European Journal of Innovation in Nonformal Education (EJINE)
Volume 5 | Issue 9 | Sep - 2025 ISSN: 2795-8612

Identity, Motivation and Investment in Learning Language

Mukhtasar Nakibova
Teacher of General secondary school No. 30 in Zangiota district, Tashkent region

A B S T R A C T
This article has demonstrated how Munoz (2019), and Singleton & Pfeninger (2018) provided insights into the role of age in second language acquisition, which it is applied to my targeted learners' context. Additionally, the articles by Dornyeri (1998), Norton & Toohey (2011), and Darvin and Norton (2021) guided my analysis of identity, motivation, and investment, specifically for my targeted learners.

A R T I C L E I N F O
Article history:
Received 15 Jul 2025
Received in revised form
15 Aug 2025
Accepted 08 Sep 2025

Keywords: English skills, grades, analyze, grammar-translation method, practice, adult learners, communication skills.

Hosting by Innovatus Publishing Co. All rights reserved. © 2025

Introduction. Language learning in adulthood presents unique opportunities and challenges shaped by environment, motivation, and access to natural input. Saida and Surayyo's stories illustrate how context influences language development. Saida, who migrated to the USA with minimal English, improved through daily interactions, family support, and workplace exposure, showing the importance of immersion and emotional encouragement. In contrast, Surayyo, an English teacher in Uzbekistan, developed strong academic accuracy but lacked conversational fluency due to limited real-life practice. Drawing on Singleton and Pfeninger (2018) and Munoz (2019), their experiences highlight how adult learners progress differently depending on exposure and support[1], [2].

Methods. Saida, 35, moved from Uzbekistan to the USA with minimal English skills and two months of instruction before leaving her home country. Initially, she stayed home to care for her children, speaking mainly Uzbek, which restricted her exposure to English and left her dependent on her husband for communication. This dependence affected her confidence and increased her isolation. Her English journey began when she worked in a diverse neighborhood out of financial necessity. Although she was shy at first, Saida learned by observing customer interactions, gradually gaining the confidence to handle tasks on her own. Singleton and Pfeninger (2018) emphasize that frequent interactions in natural contexts can overcome some age-related issues which helped Saida improve her English[3]. Her children, who became fluent in English through school, supported her by teaching vocabulary and grammar. Munoz (2019) highlights the importance of emotional support for adult learners, which was evident in Saida's progress. Feedback from her children and customers helped her refine her grammar and speaking skills. Over time, she adapted to the local culture, learned accents, and began using local expressions, demonstrating the benefits of varied input as noted by Singleton and Pfeninger (2018). Although her grammar improved through practice, occasional mistakes remain, and her academic fluency is limited. Munoz (2019) argues that adults can achieve language proficiency with motivation and consistent exposure. Saida's story shows how supportive environments and practical needs enable adults to overcome challenges and develop strong communication skills.

At 35, Surayyo teaches English in Uzbekistan and is fluent in Tajik and Uzbek. Her work involves teaching secondary school students from beginner to upper-intermediate levels. Her English use is mostly

academic and restricted to the classroom, leaving her little opportunity to practice conversational language. Outside of work, she speaks mainly in Tajik, limiting her immersion in English. Her teaching materials focus on repetitive grammar exercises, which enhance her accuracy but do not expose her to idiomatic expressions or natural conversation. Singleton and Pfeninger (2018) argue that adults in formal learning settings often lack natural input which is vital for developing authentic language use. To improve her skills, Surayyo uses English movies and podcasts for listening practice but rarely speaks with native speakers, keeping her spoken English highly academic[4]. Munoz (2019) points out that while adult learners often excel in accuracy, they may lack conversational ease without exposure to diverse input[5]. Her speech reflects influences from her Tajik and Uzbek backgrounds, and her experience with accents is limited to standard varieties of British and American English. Singleton and Pfeninger (2018) note that exposure to a range of accents supports adaptability, which is lacking. Although she has strong grammatical skills from teaching, her speech remains formal due to limited casual practice. Structured learning environments as noted by Singleton and Pfeninger (2018) help adults achieve accuracy but may hinder fluency compared to immersive settings. Despite these challenges, Surayyo's dedication to self-study demonstrates that adults can build strong grammar skills even without immersion. Her English is refined for academic purposes, but her casual conversations are less fluent due to limited natural exposure.

Results. Saida's identity changed due to her life experiences and interactions in the USA. When Saida first arrived in the USA, her main role was taking care of her children and she depended on Uzbek and her husband for communication. This limited her opportunities to practice English and slowed her progress. Norton and Toohey (2011) explain that such situations can isolate learners and slow their progress[6]. Financial needs prompted Saida to take a job in a diverse neighborhood, where she began interacting with English-speaking customers. This role helped her gain confidence and build her skills in a practical environment aligning with Darvin and Norton's (2021) idea that learners shape their identities in new social spaces[7]. Saida embraced the role of a learner with the help of her children and feedback from work. As Munoz (2019) mentioned, emotional support is crucial for adult learners to build confidence and improve language skills.

Surayyo's identity as an English user is influenced by both her role as a teacher and as a learner, shaped by her professional environment and social context. Norton and Toohey (2021) suggest that a learner's identity is influenced by their social roles and available opportunities. As a teacher of secondary school students, Surayyo's identity is strongly connected to her formal language skills. However, her work's structured nature limits her ability to practice conversational English. Outside of her professional role, Surayyo communicates primarily in Tajik, limiting her immersion in English. Her linguistic identity is deeply tied to her Tajik and Uzbek roots, demonstrating how language is shaped by social and cultural contexts. (Norton and Toohey, 2011). Surayyo actively works to improve her English through self-directed learning, using English movies and podcasts.

Motivation is essential to the language learning process, as it influences the beginning and persistence of the learning process. For Saida, her motivation stems form a mixture of internal desires, external pressures, and social support. Saida's intrinsic motivation came from her personal goal of gaining independence and integrating into her new community. After moving to the USA, the challenges she faced in communication ignited her desire to improve her English. Saida's long-term goal was to become a fully integrated community member, and this internal drive was essential for her persistence in learning English. Her extrinsic motivation rose from the external demands of her job. To succeed in her job and support her family financially, she needed to improve her English quickly. Dornyei (1998) emphasizes the role of external factors, such as professional goals, in motivating adult learners. Her job required clear communication with customers and co-workers, providing a clear external reason to focus on learning. Saida's motivation was also supported by social factors, particularly the encouragement she received from her children and customers. Her family's guidance with vocabulary and grammar helped her feel confident, and the feedback from customers reinforced her progress, encouraging her to keep improving.

Discussion. According to the articles given in weekly readings, investment involves the time, effort, and emotional energy that learners dedicate to language learning. Saida's investment is evident in her professional engagement, self-study, and family support. Saida actively engaged in language learning

through her interactions with customers at work. As Norton (1995) notes, investment is often reflected in real-world language practice, and Saida's work provided her with some opportunities such as applying her English meaningfully. The more she intact with customers, the more confident and fluent she became in English, showing the practical benefits of her investment. Her investment in learning English also involved adapting to local accents and expressions and her efforts to understand local accents helped her feel more connected to her new community. The support that Saida received from her children was an important part of her investment. Her language-learning journey was not only about mastering English but also about personal growth. Learning English allowed her to become more independent and integrated into her new environment. Darvin & Norton (2021) point out that language acquisition can increase social and cultural investment, and for Saida, English helped her build a new identity and become a more active participant in her new community.

Surayyo is motivated by her desire to improve as an English teacher and to grow personally. For Surayyo, the goal of becoming a better teacher motivates her to enhance her English. Her use of self-study tools like podcasts, and movies demonstrates her commitment to expanding her skills beyond formal language use. In addition to her internal desire, she is also influenced by external pressures, such as the demands of her teaching role. According to Dornyei (1998), extrinsic motivation often arises from external expectations[8]. For Surayyo, her ability to teach well depends on her proficiency in English, pushing her to continuously refine her language skills. Despite these factors, she struggles due to a lack of immersive language exposure and limited interactions with native speakers.

Surayyo's investment is reflected in her self-study efforts and the challenges she faces. Her investment in her professional development focuses on improving her academic language skills to meet her students' needs. However, this structured focus limits her exposure to conversational language and informal English. Surayyo also invests in self-studying by using English movies and podcasts, which help her develop listening and comprehension skills. This self-directed learning aligns with Darvin & Norton's (2021) concept of investment, where learners dedicate time and energy to improving their linguistic abilities. Surayyo faces the challenge of limited exposure to native speakers, which hinders her ability to develop fluency and adapt her language use. Norton and Toohey (2011) emphasize that the lack of real-world practice limits learners' ability to use the language effectively in spontaneous conversations.

Reference:

1. Singleton, D., & Pfenninger, S. E. (2018). L2 acquisition in childhood, adulthood, and old age. *Multilingual Matters.*
2. Munoz, C. (2019) A new look at age and second language acquisition *Language Learning, 69(2).*
3. Lee, Eun Jeong Esther. "Motivation, investment, and identity in English language development: A longitudinal case study." System 42 (2014): 440-450.
4. Norton, Bonny. "Motivation, identity and investment: A journey with Robert Gardner." Contemporary language motivation theory (2019): 153-168.
5. Munoz, C. (2019) A new look at age and second language acquisition Language Learning, 69(2).
6. Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, language learning, and social change. Language Teaching, 44(4).
7. Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2021). Investment and motivation in language learning: What's the difference? *Cambridge University Press.*
8. Dornyei, Z. (1998) Motivation in second and foreign language learning. *Language Teaching, 31(3).*