learning English, feeling tired for it may affect how they participate in the class, and therefore, their learner identity.

In some data samples students share their thoughts in regards to their learning experiences and expectations, which can be placed in a number to categories for analysis. However, in those data samples, the participants highlight particular aspects about their learning that indicate what they think about their expectations about language learning. The following quotation shows that the student has developed an awareness about the overall language learning experience he is receiving:

I feel bad because we don't watch videos, the classmates Yell too much, we have a short break and we don't play much. We practice a lot of questions, we don't practice sentences, phrases, vocabulary, only questions, she, he, they, etcetera. (Q1ST1)

The student shares his concerns in regards to his English class, and he discloses the aspects that he considers to be negative. In a way he is expressing what he inclines for in

an English class. The participant shows that he may hold a perception about his teacher and the way she teaches, considering it to lack a more dynamic approach. The participant is also showing his preferences about learning; he demonstrates a predilection for more dynamic activities which involve the use of multimedia (videos), physical movement and games. All of the above may be linked to a need for socialization in the classroom, since such expectations about learning and school demonstrate that the student requires a learning environment which is energetic, active and motivating.

The multiple domains where young children engage in learning opportunities with other children are also part of the multiplicity of components that play a role in their overall formation of self. Young children began to make connections between what they learn, how they learn in their primary schools with what they experience in the language classroom as English learners. These previous experiences could possibly affect how they develop an identity as language learners. Norton and McKinney (2011) acknowledge the multiple nature of identity, as relevant in second language acquisition (SLA). The authors state that: “The construct of identity as multiple is particularly powerful because learners who struggle to speak from one identity position can reframe their relationship with their interlocutors and reclaim alternative, more powerful identities from which to speak” (Norton & McKinney, 2001, p.74). What the authors discuss in their chapter relates to complicated situations within the EFL classroom that may affect how learners construct their identity. The particular learning community that this research explores may provide learners with alternative opportunities to take on specific learner identities that they can benefit from.

Many of them stated their opinions in regards to their primary school, including its physical environment, activities, materials, issues and positive aspects. They shared their opinions about their English school, learning English, the class and the physical space as well. They shared accounts about how they feel towards various aspects of their learning, what they consider important and their opinions about certain issues. These accounts were helpful in understanding the different ways students process their learning experiences and how those perceptions influence their identity formation as learners. The relationship between identity formation and language learning is relevant for this particular investigation, since young learners begin to build their self in regards to their learning abilities within the school environment. This research focuses primarily on the identity formation of young learners from the perspective of language learning processes,

however, their experiences acquiring other types of knowledge in other domains provides insightful solutions to understand their identity as language learners.

### **4.3 Students' Perceptions Towards their Teachers**

Students build a conception about their teachers based on what they experience in the classroom, the teachers' attitudes and actions, among other aspects. From the data samples, some students mentioned that they considered that their primary school teachers were not serious and they did not do their job properly, as it can be seen in the following quotes:

My primary school is very boring, I don't know...they don't teach us, the teachers keep walking out of the classroom. (GINT3)

I don't feel good when the teachers walk out of the classroom, and then sometimes in the group they are very talkative, and the teachers go, and they don't school them. Even though there is a camera, they continue misbehaving. (GINT4)

These quotes show what students perceive about their teachers based on their actions. Both data samples show that students complain about the fact that teachers are outside of the classroom constantly. They also show that their perception about school is affected by teachers; they consider that the teachers do not teach. The second data sample shows that the participants feel affected by the teacher being outside constantly, and she is aware that the teacher is not in control of the group. This situation affects them since the teacher is commonly an image of authority, but in this cases, that image is distorted and replaced by one of lack of control and authority. Having such an image as a teacher affects students' learner identity, because they may feel regarded as not important for the teacher. From the above discussion, it could be said that teachers play a significant role in the identity formation of their learners, and one of the reasons is highlighted by Anwaruddin (2012) as follows: "It is, therefore, important that researchers and teachers view learners as persons with multiple and changing identities, not just as individuals with (e.g., English language) learning needs" (p.14). Teachers need to develop a higher level of attentiveness in regards to the way their learners are acquiring knowledge from them, and how that represents a valuable opportunity for both, teachers and learners to achieve successful learning outcomes.

The image students have about their teachers may also be influenced by the type of activities she carries out in the classroom. Some students, when asked about their English teacher, mentioned that one thing they did not like about her was one activity they do regularly. This shows that students associate the teacher with the activities they carry out; this is expected since the one in charge of the activities and materials is the teacher. However, this may damage the conception they have about their teacher and they may begin to decrease their respect or interest in her. The following quotes show how students feel about one specific activity:

There is an activity that the teacher does that we don't like because she sets us into two teams. She divides the class in half, like "green" and "purple", and every time we participate we get a point. (GINT6)

When there was time for break, the team with the most points take the break first, and others. She even took five minutes from our break...so because of others then sometimes I was left without a break. (GINT3)

The participants describe an activity that the teacher does usually, in which they have to compete one team versus another team. The whole group commented that they did not like it much, and they expressed their feelings about it. The first data sample clearly states that she does not like that activity. The second quote draws on that commentary and explains the reasons for disliking that activity. They feel that the activity is unfair since their break time depends on being the winners or being the losers. The second quote clearly states that he considers that because of others, he sometimes lost his break time. This situation may consequently turn into a negative image of their teacher, since the teacher has the command of the class and the activities carried out.

Students have their own opinions towards their teachers, and they show how they react towards certain things the teacher does. In the following quote the participant shows how they feel in regards to some consequences they teacher establishes for some activities. He considers unfair the fact that some students get time off their break as a consequence of competing one team versus another in the classroom:

I don't like the activity where she divides the class into two teams...I don't think it's fair because the rest of the classmates participate...we do participate but sometimes we don't win anyway. (GINT1)

What the teachers provides with to the classroom is quickly absorbed by learners. One participant expressed his dissatisfaction about his primary English teacher, stating that he felt the teacher gave them not meaningful tasks. As mentioned in the first theme, students are affected by the type of content in the class, and when they do not feel motivated or stimulated, they may in turn feel disappointed. The following quote illustrates this:

In my past school they just gave us the classes but they didn't teach us much. We only had to write down some words and make some drawings. (GINT1)

This participant shows how he feels about his teacher not teaching him enough. The student was not being stimulated to do something more, which he is capable of. This may produce a negative image of his English teacher, since the student is aware that she was not responsible for providing more meaningful activities in the class. Equally, this may influence his identity as a learner, since the teacher does not believe they can do more, and she only provides simple activities and content. The student feels that he can do more than just the activities the teacher offers, and therefore, he may begin to feel disconnected from the class. The previous accounts indicate that learners perceive a lack of significance of the activities teachers carry out in the classroom. Such comments may show a connection between motivation and identity formation as learners. Lamb (2011) argues that motivation is non-linear and that it emerges from individuals' identity and the learning context they are part of. The author maintains that "All three constructs (identity and autonomy as well as motivation) are organic and share three noteworthy traits: they change over time, they depend on context and they are socially mediated" (p. 72).

Some students provided rich descriptions of what they think about their language learning experience in general. The role of the English teacher was repeatedly shown in the data and students show their perceptions towards teachers in various ways. For instance, some students mentioned positive aspects of their English teacher that seemed to have influence in their general performance and attitude about the class. The data that participants provided seem to demonstrate how teachers influence the way students see learning in general. Teachers' attitudes in regards to students, teaching and learning are easily internalized by students. The following extract from the five-minute paper technique serves as an example of this. In the extract the participant elaborating on a statement about the way she feels in her English class:

Happy. I learn many things and I can speak more in English, I like the book and do activities in the notebook, study, ask, watch videos, play, and talk about the language. I like how the teacher Annie teaches us, I like her activities, I like when we listen to music and work. I like that we have a break, the classroom, the desks, I like to work in teams with my classmates. (Q1ST3)

This participant shows her general view in regards to the English class. One can see that the student has an overall positive attitude about the language itself, the activities, classmates and etcetera. She seems to consider that she is more capable to speak English as a result of her classes. The overall environment in the group appears to be a factor for her positive experience learning English. Moreover we see the role of the teacher in this respect; the teacher appears to have positively influenced the student so as to encourage the student to develop enjoyment of the class.

Several students mentioned positive aspects of their English teacher that appear to be connected to their overall learning experience. The importance of having what they consider as a good teacher is shown in the following extract, which comes from one five-minute paper. The student elaborates on the same previous statement:

I feel happy because I am being taught English, my teacher is good, and she helps us and explains when we don't understand. I like being with my classmates and talk to them. (Q1ST2)

The participant demonstrates that the role of the teacher is important for her. She shows that characteristics of the teacher such as being supportive, understanding and ready to lend a hand may provoke enthusiasm in learning the language. The student manifests her need for a teacher who make things clear when she has difficulty. She mentions that she is content with the class in general, and makes reference to the teacher being sympathetic.

On a similar note, the relevance that children's teachers have in their learning processes is illustrated in the following extract from a journal reflection:

I think they feel less resistant to share their thoughts and views in regards to their teachers. In class they openly comment about how they like to be taught and treated, and I consider that we have built this empathic environment along the connivance and overall interaction in the classroom. Children frequently mention that they feel confident in class and that I am a good teacher. In occasions they

also mention the way other teachers have made them feel in positive and negative ways. This reminds me that as teachers we have an enormous responsibility and influence upon our learners and their learning processes. (JET7)

This extract shows how learners manifest in class the ways in which their teachers impact their learning processes and experiences. Children commonly share what I consider to be more honest opinions and they hold less restraints when it comes to speak their minds. However, I have also observed the way in which children hold back their thoughts in an effort to avoid conflict with the teacher, who they see as the authority. The way children react to different learning experiences and processes are important to their identity formation because teachers represent a significant role model. As a result, children began to construct a view in regards to the role of their teachers, and it affects the way they perceive themselves, taking into consideration that young learners' identity is a work in progress.

During the data gathering phase, participants showed their perceptions towards their primary school teachers and their English teachers. Their teachers represent role models who shape the way their learning might occur. Learners have an individual in front of them that provides the majority of the learning opportunities they have. The way teachers present content and how they manage a group signifies an influence for students' perceptions about teachers. Their perceptions towards teachers shape the way they see learning since teachers are one of the crucial components of education and school. The image they have of their teachers affects students' identity to an extent since they will most likely relate learning to their teachers. In some cases students mentioned positive aspects about their teachers and what they liked about them; however, the many others shared their perceptions and expressed some type of disenchant. This may represent a window to see what students feel they are lacking in regards to how they are being taught and their teachers. A teacher holds a powerful position within the classroom and has a responsibility to foster a positive learner identity among her students.

#### **4.4 Learner Socialization and Identity Formation**

From the data samples, participants shared examples about the ways in which they socialize in their primary schools. Some of them mentioned that their school fosters cooperative work and that they encourage students to involve themselves in such activities. This helps students to reinforce their socialization skills and hence build up their group identity. The following quote exemplifies the above idea:

In my school there are some days when one group that has to clean up all together at the end of the day, so that the trash doesn't stay in the classroom. (GINT8)

In this data sample the participant demonstrates how in his primary school cooperative work is enhanced. The student does not state his stance towards cooperative work, but being involved in such activities will most certainly improve his perspective towards group work. The participant demonstrates that he is aware of the purpose of group work, when he states that it is for cleaning out the space and not leaving trash in the school. Norton (2006) states the following: "A socio-cultural conception of identity conceives of identity as dynamic and constantly changing across time and place" (p.3). The participation of students in these activities helps them to engage more in social encountering, and therefore, to feel more as one of the group.

Some students mentioned issues that occur among older students and younger students. Participants in this study are mostly fifth or sixth graders, and they generally study in schools where secondary school is in the same location, so they have space to socialize. However, conflicts between older and younger students arise due to issues with dominance from the older students. The following quotes show how students feel about this:

I feel bad, because sometimes the kids from secondary school don't let us (primary students) play, well, and even sometimes the sixth graders. (GINT10)

When we were playing football, they said we could play with them, but then they played dirty and hit us. So they did it on purpose. (GINT1)

These data samples demonstrate the difficult relationship among some students. In the first quote it is seen how older students restrict younger students from occupying spaces that are for everybody. Participants showed how they see this as upsetting for them, because they feel rejected. In the second quote the participant shared a situation in regards



to this issue, stating that older students even get to physically harm them, in hope to feel superior. These situations are serious because students should not be refused to do their normal activities and to engage in social events. This situation may affect their identity, since they may feel inferior or not good enough to share social spaces with older classmates.

On a similar note, a participant shared through a five-minute-paper the type of experiences he goes through in his primary school:

What I like is that we're going to change the school where we study, because children bully me, they throw my glasses away and they steal from my backpack. (Q2ST7)

From this quotation we can see how the participant shows a feeling of relief because he will be changing schools. He suffered from bullying in his primary school and he manifests his discontent, and in certain way he tries to draw attention to the things he used to be a victim of. His experience was clearly negative and he might have had difficulties creating bonds and socializing in his group, which might be the reason for his optimism. One possible repercussion of experiencing difficult situations with classmates in his primary school might be that he gradually becomes shy and frustrated about school and learning. Children who go through situations where bullying is involved can develop a resistance to socialize in their group, which might as well affect their self-image; they might feel incompatible and therefore believe there is something wrong with themselves.

The experiences children have in their primary schools may be influential for their development in other areas of their social life. The way they perceive their primary school, classmates and teachers, and how they integrate within such social sphere represents an important indicator of their attitudes and perceptions about the way they incorporate into their language classroom. In the following quotation it can be seen that the participant expresses how a difficult social environment makes him feel stressed, and that he considers it to be an inconvenience for him:

What I don't like is that there are many kids, I don't like them because they get angry at everything. My friends are: Chino, Hector, Diana, Kevin, Abraham. They are cool and funny. (Q2ST2)

The participant evidently regards having difficulty to socialize as an obstacle in his classroom, indicating that certain classmates show a negative attitude. This situation may influence negatively the way this participant perceives his classroom, the way social relationships work and his own social identity. From the data extract it is noted that the participant has a group of friends, regardless his difficulty to socialize in such a complicated environment he describes. His identity, as learner, may be affected by the obstacles he faces by having to handle difficult situations with peers, which may in turn hinder his ability to make friends and socialize. Therefore, the participant may consider his group of friends as important for him since he believes that the majority of the classmates are difficult to interact with.

The way classmates influence each other may result in negative or positive outcomes for their learning development and identity formation. In certain occasions, participants commented on classmates that they did not like, or that they considered to represent a bad influence for them or for the whole group. The following data excerpt indicates how a participant is aware of some of the bad habits one particular classmate has, and how that may influence others:

One of my classmates raps, makes graffiti, smokes and sometimes he sneaks out of the school. (Q2ST6)

What I like is that we are going to switch to the evening schedule at school, because in the morning I am bullied. They throw away my glasses and they steal my money. (Q2ST7)

The first participant highlights the fact that his classmate's bad behavior, and in a certain way he is trying to call attention to this classmate's actions. The fact that this participant is indirectly trying to point out how his classmate's bad behavior is not correct may indicate that he is well aware of the possibility of being influenced by him. Perhaps this participant is worried that his classmates may follow him and imitate his behavior, which indicates that he values the harmony of the learning community.

When children feel comfortable in a welcoming environment it is only natural that they enjoy their learning processes as well. The following quote concisely illustrates how the participant relates the way she perceives a positive group environment with a positive learning experience:

All of the classmates are kind. The teacher is really nice and I like her. I feel really good and I have good grades, I work hard in class and I am part of the group as a leader. (Q2ST4)

The previous account is a brief illustration that a welcoming classroom atmosphere can promote the development of a positive learner identity. The participant mentions aspects of her language learning experience that seem to indicate that a warm environment fosters the shaping of a good identity as learner, and therefore a positive learning process. This participant identifies herself as a leader, which could have been caused by previous learning experiences where she felt empowered through learning the language. This might be due to her accomplishments in her language course and how her progress represents a way in which she sees herself as a leader, reinforcing her self-image in a positive way.

The way children interact in the language classroom is a fundamental aspect for their identity formation. As discussed, language learners build their group identity within the classroom space, and they forge connections with others, which may influence the way they perceive themselves within such particular group. In the primary school, children also build up relationships and create connections with others, and in other occasions, they face difficulties doing so. Having such previous experiences socializing in their primary schools may affect the way they interrelate with other classmates in their language classroom. The following data excerpt exemplifies the way one participant values a positive relationship among classmates and teacher:

With my classmates I feel good. Where my classmates don't discriminate, where they don't put you aside and I feel like I am actually learning. The teacher is good and knows how to explain, I feel comfortable. (Q1ST5)

The participant shows awareness in regards to a positive group relationship, and possibly a positive group identity. Building a relationship among classmates based on respect and values, where she feels included and part of the group seems to be appreciated by the participant. The importance that she gives to feeling part of the group may be connected to a positive learning experience, as expressed by the participant. She shows a sense of progress which may be linked to a positive experience socializing with her classmates. She states that she perceives that she is actually learning, and she values her teacher's hard work, which may indicate that the learner feels motivated.

Learners repeatedly mentioned the importance of having a good relationship among their classmates in the English classroom. They were asked through a five-minute-paper a question about how they felt in their English classroom. Many participants described the way they felt as part of the group, indicating if they felt comfortable, included or maybe out of place. The following excerpt illustrates how a student values the sense of belongingness to the learning community, and how he perceives himself:

I feel important among my classmates, I was able to make friends and they don't bother me. The teacher is nice and she does fun activities and she does pay attention to you. (Q1ST10)

The participant recognizes and highlights the importance of feeling an important part of the group. It could be said that the participant feels accepted, or that he has a relevant role within the learning community. This is a significant aspect of his learning experience, since he also remarks being able to make friends within the classroom. It could be argued that perhaps this participant has had previous experiences where he was not successful in making friends. The participant values the role of the teacher in including him as part of the group, since the participant remarks receiving attention from her, which the student appreciates. Additionally, having a positive outlook in regards to one's role within the group may boost his self-esteem and confidence, which in turn helps him develop a positive learner identity.

Participants shared their preference to work in groups during their English class activities. The vast majority of the participants expressed why they prefer to work in teams. Nevertheless, there were other data samples that showed that students feel comfortable working by themselves in certain situations. Working cooperatively in order to accomplish a learning goal is significant for their learner identity formation. When they engage in teamwork, conversation and cooperation with their classmates, they reinforce their group identity and embrace their unique role in that group. The following quotes illustrate how students feel about working cooperatively in class:

I prefer to do group activities. (GINT11)

I like to work in teams because that way we can help each other. (GINT3)

These data samples reveal that students have an actual preference for working cooperatively with their classmates. Mellen (2002) describes identity as “the human

nature that is socially constructed and changing” (p.17). This improves the overall relationship among the students and the teacher, because they have a better outlook about the class. They are aware of the benefits of collaborate with their peers in order to accomplish a shared goal. The second quote shows that the participant finds a benefit from working together, which is to complement their knowledge in favor of their learning. This fosters a positive identity as a valuable member of the group and as a capable learner. They play a more productive role in the classroom and it boosts their confidence, self-image and the relationship among classmates.

The relevance that teamwork has for most of the children was illustrated by a participant in the following quotation, from a five-minute-paper:

I feel really, really, really good, because everybody talks to me and the teacher makes us work in groups very well, everybody is quiet and working. The recess is OK, and we can work in teams with whoever we want. (Q2ST10)

For this student the importance of social interaction and teamwork is palpable, as he expresses a positive attitude and even excitement about working with his classmates. Socializing with his classmates seems to be significant for his learning process since he highlights the fact that he enjoys working in class with classmates. This participant values the effort that his classmates make while working in teams. He also stresses the significance it has for him the fact that learners can choose who to work with, which might be a sign that the teacher allows them to exercise their agency and individuality, making their own decisions in class. This can certainly have an impact in their identity formation as learners, because they recognize their own unique value and build a strong confidence in themselves.

Some participants express how they value their own role as members of the learning community, and how they give importance to cultivating a constructive social space among the group members. The following extract from a five-minute-paper exemplifies the above:

I feel part of the group participating in class, being friends among everyone. My best friend (boy) is friendly, silly, my best friend (girl) is studious, easygoing. I like everyone event though we are all different. (Q2ST12)

Apart from giving a high value to overall group relationship, this participant recognizes that his own position as member of the group is as well important. He highlights his contribution to the group by mentioning that he participates in class, which could possibly strengthen his own identity as language learner and as member of the social group. This draws attention to the significance he gives to the actual language learning processes, while also reiterating the value of social interaction and friendship. This might signify that for young learners in this study, engaging in positive social interaction among classmates is substantially fundamental for their language learning processes and their identity formation as learners. This participant clearly embraces the diversity that each individual learner brings to the overall group atmosphere, emphasizing on the positive effect it has on his learning experience.

The act of teaching in general provides practitioners with opportunities to observe the ways in which learners get involved in their social space. The influence that young learners have on each other is manifested and observable through the language classroom interactions. The following reflection taken from a journal entry provides an illustration of the above:

I noticed that Valentín is very shy in class, he is smart and responsible, and he is a good student and tries to interact with others although I see that he has certain difficulty. He's been hanging with Emmanuel and he (Emmanuel) as a contrasting personality. Emmanuel is outgoing and more participative, and extrovert. Valentín has become less shy and I notice that he has started talking to the rest of the group a little more, volunteers more and shows a more outgoing attitude. (JET1)

The way individual identities are formed, reformed and transformed is clearly observed through social interaction. The reflection above illustrates how one learner has a strong influence over another learner, who displays a rather malleable personality. In this example, both learners were influencing each other; Valentín might have motivated Emmanuel to serve as a model for him to develop a somewhat stronger character. The individual identity of a learner can be shaped by the influence another learner has, with the possibility of stimulating his involvement in class and consequently his confidence. While every individual young learner is different, the data shows that as a general trait, being part of the language learning community and playing a role within such group fosters the development of a positive learner identity. In a similar way, having a positive learner identity might increase their motivation, facilitating the language learning process.

The data shows that the socializing process of students in the classroom is an important aspect that plays a role in their identity formation. Having group identity is important for them because it boosts their self-esteem and confidence, which may bring advantages in their learning process. Having a positive identity among a group is beneficial for learners since they will have a better learning experience, which involves socializing. Hall (1997) notes that “Identity is highly influenced by the outside environment and the recognition that others have towards us; he claims that without others, we lose self-recognition” (p. 17). Participants in this study mention aspects of their socialization experiences which, in some way or another, affected them. They discuss aspects about their classmates from their primary school and from their English school. There are some commentaries about issues with other classmates and difficulty to socialize. There are other data samples that show the importance of a positive socializing experience inside the classroom. Teachers are also an important part in this process, since they set the tone of the classroom atmosphere and they can build up a good relationship among students and teacher.

#### **4.5 The Role of Learner Styles in Identity Formation**

From the emerged data students show that most of them have a preference for learning through the use of playful, outdoor and dynamic activities. There were several comments in relation to the use of games and it was surprising to find that almost all of them agreed with what their classmates had to say. When the topic of learning through the use of games in the English classroom, the group showed a greater involvement and interest in mentioning something about the topic. The following two quotes illustrate what participants consider about using games in the classroom:

I think that my school is OK, it's very fun. In the English class they teach us everything with games...I like that a lot. (GINT1)

I like to come here and study English because they teach us using games, and we play outside too. (GINT2)

These participants state that they like their English class because they learn using games. With children it is commonly assumed that they enjoy games in the English classroom, and with these opinions from these participants it is confirmed.

In a five-minute-question the learners were asked about the activities they preferred and felt better doing. The following two quotes show their preferences:

I would like to have more games and to watch more videos, because sometimes I get a little bored. Also I want to do more activities outside, to go out to the patio and do activities from the class. (Q4ST6)

I like activities when we work in groups, in pairs and also in the book. I feel better with activities outdoors, in the patio or inside the classroom when we make teams. (Q5ST2)

These participants show that they enjoy activities where some sort of physical movement and interaction with their peers is involved. As a general trait, children usually require to move constantly and they are energetic students who most of the times are actively participating in the classroom. These two examples demonstrate that children feel motivated by activities where a change in the scenario is provided, moving from the traditional classroom activities to more dynamic ones done outdoors. In the first example the participant states that he gets bored with more traditional activities, and that watching videos also helps him feel more interested in the class. The activities that language teachers carry out have a significant impact in the way children learn and in the way they perceive their language classes. It has been mentioned previously that children construct an image in regards to school and learning in general from experiences in the classroom, and being able to see that their interests and needs are being addressed in the language classroom (such as including outdoor, playful and dynamic activities) might reinforce a positive view in regards to their learning process. This in turn can help them feel motivated in the language classroom and therefore develop a greater confidence as learners and members of the language classroom.

Students indicated that they are aware of the benefits that using games in class has for them. Some of the quotes state that they consider that implementing something they do outside of the classroom (playing games) is relatable for them, and therefore makes them feel more engaged in the classroom. A number of data samples illustrate that participants consider that using games in the classroom is beneficial for them. They expressed an inclination for preferring activities that include a game. Below, I grouped four data samples, because they mention similar aspects related to playing in the classroom. They illustrate the connection that students make between learning and playing:

There's a saying that says that you learn better by playing. (GINT1)



I like the games we play in class because we learn better when we are playing.  
(GINT2)

I like my English class because we can be learning but also playing. (GINT4)

I like that even though we are working and learning, we play games too and I like that a lot. (GINT8)

According to these four participants, one learns better by playing. It is impressive to see that for relatively young students, this conception is already present in their minds. The first quote shows that the student is confident to assert that learning is tightly linked to playing. From this idea we can see that students show a preference for a familiar or friendly platform for learning. Experiencing learning in a way in which they feel engaged and comfortable may positively impact their self-image. We might be certain to state that teachers should probably include activities that involve playing games that relate to students. Including familiar activities for children might be helpful in boosting a positive learner identity. In the second quote it is clear that the student considers the use of games in the classroom as a way to facilitate the process of learning. In this sense, they show that their learning styles affect how they perceive and experience learning English.

This theme of learning styles as well relates to what students prefer or are interested in. Sometimes what they express as a learning need may give us hints as to what students may find useful in their language learning. Students share their thoughts in relation to what they think about a lack of use of technology and different materials that they have. They point out that they would like to have working technology tools in the classroom, in order to integrate a vaster number of materials in the classroom. The following two quotes are paired together because they discuss an issue related to the need for a projector:

I would like that we could use the projector, watch movies, videos and see things on the internet. (GINT2)

I don't like that the projector in our classroom doesn't work because when we want to use it we have to move to a classroom with projector. (GINT4)

In the first quote it can be said that the participant is conscious about the areas in which their English class could improve. He explicitly states that he would like to use the projector in order to watch movies. One possible reason for that is that some students have a background experience learning English, and using technology. They show a

tendency for asking for the inclusion of this technology in the classroom. We could also argue that in reality there are some schools that have availability limitations in relation to the use of technology. Students rarely reflect on the conditions of their English school or the teachers staff in general. However, students still have a preference for learning with technological tools in the classroom which sometimes cannot be fulfilled. The participant show an inclination for learning with technology, which when is not addressed may influence how he feels in the classroom. The second quote relates to the same issue, but this participant mentions an additional obstacle which having to change classrooms because theirs does not have a projector.

It is common in this school that only a few classrooms are equipped with a projector and more technological devices. Students are aware of this and they demonstrate that they can see the inconsistencies in their own school. This is an important aptitude to find in students, since this is empowering their learner identity by allowing them to play the role of a conscious and responsible learner. Lacking what students need cannot always be solved, but we should be aware of these learning styles to try to incorporate characteristics of how our students learn into our classroom. Teachers should show to students that they care about their interest, which in turn boosts their confidence as learners.

Learners generally show a particular preference for certain learning styles, either as language learners or as primary school learners. The data collected shows that students repeatedly talk about their preferences in learning English and in their schools. Sometimes they mention their reasons for preferring a certain way of working inside the classroom, for example working with visual materials. Moreover, they make reference to their learning styles in relation to achieving a better result in learning. For instance they mention wanting to work on the book, activities outside the classroom, using technology, visuals and other materials. What they find appealing, interesting or important inside the classroom might be a significant factor for the formation of their learner identity. When students show preferences towards specific activities, materials, topics and etcetera, we as teachers can identify those inclinations and implement them in the classroom. Teachers can positively promote learning strategies for their learners. Such learning strategies could be adopted by children and they might develop a positive learning process and an enhanced perception towards teachers. Lamb (2011) argues that “Teachers, therefore, should offer opportunities to develop the metacognitive knowledge and strategies which will enable learners to be more involved in their learning, nurturing learners identity as

learners capable of taking control of their learning” (p. 78). Implementing what students prefer in terms of learning styles or ways of learning may be helpful in building a positive learner identity.

#### **4.6 The Importance of their Self-image in Identity Formation**

A major theme that emerged from the data was, unsurprisingly, the role of their self-image in their learner identity formation. From the data gathering process, students shared some of the aspects about themselves that might be key to their identity formation. Their identity in general is shaped and determined by several factors, including previous learning experiences, their personality, individual differences, preferences, the role they play in their English school community and in their primary school community, which can be the classroom, their closer group of friends, teachers, and etcetera, among others. Students shared how they perceive themselves as English learners and as primary school learners in general. These ideas they have of themselves as learners can provide a perspective into what are the factors that are more influential to their identity formation. Their preconceptions about what they can do in the classroom, how they socialize, if they are participative, good or deficient students greatly impact their learner identity, and therefore their learning in general. Hirano (2009), “people tend to maintain their identities, day after day, throughout their lives, to create stability and coherence in their lives” (p.37). In order to achieve a successful English learning progress, students must feel confident, empowered and in responsibility of their learning.

During the data gathering process, students were asked about their reactions towards a situation, which in this case was their reactions to their classmates showing a chaotic behavior in the classroom. How they react can show us their role in the classroom, and therefore how they are part of a group. The following quotes illustrate this:

When my classmates are misbehaving, I tell them that they should think about what they are doing. (GINT2)

When my classmates create a mess in the classroom, I tell them to be quiet. (GINT6)

Oh boy...I tell them to be quiet, because they don't let the rest listen to the class. (GINT10)

According to the first quote, it could be assumed that the participant has a role of a mediator in the classroom. This characteristic of the student is shown in how he interacts with his group in class. He shows that he inclines for a more peaceful alternative to being loud and not well behaved. This can impact his learner identity in the sense that he might opt for trying to reconcile a difficult situation in the classroom. His learner identity might be shaped by his role in the group, and if this helps him build confidence, his identity as a member of the group may be solidified.

Learners shared their ideas about how they perceive themselves as English learners. This is important because students position themselves as part of their group in relation to their self-image, and this is linked to their learner identity. Sometimes students have a negative perception of themselves as learners, and in reality they may certainly be able to do more than they think they can. Students show learning difficulty due to several things, but many times this is due to their negative preconceived notions. This image may be shaped by several aspects, such as previous experiences with their primary school, learning English, teachers, classmates, language exposure and previous linguistic knowledge. Their role in a group can also be determined by how they interact inside the classroom, how they build their confidence and the beliefs they have. The following two transcripts show examples of the perception that students have about themselves:

Well, I think that I am, like, more or less, because I get good grades, but I don't think I'm like super smart. (GINT8)

I feel that I'm not bad but not very good, I don't feel like, I don't know...like very smart...but yeah, I do learn. (GINT10)

These two examples show that students seem to be unsure of accepting their capabilities. Both quotes state that they feel more or less in the middle. These self-perceptions may be a result of previous English learning experiences and experiences in their primary school. The fact that they mention that they are not as good may be a sign of insecurity, which may result in a negative learner identity. When students are not certain of their capabilities they are perhaps more vulnerable to believe they are bad students, and therefore make it happen.

The perceptions of teachers in regards to their learners can certainly have an influence in their own self-image. The following extract from a reflection journal describes how learners internalize the ideas that teachers have about them:

I see that some students generally refuse to participate, or sometimes they have an unenthusiastic attitude. I consider that some of the students who are little bit ahead of the rest usually show less initiative and seem less animated. With Héctor this was happening, because I noticed he was feeling bored in class. He is very close to Ricky and they help each other with the activities, but Héctor continues to start getting off-task and showing a bad attitude. I told Hector that he could help Ricky with his activities and I even gave him the task of explaining him when he didn't understand. After some classes I asked Hector to help Ricky, and he began to behave different and even to participate in class explaining some of the aspects we were learning. I think that he is slightly changing his attitude for the better.  
(JET4)

With this reflection I notice that the self-perception that young learners carry is often created from the ways teachers see them. In this particular case, the learner who was more advanced to some extent was showing a negative attitude, feeling bored, not doing the activities and not contributing to the good atmosphere of the group. The fact that he was close to one of his classmates helped to create a different scenario, where Hector became the guide and represented an assistance for Ricky. Both of them benefited from each other since Hector began to show a better attitude, feeling more responsible and finding a role within the learning community which boosted his confidence and self-image. Getting involved in the class and engaging in social interaction within the learning community might be the motivation Hector needed to develop a positive self-image, which in turn helped him find a role he was comfortable performing.

The way students describe themselves represents a window through which we can see how they are shaping their learner identity. Some students mentioned that they do not feel very competent, but even more, some of them describe themselves as bad students. This may represent a serious problem for students to experience a successful language learning. Sometimes students begin to build their own obstacles based on their role as English learners and their perceptions. The following extracts show how two students describe themselves as bad students:

I think I still have more to learn...almost everything. I describe myself as if I still had a lot more to learn about English. (GINT1)

I describe myself as very bad, very bad in English...I am not good at it, I'm not good...I try my best, but if I don't know...if I can't. (GINT6)

Here it is seen that students give the impression of feeling behind; they feel they still have to learn more. The first quote shows that the participant perhaps has a feeling of frustration because he feels that he still needs to learn. What I want to highlight is that the student show awareness of his learning. He might feel behind probably due to comparing himself to his classmates, to the comments of their teachers or even their parents. Although he feels he does not have a high level of English proficiency, he is aware of his learning, and he perhaps can do something about it in the future. The second quote is somehow a bit more negative in his self-description. It seems that the student has internalized the idea of him being a bad English student, therefore he seems to have projected that in the classroom.

The image that young learners have created of themselves shows the aspects that are significant in their identity. The following two quotes from a five-minute-paper illustrate how they perceive themselves:

I feel like the one who studies, who works hard, the one who participates and answers. (Q3ST1)

I see myself as someone who studies, talks in class and sometimes gets distracted. I feel comfortable with my classmates. (Q3ST2)

These two examples evidence that learners have a general positive view of who they are as language learners. They express confidence and they relate such confidence to the work they carry out in the language classroom. The first quote seems to indicate that the learner has acquired a confident opinion of who she is as a learner which is based upon academic achievements. Children quickly internalize the moments when teachers and classmates give recognition to their efforts, which may help them boost their motivation, self-esteem and positive self-image. Learners who feel responsible and feel that they are good students most likely will feel motivated to continue learning and improving. The second quote similarly shows that a positive self-image is present, although this participant also acknowledges his human flaws. This is interesting since he does not regard being

distracted and talking in class as an issue, but rather he admits he also makes mistakes. Such small imperfections are part of the language classroom nature, and realizing that they can be off task from time to time and still be good students can help them feel confident and develop a positive self-image as members of the classroom community. In the last quote, the participant also points out the fact that he feels confident with his classmates, which can also help him build rapport with the group and boost his confidence as an important member of the learning community.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the data analysis which led to the development of the five themes. The purpose of this chapter was to provide evidence for the claims made, based on data samples presented throughout the section. In order to answer the research question, the themes developed aim to explore the question. In general the data provided an overall understanding about the factors that are important in the formation of students' identity. The first theme addresses the perceptions and expectations that students have towards learning, and the second, towards teachers. Students expressed their opinions about aspects of their learning experiences; previous and present. As well, they expressed what they think about their English teachers and primary school teachers. The following theme explored the socialization process which learners go through. This is especially important because learner identity is highly determined by the position we have in relation to others. Being part of a group boosts the sense of identity towards such group, which could result in a positive learning experience. Children who feel that their teachers do not commit seemed to show less interest in learning the language as a result. On the other hand, some children who commented that their teachers are good, prepared and committed, demonstrated to have more motivation and willingness to learn. This may affect their identity since they perhaps want to relate more to their teachers, and are more connected to the class.

Related to students' learning experiences in the EFL classroom, the data also showed how some aspects of their socialization process affect their self-image. Participants shared experiences in their primary school about the difficulty they encounter in socializing with elder peers. This situation was present in several data testimonies, although not in all of them. Having issues with students from their own primary school may represent an obstacle for students to develop an identity, especially if they feel rejected, not accepted

or even bullied. Their identity end up damaged due to issues in socializing. These students are perhaps more vulnerable to feeling unmotivated and not part of their own school community. Burr (2006) claims that “if the self is a product of language and social interactions, then the self will be constantly in flux, constantly changing depending upon whom the person is with, in what circumstances and to what purpose” (p. 27). Students who showed a preferable socialization experience, for example having a good relationship with their peers, also indicated that they enjoyed being in school, having friends and that they liked their teacher. Participants repeatedly suggested that they prefer working in group or with other classmates in class; they mention they feel better and enjoy their class more. This is perhaps an important aspect to consider, since students show that they feel comfortable and engaged in their group. This is relatable to their identity formation process, since they are in an early stage in which socializing with other children and members of their school community may affect their self-image positively.

In the area of English learning students indicated several aspects of their classes which they prefer. This theme covers learning styles and preferences in the language classroom which seemed to be an important aspect for identity formation. Children are in an early stage of discovering what they feel most comfortable doing, their learning styles and preferences in the classroom. This is probably an important component of their identity formation process, since they will feel more connected to certain ways of working in class. Participants showed a variety of learning styles and preferences, and they also show how that affects their self-image. Some participants stated that they dislike or do not feel comfortable doing a given activity or working in a certain way. When the teacher requests them to be involved in such activities, they feel uncomfortable, unmotivated and they do not enjoy the activity. Some participants stated their inconformity towards a particular activity that their English teacher carries out regularly. All of the participants mentioned that they did not like that activity, and they even felt it was unfair since it involved taking time off of their break to the losing team. When a student is put in a position in which he or she has to carry out activities that are especially not enjoyable to them, they may feel upset, out of the group or simply lose interest and motivation. If this happens regularly, it may lead to a general sense of monotony which students are completely able to perceive.

One of the most important themes that emerged is the importance of their self-image in their identity formation process. The image students have of themselves is essential to



their identity formation process. Students in this research expressed how they felt as students. Several of them mentioned that they feel they are good students, and they projected a positive attitude towards themselves and learning in general. These participants are the ones who show an optimistic and confident personality and who appear to progress more in class. Students who defined themselves as good, intelligent students certainly show that this self-image affects their group development for good. On the contrary, there were some participants who defined themselves using damaging adjectives for their identity. They identified themselves as bad students, or not that good for English. Some of them indicated that they consider to be behind the rest, and that they have more difficulty to learn the language. These ideas of themselves may impact their identity, for good or for bad, and taking into consideration that as children they are in a crucial process of identity formation, this may mark their identity in the long run.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The present chapter provides an overview of the main findings of the study. Drawing upon the most important aspects of the previous chapters I will discuss the possible answers to the research question. The aim of this research is to explore the ways in which language learners' identity is affected. In order to do so, the following research question was addressed: *what are the factors that affect young English language learners' identity formation process?* A brief summary of the overall findings of the study is presented which will relate to the relevance of the study in regards to the subject area. A consideration of the implications of the study is presented, alongside the limitations that influenced the development of this. Practical applications of the findings are suggested, as well as recommendations for further research.

### **5.2 Answering the Research Question**

Identity formation processes in early stages of children's lives are influenced by a variety of factors and circumstances. The notion of identity is complex in its nature and it involves an interplay of a wide variety of elements. In addressing the research question, the data showed a number of issues which influence the learner identity formation process of young English language learners. One of the major areas which the data continually displayed was the role of their socialization process in the EFL classroom. The process of socialization in the language classroom community is an important component of their learner identity development.

Having group identity seemed to be an important factor in their learner identity development. The participants' role in it was highly relevant for their construction of an identity as language learners. Furthermore, their relationship with classmates and teachers was significant in determining their sense of belongingness and their position within the classroom community. The data suggested that learners sought recognition and participation as members of the classroom community. Their identity was affected by the relationships they had with classmates, and in turn, those relationships shaped their individual learner identity at the same time. Just as their sense of affiliation to the classroom community affected them positively, participants expressed their frustration when having the difficulty to socialize with older peers from other levels and classrooms. Participants mentioned that in the occasions where older peers rejected them, they felt

excluded and they found it difficult to relate to the wider community. The way learners participate and their level of involvement was shown to be affected by the way others perceived them and how they perceived others. In relation to the perceptions they hold about issues surrounding their language learning, participants demonstrated that those perceptions affected the way they behaved in the classroom and how they interacted among participants of the community. On that account, learners' interaction within the classroom community shapes, to a certain extent, their collective identity as members of that community, which in turn affects the way they engage in learning processes and their development.

In relation to this dynamic process, the role of teachers in learners' socialization and identity formation was similarly significant. Participants provided evidence which informs the way in which teachers' behavior, actions, teaching styles and overall relationship with learners suggests a connection with learners' identity. The role of the teacher's general presence and involvement with the group seems to have an effect in the way learners' perceive English learning, education, school and their overall self-image. It is important to recognize that the role of teachers in their learners learning process is influential. Learners gradually build up perceptions about their teachers and learning, which are shaped by the ways teachers perceive learning, their beliefs, attitudes and behavior in regards to school and education. Learners expressed how their teachers influenced them in their learning process and how they represent a stimulus or an impediment in their involvement with the language and with the classroom community in general. Therefore, it might be appropriate to assume that, to an extent, teachers hold a significant responsibility in defining a great deal of their students' identities.

The ways in which young English language learners conceive their learning process and school in general are as well crucial factors to consider in relation to their learner identity. Language learners' perceptions, expectations and beliefs about learning and school have a heavy influence in the way they see themselves as language learners. Several data samples revealed that participants have an already solid perception in regards to their learning of English. From the data it was seen how they associate a negative classroom environment with a lack of motivation to work and participate in class. This issue closely relates to the issue of socialization in the language classroom, since individual learners may perceive their classroom community as opposing or disassociated from who they are. Participants depicted a chaotic learning environment as an issue that damaged their

learning experience. This has to do with their self-image as learners since they gradually construct an idea of school which lacks order, discipline and perhaps seriousness, which teaches them that school and learning are characterized by unpleasant situations. Contrastingly, if their perceptions and attitudes towards school are positive and they are able to find encouraging opportunities to learn the language, participate and feel they appropriately fit into the learning community.

Learners' self-image is critically important to their formation of learner identity, and in order to explore this aspect, learners manifested the ways in which they perceived themselves. Throughout the analysis of data samples from interviews and five-minute papers, a number of aspects arose in relation to the ways participants perceive themselves as learners. This is particularly significant since their self-image impacts their identity as learners and their learning performance altogether. It was found that some participants hold an image of themselves that is characterized by struggle, incompetence and lack of motivation. In other words, learners sometimes label themselves as weak learners. Some other participants also had ideas about themselves in regards to their capacity to learn the language, but they labeled themselves as good students. From the data obtained it was found that learners may label themselves with positive or negative adjectives which depend on other factors. Such factors include their social relations in the classroom, their relationship with the teacher, their expectations, beliefs and attitudes towards learning English, school, classmates, teachers and themselves. From these findings it can be presumed that learners' individual identity as learners is dependent on the ways they see themselves in relation to others, the ways others see them and their role within the learning community.

### **5.3 Implications**

In answering the research question, the results obtained from the data analysis have indicated an array of possible issues that seem to be involved in the development of learner identity. Having a clearer understanding of the ways in which language learners build their identity as learners is beneficial for teachers, and the factors that affect learner identity formation must be central in language teaching. The consideration of such factors allows teachers to have an enriched knowledge of their students and the process of language learning which connect to their learner identity. Henceforth, teachers hold a privileged position within their classroom where they have the opportunity to enhance their students' language learning process. Van Lier (2008) suggests that pedagogical

action is required in order to direct learners to what he calls *affordances in the environment*. Such affordances refer to the learning opportunities available for them within their social space in the EFL classroom. Teachers are in charge of a considerable amount of pedagogical actions within their classrooms. They can help learners to take advantage of their social space and what it brings to their learning and identity development.

The relevance of the ways in which learners construct their identity and the ways that identity influence their language learning must be taken into consideration not only by teachers alone, but by authorities in charge of the the design of language programs and curriculums. As argued by Coll and Falsafi (2010) “learner identity is the main mediator of participation in learning situations and as such deserves the special attention of policy makers and practitioners” (p. 229). Understanding how learners’ learning process is affected by multiple issues regarding their self-image might be beneficial for the design of language programs that take into consideration such issues. From the data obtained and the discussion of it, a major finding showed that the process of socialization in their language classroom sphere is a fundamental aspect for their identity development. The significance of understanding that socialization in the language classroom largely contributes to a constructive formation of learners’ identity. Learners’ role and level of involvement as members of the classroom community and their identity as learners are reciprocally informed by each other, and should be fully considered by teachers in their practice.

Classroom interaction was visibly an important factor that is present in the construction of learners’ identity. Positive and negative impressions of their learning community seemed to influence the way they interacted in the classroom, and in turn, their attitude and behavior were shaped by such interactions. Positive experiences in their language learning process seemed to improve their attitudes and behavior, and their learner identity was enhanced as well. For language instructors and authorities in the field it results valuable to consider how classroom interaction influences learners’ identity. Young learners may possibly be benefited from teachers who take into consideration the ways in which they can construct a more positive learner identity through classroom interaction, and as a result, an enhanced language learning experience.

## 5.4 Limitations

The present study intended to provide an illustrative exploration to the issue of language learners' identity formation process. This study was conducted within the language center community in a school in León, Guanajuato. For this reason, the conduction of the study is devised within a more local context, therefore some suggestions in regards to the limitations of the study are made. Although the issue explored is widely researched and applied in a variety of contexts among the ELT community, there exist particular specifications and applications to the local setting. Therefore, the findings should not be generalizable to wider contexts. It is important to consider the particularities of this study so that teachers and ELT community members are aware of the limitations that this conveys. Nevertheless, English teachers could consider some of the more general aspects that are mentioned here.

Not surprisingly, time constraints were part of the limitations that this study faced. The need for more time to carry out the data gathering phase of the study represented a difficulty when conducting the face-to-face interviews with children. The choice of this technique represented that piloting was needed in order to enhance the interviews and the information to gather. The interviews were conducted after the required piloting was done. However, part of the limitations regarding face-to-face interviews were that student participants seemed to find it difficult to provide extensive and relevant information that could be useful for the research. Children were interviewed individually in the classroom setting and this situation might have influenced their limited responses and lack of confidence. Nevertheless, some valuable responses were gathered, although there existed the need for delve further. In order to deepen into the interviews, a group interview was conducted. This alternative supplemented the lack of information from the face-to-face interviews, and it resulted in a largely profitable option for meaningful data gathering. On the subject of time limitations, the amount of data gathered by means of individual interviews, group interview, five-minute-papers and researcher journal supposed a great deal of time investment in decoding and analyzing the data excerpts. So as to cope with this problem, a timeline schedule was implemented and followed in order to foster discipline and time management techniques.

As with any research project, consent from the participants to use the information they provided during the interviews and other techniques is needed in order to include their testimonies as evidence of claims of any kind. Due to the fact that the participants in this

study are young children, ethical issues might be more sensitive. Children's permission to use their information was vastly important, but parents' consent to use what their children shared as evidence was particularly fundamental. In this regard, another limitation arose in terms of the arrangements done in order to obtain the parents' signature in the consent letter. All parents agreed in permitting their children's information to be used for the purposes of this study. The challenge consisted of being able to collect the letters of consent and to talk to the parents in person. Due to the fact that the vast majority of the children were picked up quickly by their parents at the end of the classes, and that the institution did not allow parents to enter and leave as easily, it was difficult to meet with the parents and explain the purpose of the study. In order to solve this issue, I sent an informative letter to the children's parents throughout their children. The ones who were willing to give consent (who were all of them) answered back, and only then I sent back the official consent letter, which they signed and returned with their children.

### **5.5 Recommendations for Further Research**

Having discussed the limitations involved in this study and having completed the conduction of this study, some recommendations for further research are proposed. The limitations discussed above serve as reference for future examination into the area. The area of investigation involves aspects such as identity formation, socialization, learners' self-image, among others. This particular study focused on the process of learner identity formation of young learners of English. Further research can possibly attempt to explore the same construct, but from the perspective of language teachers. Throughout the development of this study it has been highlighted the importance of the role of English teachers in their learners' identity formation. Therefore, further exploration in the ways in which teachers' identities and learners' identities affect one another, or the interconnection between the roles of their learners in teachers' identities. This might be helpful in providing insight into the area since teachers hold a particularly influential position among their learners. Exploring the ways teachers' identities interplay with aspects related to their practice could provide a wider vision in order to understand how teachers develop their teacher identity.

Taking as a starting point the present study, a similar study could attempt to explore related issues in regards to identity construction. In this regard, similar researches could try to develop a clearly organized time schedule in order to prevent time constraints, discussed in the limitations section. Needless to say, it is important to anticipate the time

that the participants will need to invest in the contribution to the research. The number of participants required to gather an insightful amount of information may also represent time constraints, thus a suggestion is to carefully pre consider the time available to carry out the research.

Alongside, it is necessary to consider that the amount of data collected might be numerous and its decoding is amply required. In order to cope with this situation, the piloting of the research techniques is necessary so that the researcher can foresee the implications they convey. In regards to the organization of the data samples and the coding, a similar tactic as the timeline schedule can be implemented, with the purpose of establishing deadlines for assuring a rigorous completion of the data samples codes. In conjunction with the previously stated, a systematically organized table for the coding of each technique type should be included with the intention of identifying recurrent patterns in the data which could result in the main themes to discuss.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The purpose of the exploration of the present subject area was to address different elements that are interconnected in the process of learner identity construction. In general the findings from the analysis of the data showed that the identity formation process of young children is highly influenced by a number of aspects related to their language learning. The majority of the aspects that influence their learner identity reflect the importance of the role of socialization, the formation of a collective identity among the classroom group, the ways others perceive them, and their role within the classroom community. Being members of the community influences the way they develop a self-image as learners. Within the classroom community language learners develop ideas about themselves in relation to their capabilities, the way they interact in the classroom, the ways they are perceived and the ways they relate to others. It is pertinent to note that throughout the analysis of data samples it is suggested that learners' self-image and learner identity are closely connected. Learners who develop a positive learner identity were shown to be more likely to experience an equally positive language learning process. Based upon such findings it is noteworthy that language learners go through such complex processes of identity formation, and those complex processes are influential in their process of language learning. Considering those issues that surround language learning and learner identity formation are crucial aspects to consider in teaching the language.



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### ***Appendix 1. Group interview questions.***

Entrevista para niños estudiantes de inglés

1. ¿Qué piensas de tu escuela primaria en general? Puedes contarme acerca de maestros, compañeros, amigos, el ambiente, etcétera.
2. ¿Cómo te sientes en tu escuela primaria? ¿Cómo te llevas con tus compañeros?  
¿Quiénes son tus mejores amigos?
3. ¿Qué piensas de los maestros?
4. ¿Qué piensas de estar estudiando inglés aquí? Cuáles han sido tus primeras impresiones, experiencias, acerca de los maestros, amigos, compañeros.
5. ¿Cómo te sientes en tu escuela de inglés? Te sientes bien/mal, seguro/tímido, contento/triste, capaz/incapaz.
6. ¿Qué piensas del entorno y ambiente dentro del salón de inglés? Puedes decirme acerca de tus compañeros, maestros, otros alumnos, el entorno físico, etcétera.
7. ¿Te gusta o te desagrada venir a clases de inglés? Te puedes sentir, cómodo/incómodo, contento/enojado, relajado/tensión, sociable/tímido.
8. ¿Qué piensas de ti mismo como estudiante en general? Crees que eres buen/mal estudiante, participativo/no participativo, haces tareas/no haces tareas, tienes ganas/no tienes ganas, crees que es divertido/aburrido.
9. ¿Qué piensas de aprender inglés? Crees que es fácil/difícil, te gusta/no te gusta, relajado/tensión, desarrollarte/tímido, puedes aprender/no puedes aprender, útil/inútil.
10. ¿Cómo te gustaría que fueran tus clases de inglés? En general, háblame de tus compañeros, las actividades, materiales, temas, juegos, lectura, etcétera. El salón de clases, lugar físico.

*Appendix 2. Question/statements samples for five-minute-paper technique.*

En mis clases de inglés, me siento...

En mi escuela primaria me siento...

¿Cómo me veo a mí mismo en el salón de inglés?

Quiero que mi maestra sepa:

¿Con qué actividades me siento mejor?

### ***Appendix 3. Consent letter format.***

Estimado padre de familia:

Por este medio lo(a) invito a participar en un proyecto de investigación como parte de mi proceso de titulación de la Maestría en Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza del Inglés, de la Universidad de Guanajuato. El principal objetivo de esta investigación es explorar y conocer más a fondo los procesos de formación de identidad como aprendices que los niños llevan a cabo al aprender inglés. Como docente del idioma inglés y ya que su hijo(a) cursa el nivel 100 del programa de KIDS en este Centro de Idiomas, le solicito el permiso para realizar una entrevista grupal con los alumnos de dicho grupo, en la cual su hijo(a) tendría participación en la discusión de preguntas orientadas a explorar sus procesos de aprendizaje del idioma.

De aceptar y permitir que su hijo(a) participe en dicha entrevista, esta misma estaría siendo llevada a cabo dentro de los días próximos, con puntual y previo aviso de su aplicación. La entrevista grupal será audio grabada para su posterior transcripción y análisis de los datos obtenidos. La grabación obtenida será escuchada únicamente por el aplicador de la entrevista. Su privacidad y anonimidad son de gran importancia, por lo que para asegurarlo el nombre de su hijo(a) no será utilizado dentro de la investigación, sino que se usará un pseudónimo para proteger su identidad. Ningún tipo de información privada será solicitada ni publicada en el reporte final de esta investigación.

Usted está en libertad de decidir aceptar participar en esta investigación o no. Si desea participar en este proyecto, por favor firme el apartado que indica la aceptación, de lo contrario, firme el apartado que indica su rechazo.

Atentamente:

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Ana Guadalupe Avilés Hernández  
Maestra de inglés del grupo

#### **CONSENTIMIENTO DE PARTICIPACIÓN EN ESTE ESTUDIO**

He leído y entendido esta forma de consentimiento y deseo participar.

SÍ [  ] Doy permiso para las entrevistas y el uso de los datos que se obtengan.

NO [  ] No doy permiso para las entrevistas y el uso de los datos que se obtengan.

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Nombre y firma del padre de familia