Metamorphosis in Motion: A Comparative Analysis of the Identity Changes in First and Final Year BS English Students of IMSciences

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the transformative effects of studying English linguistics and literature on the identities of BS students at IMSciences. The main focus is to critically observe the changes in their identities as they progress from the first to the second year of their academic journey at IMSciences. Data was collected from 33 volunteer participants (selected through purposive sampling) through separate Focus Group Discussions conducted at different stages. The analysis of the study was guided by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and a general Reader-Response theory. The data was categorized into themes and sub-themes for analysis. The findings revealed that the students' worldviews were altered and their language and communication skills were enhanced during the course of the study. Additionally, the overall social and cultural perceptions of the English language and literature program, as well as the students' affordability and expectations, played a positive role in shaping their identities.

Keywords: Self-identity, Language, Literature, English language learners, BS English

INTRODUCTION

"The term [identity] (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other" (Katzenstein 1996, p. 59). An identity is a social construct that defines an individual and their sense of self. It is a way of association or rather a distinction that creates a unique view of self for an individual. Throughout life, an individual finds or develops an identity linking him\her to a group of people to obtain social recognition. This defines an individual in a layered structure of living where they assume different roles linked to distinct hierarchical tiers that are ever-evolving.

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Identity is most often studied in terms of two distinct sets of loci (i) outwards: towards people (How others view an individual), and (ii) inwards: forming an individual's personal sense of self i.e. self-identity.

Whereas being a student, belonging to an institute and pursuing a specialized degree are all specifications that allow the concerned individuals to grow intellectually and academically, they give them a unique sense of self which is marked by their being defined as members of a specific group. American Psychological Association refers to it as group identity (reference?).

While students of BS English have a group identity derived out of (i) their association with IMSciences, (ii) pursuit of Bachelor's degree in English, their identities can also be studied as their belonging to either of the two categories i.e. students studying English Linguistics and those studying English Literature.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

i. Highlight the identity changes observed among the students during the course of their degree.

ii. Find the factors that shape the identity of students in IMS over the course of their BS English degree that are a direct influence of their area of study.

Research Questions

The study will address the following questions:

i. How does studying English literature and linguistics change the identity of students during the course of their degree?

ii. What are the factors that influence identity changes in a classroom environment in terms of two distinct sets of loci (i) outwards: towards people (How others view an individual), and (ii) inwards: forming an individual's personal sense of self i.e. self-identity.

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The aim of this study is to identify and study how the above-mentioned factors cast an impact on the budding adults studying BS English at IM Sciences develop and shape their identities of BS English students of IM Sciences. It is pertinent to mention that BS English program was founded in 2019 at IMSciences, an HEC recognized university located in Hayatabad, Phase 7 of Peshawar.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Hogg and Abrams (1988), Identity is "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (p. 56). An identity is not constant; rather it is constantly evolving and changing, being influenced by external factors, including what a person studies. Studying language and literature can have a significant impact on a student's identity by exposing them to diverse perspectives and cultures, encouraging critical thinking and self-reflection, and fostering a deeper understanding of the human experience. Where language and communication skills are enhanced through these language courses, it is reading literature that helps students develop empathy and a greater appreciation for the complexities of the world and human nature.

According to Mashhadi, Memari, and Saki (2021), an identity includes different aspects of individuals' personal and social lives, including ethnicity, occupation, role, culture, ability, interest, religion, cuisine, social habits, music or arts, appearance, character, and homeland or languages. Language, as a fundamental form of communication, plays a significant role in shaping identity. It encompasses verbal, physical, and biologically innate aspects and serves as a means for expressing emotions, thoughts, needs, desires, and more. Therefore, learning a new language without familiarity with its culture remains incomplete. Boonchum (2009) highlights the importance for educators to be aware of this impact when they are designing language learning programs. While also emphasizing the importance of motivational factors in language learning and their influence on self-identity and how it influence or change it.

Being a mullingual society, different languages are being taught at BS level in Pakistani universities. One such language is English, the language of the world. The study by Boonchum (2009) concluded that studying English has a significant impact on the self-identity of students.

Paulin (2006) observes identity as a flexible concept, a marker that is always in flux. It remains evolving and can never be recorded as being in its final shape for it is influenced by a huge variety of factors such as social advancements and practices, globalization, innovation, and language. Considering language to be a flexible

phenomenon itself, Cummins (it is believed that the study of language facilitates students to develop a heightened sense of communication, effectively raising their ability to communicate with others around them (Cummins, 2000). These critical thinking and language skills are essential for students to navigate the complex world around them, and they contribute to the development of a strong sense of self.

Maibodi (2014) showed that there was a significant improvement in student's attitudes, confidence, and interest specifically in their capability to read novels. Similarly, language and literature play a significant role in shaping and defining an individual's identity. They provide a means of self-expression and connection to others, and help to shape an individual's understanding of themselves and the world around them (M.Lawson, 2013).

The study of literature, in particular, allows students to interact with different cultures and diverse backgrounds, equipping students with an opportunity to explore the diverse experiences of people from different backgrounds, cultures, and historical periods (Gee, 2005). This exposure can help students to develop a sense of worldly empathy and understanding towards people who are different from themselves, allowing them a chance towards acceptance and tolerance, which can be an important step in the development of a strong sense of self.

The study of literature, in particular, is seen as a very important tool for promoting empathy and understanding of others who are not part of an individual's immediate social group. Reading and understanding literature allows students to explore different perspectives and angles to understand the experiences of others, which can help to promote empathy and understanding that appears to be external and non-native to an individual (Rudd, 2001).

English Language and Literature can also influence student's identities through the development of creativity and imagination. The study of literature and language allows students to explore new ideas and to express themselves in new ways (Eagleton, 2003).

A study by Kramsch (1998) found that traditional language teaching methods, which focus on grammar and vocabulary, can reinforce a student's existing beliefs and perceptions about the language being learnt.

Language is more than just a system of words and sentences; it is also a social activity in which identities and aspirations are discussed within the context of complicated, frequently unjust social interactions. Identity refers to how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future (Norton, 2013)

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A study by Standfield and Bunce (2014) revealed that exposure to fiction was associated with trait cognitive, but not effective, empathy, while the experience of being transported was associated with story-induced affective empathy.

Jamshaid Mashhadi et al. (2021) concludes that language and identity are inherently codependent on one another because if one is separated from the other, they remain incomplete. While also establishing identity as a significant factor in language learning, having a positive impact on communication as language and identity are responsible for uniting an individual with his\her surroundings.

There are previous studies done on the impact that English language and Literature has on the identity of students. However, these studies are limited to their own regions. There are next to none studies done in the region of Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

Socio-cultural theory, developed by the influential psychologist Lev Vygotsky, states that individuals develop language and identity through social interactions within their cultural and linguistic communities. Parents, caregivers, peers, educational environments, and the culture at large are responsible for developing the brain's higher-order functions. As a higher-order psychological function, identity is formed in socio-cultural practices.

Rooted in the field of Sociolinguistics, this theory explores the relationship between language, culture, and social interactions and how they shape an individual's identity. According to this theory, language is not simply a means of communication, but it also plays a crucial role in the construction and expression of personal and social identities.

In the context of studying English language and Literature, socio-cultural theory explores how the engagement with the English language, its literature, as well as the academic environment influence the formation of students' identities.

Another theory that is relevant to this study is the Reader-Response theory which is developed by theorists such as Louise Rosenblatt, Stanley Fish, Norman Holland, and David Bleich. This theory focuses on how readers promptly engage with literary texts and construct meaning through their personal lens and experiences. In the context of identity, Reader-Response Theory suggests that English literature can play a significant role in shaping an individual's sense of self. When readers encounter characters, themes, and situations in literary works, they often make connections between the text and their own lived experiences. This process of identification and personal resonance can contribute to the formation and exploration of one's identity.

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Through literature, individuals may encounter characters who share similar identities, struggles, or aspirations, which can provide validation and a sense of belonging. They may also encounter characters who have different identities or experiences, which can broaden their perspectives and foster empathy. By engaging with diverse literary voices, readers can gain insights into different cultures, time periods, and human experiences, which can contribute to the development of a more complex and nuanced understanding of their own identity. In short, the Reader-Response theory highlights how English literature can impact identity by providing opportunities for readers to reflect, relate, and engage with diverse narratives, ultimately contributing to their own self-discovery and understanding of who they are.

Research Approach, Design, Unit of Analysis and Ethical Consideration

The research approach for this study is qualitative, using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as the data collection method. Purposive sampling was employed to select the 33 students of BS English students from IM Sciences, representing both first-year and final-year students. Among the population 75% of the participants were female while the rest 15% were male (23 females and 10 males). The minimum age group was 19 years, students in the first year of their degree and the study expanded to final year students as well so we had the maximum age group of 24 years. A total of 3 in-person sessions were arranged to conduct FGD's. All the sessions were recorded after obtaining written consent from the participants.

Thematic analysis and comparative analysis are used to analyze the data gathered from the FGDs. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed, ensuring confidentiality of participants' personal information and obtaining their informed consent for recording the FGD sessions. The time horizon for the study was limited to 4-6 months due to program constraints and availability of participants, focusing on the first and final year students to capture a range of perspectives.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The study conducted three Focus Group Discussions in which the participants were asked questions. This chapter analyzes and discusses the data that was taken from all three Focus Group Discussions. The data is analyzed by finding themes and doing a thematic analysis as well as a comparative analysis. The questions can be viewed in Appendix B.

The table given below represents the themes and sub themes of all the participants on the research subject.

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Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub Themes
Not a primary academic focus	• Failed medical enterance test • Considered it as an option for appearing in CSS • Was asked to consider as an option by a parent or sibling
Provides a world view change and polish language skills	• Will build\improve empathy • Will help become a better human • Will give a new outlook on life • Will polish English language skills
Affordable and critical degree program	• The degree is affordable and artistic • The degree is fun and critical
Expectations from the program	• Expected work on English Basics • Basic grammar work • What and how English is formed
Impact of Degree on Identity	• Skepticism • Critical Thinking • Self Awareness • Improved Problem Solving Skills • Immunity to critical manipulation
Impact of Literature On Identity	• Connection to real world emotions • Increases Empathy
Factors Influencing Identity	• Teachers • Philosophical Awareness • Interaction with diverse thoughts • Diverse Books

Table 4. 1 Themes and Sub-Themes

Not a Primary Academic Focus

Out of the total population of the participants of the first year of BS English, 73% had opted to study BS English as a secondary option. It was not their primary academic focus. Their primary academic focus was a degree of their choice, which they were either not allowed to opt for by their parents, or they had failed to pass the entrance exam. 75% of those participants had failed to pass the entrance exam for medical colleges in Peshawar. MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery) being a popular option among students in Pakistan especially Female students. The CSS (Central Superior Services or Civil Service) test is another popular choice among students in Pakistan. Because English is the CSS's language of instruction, students who intend to take the exams frequently choose to pursue a Bachelor of Science in English. 47% of the population as a whole intends to take the CSS exam. They were asked to consider BS English as an option by a parent or sibling in order to pursue CSS after they graduate. The pressure to take further CSS examinations is typically applied by a parent or other family member.

> *"I wanted to become a doctor. My second option was CSS. This is why I chose this degree. I had content writing/journalism in mind as well."*

Individual A talks about how their first option was to become a doctor and their second was to become a CSS officer. Along with that they also had journalism or content writing in mind. Which is why they opted to study Bachelor of English because it would help them polish their English writing skills.

> *"I studied literature in my college and my parents always wanted me to do CSS. I don't have interest personally but my parents want me to do this for CSS."*

Individual B talks about their background in literature which is not their choice, rather their parents' choice. CSS being their parents' aspiration for their child.

Individual C chose to study English of their own choice and expressed their interest for the subject passionately. They emphasized the significance of English as a language and literature as a powerful tool that shapes our understanding of the world, how it preserves history and culture, and defines the soul of a nation.

> *"I chose English because it is a strong language with a great impact internationally."* (D)

Individual D says that their decision to study English is motivated by its significance internationally. As a widely spoken language, English serves as a powerful tool for global communication. Proficiency in English opens doors to opportunities, facilitates connections with diverse cultures, and grants access to a global community. Studying English empowers individuals to navigate the complexities of our interconnected world and make a meaningful impact on an international scale.

Provides a world-view change

Out of the total population of the participants of the first year of BS English, 36% had one similar expectation before officially starting their degree. They believed that their English language skills would become stronger and more polished. By English language skills they meant English reading, writing, and listening skill. However, after the participants had spent one whole semester studying English language and Literature, 52% had similar expectations regarding their degree. They believed their entire outlook on life would change by the end of their degree or during the course of it. The individuals believed that immersing themselves in literature would lead to personal growth and make them better human beings. They recognized that literature has the power to build and improve empathy, allowing them to understand and relate to the experiences of others. By delving into diverse narratives, they hoped to shed their judgmental tendencies and develop a more open-minded perspective. They understood that literature has the ability to challenge

preconceived notions, broaden their understanding of the human condition, and ultimately foster compassion and acceptance. Through the transformative impact of literature, they aspired to cultivate empathy, become more compassionate individuals, and contribute positively to the world around them.

> *"Choosing English literature will make you fluent in speaking English because it is an international language." (E)*

Individual E opted to study English language and Literature because it is their belief that by reading English literary works and interacting with the language itself will help them become more fluent and they will be able to speak more eloquently.

An affordable and critical degree program

The participants of the final year were asked why they initially came into this degree and some of the common answers given by the participants are the following: the degree was affordable, artistic, and critical.

Affordability is a factor that influences the educational decisions of some of the individuals. Higher education can be financially burdensome, and students often seek affordable options to pursue a degree. In this case, opting for a degree in English Language and Literature at IMSciences offers a more accessible path as compared to other degrees offered by the institute.

Another aspect that attracted the participants to the English degree is its artistic, literary, and critical nature. The nature of English literature develops creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to engage with complex ideas. Participants who value artistic expression and critical analysis found this degree appealing. They believed that it would foster their literary skills and they would be engaged in creative writing. The artistic aspect of the English degree resonated with the individuals who had a passion for literature, language, creative writing, and storytelling.

Expectations from the program

The participants of the last year students were asked about their expectations from this degree when they had initially joined, or before they officially enrolled as a student. Their expectations regarding studying English Language and Literature encompass a range of key areas that the expected the degree to focus on. One primary expectation highlighted by the participants is the opportunity to work on English basics. This included a focus on basic foundational skills such as reading, writing, and basic English grammar.

Most of the participants that expected to work on basic English grammar and skills did not understand the 'literature' aspect of the degree at the time. A participant was quoted saying:

> *"I didn't know that there was literature or linguistics. I just expected there would be Basic English and we would become fluent in English."*

Participant F emphasized that he had thought that BS English would be a good opportunity to learn good English skills and become proficient in speaking, listening, and writing English.

Impact of Degree on Identity

The last year students of BS English were asked whether they had thought that studying English Language and Literature would impact their identity in any way, coming into this degree/at the beginning of their degree. Out of the total population of the last year students, 64% said they believed that English Language and literature would impact their identity while 35% did not agree; they did not think their identity would be impacted in any way.

When asked about how their identity had been impacted by studying English Language and Literature, there were some common answers found among the participants. Some of the common ways that the individual has changed are being prone to skepticism, critical thinking, self-awareness, improved problem solving skills, and immunity to critical manipulation.

The participants agreed that they became more skeptical during the course of their degree. They claimed it was a direct impact of studying English Literature that made them skeptic. Studying English Language and Literature encourages skepticism by exposing students to a wide range of texts and narratives. Literature often presents different perspectives, challenging readers to question and critically analyze the ideas and beliefs presented. Through the exploration of various literary works, students learn to approach information with a discerning eye, question assumptions, and develop a healthy skepticism towards widely accepted notions. This ability to question and critically evaluate ideas is crucial in an age of misinformation and helps individuals develop a more nuanced understanding of the world. Participant E was quoted saying:

> *"I have become very skeptical as a person and question things more before accepting them."*

The participants also emphasized on their newly developed critical thinking skills. They claimed studying English Language and Literature formed critical thinking skills within them. Reader-Response theory states that analyzing literary texts requires students to engage in close reading, interpretation, and analysis. They learn to dissect complex ideas, identify underlying themes, and analyze the author's intent. This process enhances their ability to think critically, evaluate evidence, and develop coherent arguments. These skills extend beyond literature and have practical applications in various areas of life, including problem-solving, decision-making, and effective communication. The participants said

that their degree requires students to engage in close reading, its interpretation, and analysis of literary works. And because of this process, their ability to think critically is not only developed but also enhanced.

The participants also discussed how their problem-solving skills had gotten better during the course of this degree, being a direct result of their new critical thinking skills. Engaging with complex literary texts challenges students to think creatively and critically in order to interpret and analyze the material. This process of grappling with intricate narratives and characters builds problem-solving skills. Literature often presents readers with ambiguous situations, moral dilemmas, and unresolved conflicts, forcing them to navigate through these complexities and find meaningful resolutions. The ability to analyze intricate problems and consider multiple perspectives is a valuable skill that can be applied to real-life challenges in various contexts. A participant was quoted:

> "*I believe it has developed problem-solving skills in me. Critical thinking as well.*"

Another common finding is that the participants agreed that studying English Language and Literature enables them to explore the human condition, gaining insights into different cultures, perspectives, and experiences. By immersing themselves in literary works that reflect diverse voices, students develop empathy and a deeper understanding of the complexities of human nature. They learn to reflect on their own beliefs, values, and biases, fostering self-awareness and personal growth. They become more self-aware individuals who appreciate the richness of human diversity, become more empathetic, less judgmental, and possess a deeper understanding of their own identities.

In his article 'Literary Analysis and Skepticism' (Kurtenbach, 2012) published in Centre for Inquiry, he quotes:

> "*The study of literature develops the qualities of reflection and introspection. In order to evaluate literature, a student must examine the impact it has on him or her, and deeply reflect on this. This ability to reflect deeply on material and introspect about one's thought processes is valuable for many domains beyond the classroom. It is a transferable skill that the student gains. The development of this skill is valuable for the student, and having students with this skill is valuable for society. More reflective, introspective citizens tend to make better decisions on the large scale, I suspect.*" (Kurtenbach, 2012).

Finally, the last common change that the participants put forward is the ability to become immune to critical manipulation. They claimed that studying English Language and Literature equipped them with the tools to recognize and resist manipulative techniques employed in persuasive writing and discourse. Through close reading and textual analysis, students learn to identify biases, fallacies, and emotional appeals used to influence

opinions. By developing a critical understanding of language, rhetoric, and argumentation, individuals become less susceptible to manipulation and are better equipped to form independent, well-informed opinions. A participant was quoted:

> *"I used to be easily influenced by people and ideas. Now it is different. Now I am not so gullible."*

Impact of Literature on Identity

The participants were asked to identify how Literature specifically had impacted their identity. The most common answer was that it increased empathy within them towards the diverse humankind, and that it connected them to real world emotions. The Reader-Response Theory specifies that the study of Literature nurtures empathy in individuals by facilitating a profound understanding and connection with the experiences of others. Through literature, readers identify with complex characters, empathizing with their emotions and challenges. Engaging with diverse perspectives presented in literary works encourages readers to step outside their own viewpoint and embrace new outlooks. The emotional engagement elicited by competing narratives evokes compassion and understanding. By actively participating in the meaning-making process, readers develop a deep empathy that extends beyond the pages of a book, influencing their interactions in real life and fostering a more compassionate and empathetic self.

> *"The reason why literature has such a deep impact is because the subject matter touches on people's emotions and feelings and events."*

This individual answered that the subject matter of literature is as such that it constantly talks about people's feelings, emotions, etc. Even though it is all written and published work, the emotions are usually the emotions of fictional characters, but it has a human-like touch which reflects in the reader's mind, exactly what the Reader-Response Theory says.

Factors Influencing Identity

The participants of this study in the last year were asked to identify the factors that influenced their identity by studying English Language and Literature and during the course of their degree in IMS. Each participant was asked to name at least 3 factors. The following are the most common factors identified by the individuals: teachers, philosophical awareness, interaction with diverse thoughts, and diverse books or literature.

The first factor that was a primal cause of change for the participants are the teachers. The teachers played a crucial role in shaping student's identities by creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. They served as guides, mentors, and facilitators, encouraging students to explore diverse perspectives and engage critically with literary works. Good teachers fostered intellectual curiosity and independent thinking

among the students, encouraging them to question things. Through insightful feedback and meaningful discussions, teachers helped students develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others, nurturing the growth of their identities. However, the participants agreed that not all the teachers played such a crucial role.

Teachers also served as role models, embodying values of empathy, respect, and open-mindedness. By fostering a safe space for dialogue and promoting a love for literature, the teachers inspired students to embrace diverse identities, celebrate differences, and contribute to building an inclusive society. The participants said that the influence of teachers extended beyond the classroom, as their guidance shaped the students' self-discovery and their development into better human beings.

Studying English language and literature provided an opportunity for philosophical inquiry and reflection for the participants. Through engagement with literary texts, students had been exposed to moral issues, cultural norms, and diverse worldviews. This exposure fosters critical thinking skills and challenges students to consider their own beliefs, values, and biases.

Literature often presents characters who grapple with questions of identity, belonging, and the meaning of life. By exploring these themes, students are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and identities. They gain insights into the complexity of human existence and the multitude of perspectives that shape individual identity. Through philosophical awareness, students develop a better understanding of themselves and the world, contributing to the construction of their identities.

Additionally, engaging with diverse thoughts and perspectives is a fundamental aspect of studying English language and literature. Through discussions, debates, and collaborative learning, students had been exposed to a variety of viewpoints and interpretations. This exposure helps students develop empathy as they learn to understand and appreciate different cultural, social, and historical contexts. Interaction with diverse thoughts allows students to broaden their horizons, challenge their own assumptions, and develop a more inclusive and global outlook.

Finally, the literature encountered while studying English language and literature played a vital role in shaping the student's identities. The participants claimed that diverse books offer a window into the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of individuals from various backgrounds and cultures. Exposure to diverse characters and narratives helps students develop empathy, as they can relate to and understand the emotions and challenges faced by others.

By encountering diverse voices, students gain a broader understanding of the human condition and the intricacies of identity formation. Diverse literature allows students to see themselves reflected in the stories they read, validating their own experiences and contributing to the development of a positive self-identity.

It is important to note that according to the participants, English Literature has more of an impact on students' identities rather than linguistics or simply the English language.

We would further elaborate and establish the research we will build upon by performing a comparative analysis on the existing data set.

Not a Primary Academic Focus

During the FGD performed with the first year students 71% of the total population reported that studying BS English was not their primary choice or focus of study. While 75% of the total population who were in their last year reported the same that BS English was not their primary academic focus. This in general indicates a trend which this study has stumbled upon, that an overwhelming majority of students enrolled in the program were not considering BS English for either their career prospects or their academic growth.

Improving upon World View

After having spent at least 1 semester in the program, 52% of the total population of the 1st year students believed that the degree will help them reimagine their life and surroundings. They believed that immersing themselves in the world of literature would lead to personal growth and make them better human beings. This directly corroborates the research given by (Cummins 2000) where he identified the exact same factors to be responsible for social growth.

Impact of Language and Literature on Identity

The study had its focus on measuring this variable as a key indicator, leading us up to identifying factors that influence identity of students. Broadly, this question was divided into two categories with language and literature at the helm. The students of the final year were asked this question to find and compare what appealed to them the most and whether language or literature had a bigger impact on the identity of the students.

Out of the total population of the final year students of BS English IMSciences 64% said they believed literature had a bigger impact on them, upon further inquiry via a leading question, 35% of the population agreed that language made an impact (The students who were mostly majoring in linguistics)

Factors Influencing Identity

As a result of studying the impact of language and literature in the study, we were able to identify 4 intersecting factors in the FGDs. The factors that were found to have been influencing the identity of BS English Students in IM Sciences include: teachers, philosophical awareness, interaction with diverse thoughts and Diverse Books.

Metamorphosis in Motion

Teachers

Among the student population of the final year, 65% of the students believed that the teachers played an important role for them to shape up their identity as the instructors allowed them to think critically and encouraged them to get newer insight about the ways of the world. The teachers were regarded as mentors by students, held in high prestige. This directly corroborates Boonchum (2009)'s study where he showed that studying English has a significant impact on the self-identity

Philosophical Awareness

Among the student population of final year students, 45% of them believed that introduction to literary theories enabled them to go beyond the horizon and find guidance in the principles given by famed philosophers. This resulted in an awakening or enlightenment, which caused their critical and analytical abilities to become heightened.

Interaction With Diverse Thoughts

Among the student population of final year students, 30% were of the opinion that through this degree, they were able to interact with a diverse set of people that belonged to different locations which caused them to interact with a very diverse group of thoughts. This enhanced acceptance and empathy among the sample population, making them tolerant towards different opinions. The students also pointed out that their ability to take diverse opinions and be more accepting of them increased because of the program. Due to the program, the students opined that their personalities underwent tremendous change when it came to critical discourse as they became much more accepting of the views others expressed hence becoming more *tolerant*. This leads us to believe that students became much more tolerant as compared to their past selves. This directly corroborates the study (Gee, 2005) where he concluded that studying literature, in particular, allows students to interact with different cultures and diverse backgrounds, equipping students with an opportunity to explore the diverse experiences of people from different backgrounds, cultures, and historical periods. This exposure can help students to develop a *sense of worldly empathy and understanding* towards people who are different from themselves, allowing them a chance towards acceptance and tolerance, which can be an important step in the development of a strong sense of self.

Diverse Books

Among the student population of final year students, 71% opined that due to the exposure they received during their degree of diverse literature, they became very critically aware of the knowledge paradigms. A major population of readers among these students revealed that previously they stuck by reading a specific genre of books or rather preferred it which limited their critical thinking abilities. However, upon studying within the program

they were able to go through a diverse curriculum that enabled them to develop feelings of *empathy* towards "others" who were not part of their immediate social group.

This directly corroborates the study by (Rudd, 2001) wherein he concluded that literature, in particular, is seen as a very important tool for promoting empathy and understanding of others who are not part of an individual's immediate social group. Reading and understanding literature allows students to explore different perspectives and angles to understand the experiences of others, which can help to promote empathy and understanding that appears to be external and non-native to an individual.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the surprising influence a BS English program has on students' sense of self. While most students initially enrolled with the goal of taking the Civil Services Examination (CSS), the program ultimately led to a significant transformation in their identities and personalities over four years. Exposure to a diverse range of literature and qualified instructors played a key role in this transformative experience. Students reported developing valuable skills like empathy, tolerance, acceptance, and critical thinking.

Exploring the works of influential philosophers further fostered self-enlightenment. The program fostered a heightened sense of self, leading students to become more critically aware of their place in the world. Interestingly, literature had a more profound impact on students' identities compared to language studies within the program. A significant 80% of the students credited literature with helping them discover who they truly are and forge a unique identity. Overall, studying literature from various genres led to positive changes in the identity of BS English students. Graduates reported increased empathy, self-awareness, tolerance, and acceptance, making them more open-minded and critical thinkers. This study highlights the unexpected power of a BS English program in shaping students' identities beyond career preparation. By fostering empathy, critical thinking, and self-awareness, it equips graduates to engage with the world in a more positive and constructive way.

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