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Investigating the Role of Virtual Communities in Shaping EFL Learners' Intercultural Identity

A Case Study of First and Second Year Master Students of Language and Communication Department of English, Mostaganem

Presented by: BENALIOUA Hadjira

Board of Examiners:

Chairperson: Mrs. Mounira KHAROUBI   **University of Mostaganem**

Supervisor: Dr. Hanane SARNOU   **University of Mostaganem**

Examiner: Dr. Dalal SARNOU   **University of Mostaganem**

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved father may his soul rest in peace and to all people who are very dear to my heart

Abstract

Virtual online communities have in many ways changed the socialization experience of our 21st century learners. As learners get immersed in virtual communities they develop higher levels of competences related to intercultural communication which later lead them to develop their intercultural identity, an identity that will by time become an omnipresent force within their social lives .This study is an attempt to examine the views of the participants regarding the connectedness of virtual communities and their identity formation process. The methodology employed in this study is a mixed method that involved 15 master one and two EFL learners of language and communication stream who participated in three different data collection tools; questionnaire ,experiment and interview all of which took place in virtual online realms. Participants shared how virtual communities develop their intercultural competences , influence their intercultural identity and help them adapt to certain cultural differences therefore; our study conclude that virtual communities are considered as a powerful tool through which our participants can get a wide range of benefits and develop their abilities to understand people cross and beyond all types of cultural barriers. Virtual communities seem to be a predominant tool that helps individuals become more culturally aware and develop some very crucial attitudes which later help them negotiate an identity that extends the cultural boundaries and explores new whole life patterns.

Key words: virtual communities, intercultural competences, intercultural identity.

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General Introduction

Living in the 21st century means living in a completely virtualized world where getting submerged in technologized virtual communities, imparting intercultural skills and developing intercultural identity are becoming the building blocks for a well-functioning tomorrow. This era of globalization requires of all individuals to become more globally connected with this borderless world where more demands on intercultural competences are to be exhibited and developed. One way to foster this culture-specific knowledge is to involve learners in wide array of challenges with English foreign speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds through the so called "virtual communities".

Virtual communities have come to be seen as a mainstay of online virtual exchange that tremendously develop the intercultural sensitivity in the learner ,they allow EFL learners to enter a new realm of virtual constructivist learning with a view that expands their repertoire to new cultural ventures and engage them to diverse communicative situations in a safe secure environment .Virtual communities as a learning tool are a deep journey of self discovery and reflection on diverse cultural behaviors, beliefs and concepts that nourishes the learners' understanding about the target culture and help him build a new whole identity .

Recent years witnessed transition change in the perception of intercultural identity. We are living in an era where showing a strict adherence to the cultural identity has become absurd and no longer help individuals build solid relationships with people from different cultural and social backgrounds and assimilating elements of multiple cultures has become a necessity for individuals to minimize cultural conflicts and cope in this new digital age .Virtual communities therefore, are considered as a firm means where the intercultural identity can be effectively leveraged and developed .

In order to be able to discover the extent to which virtual communities shape the individual's intercultural identity two research questions have been formulated:

1- How does learner's engagement in virtual communities affect the development of their intercultural competence?
2- To what extent do virtual communities contribute in shaping learner's intercultural identity?

Before we answer the following questions we first formed two hypotheses as predicted answers to our research question. The hypotheses we formed are as followed

1- By getting frequently in touch with foreign speakers we speculate that learners can develop the required knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow them to become effective intercultural speakers.

2- Virtual communities may contribute to a great extent to the development of learner's intercultural identity since they present a great opportunity for learners to encounter, explore and communicate new cultural adventures.

The purpose of this study is to unveil how individuals through the use of virtual communities can develop their intercultural competences and shape their intercultural identities by interacting with millions of people present online in social spaces like Facebook, Watssup, Instagram and other virtual spaces that provide important tools to boost performance of the intercultural identity.

The present study utilizes a mixed method where questionnaire, interview and experiment are used. This triangle method is considered as important research instrument that helps us reveal insights regarding the role of virtual communities in shaping learner's intercultural identity

In our research framework, the first chapter endeavors to set forth the theoretical background of the study. It first defines the concept of virtual community as a key factor that contributes to the development of intercultural competences as it provides a holistic definition of intercultural identity which is a key element of our research. The first chapter lays the groundwork by defining each concept and relates it to one another, in other word it attempts to relate the concept of virtual community to the development of intercultural skills and to the formation of the intercultural identity.

The second chapter entails setting out methods to be used in order to gain perspective of the research question as it attempts to give information about the method and the data collection tools used when undertaking this study.

The third chapter aims at drawing conclusion from the results gained and analyzed by the participants as it aims to uncover the participant's perceptions regarding the role virtual communities in shaping their intercultural identity.

Chapter One: Overview

1. Introduction

This chapter aims to highlight and provide an overview of the role of virtual online communities in shaping EFL learner's intercultural identity. We divided this chapter into three sections. The first section introduces the concept of virtual community as a social entity that supports cultural and social exchange. The second section discusses the development of "EFL" learner's intercultural competence through social interaction with people from socially and culturally diverse backgrounds and the final section explores how Virtual Online Communities can shape and define learner's intercultural identity.

1.1. Definition of a Virtual Community

In order to define a virtual community, it is of paramount importance to examine what constitutes virtual and what constitutes community. According to Handy (1995, p. 10) "the term virtual, precipitated by the advent of information technology, and specifically, the Internet, means without a physical place as a home "or we can simply refer to it as a space where physical attachment is of no importance. The term community however, seems to be more complex and fluid. A Community is the cornerstone of any society. But how does one define a community? One of the most cited and still widely used definition offered about community is Etzioni's (1996) he says that community:

> Refers to a group of people with two attributes: (1) a web of affect-laden relationships that often crisscross and reinforce one another rather than merely one-on-one or chain-like individual relationships) and (2) a commitment to a core of shared values, norms, and meanings, as well as a shared history and identity – in short, to a particularistic normative culture.

The term 'virtual community' is used in its broadest sense, to refer to a social multifaceted entity where people with similar interests gather to communicate, collaborate and exchange information through the Internet.

The concept was popularized and firstly coined by Howard Rheingold while writing about his experiences on the WELL "Whole Earth Lectronic Links" an experience done through the mediation of computer networks and bulletin boards in early 1990s.Rhingold

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(1993, p. 1) defines virtual communities as "a group of people who may or may not meet one another face to face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks" he continues to describe virtual communities as (1993, p. 5) " social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace". In other word, communities in cyberspace are social gatherings where individuals strive to satisfy their own needs to reach a particular goal.

1.1.1. Characteristics of a virtual community

A virtual community refers to a community of people who connect with each other for the sake of obtaining specific information through online networks, it is an efficient medium through which members can form mutual relationships and exchange personal information insights and opinions. A virtual community has several characteristics that distinguishes it from other types of communities. Whittaker,Issacs and O'Day (1997, p. 137) identified the core characteristics of Virtual Online Community as follows:

1. Members have some shared goal, interest, need, or activity that provides the primary reason for belonging to the community

2. Members engage in repeated active participation and there are often intense interactions, strong emotional ties and shared activities occurring between participants

 3. Members have access to shared resources and there are policies for determining access to those resources

 4. Reciprocity of information, support and services between members

5. Shared context

1.2 Definition of the Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is understood as a range of attitudes, knowledge, and skills applied in real life situations. This combination of elements enables one to understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations and backgrounds; Anticipate and react respectfully to culturally sensitive situations and establish and maintain intercultural relationships. Among several definitions and descriptions of intercultural competence, Byram's (1997, p. 70) is the most popular. He defines Intercultural competence

as "the ability to communicate and interact with people of a different culture using a foreign language" which explains that ICC is measured by how effectively one is capable of communicating with people from different affiliations based on one's qualities and competences. Similarly, Bennett (2004, p. 197) defined intercultural competence as "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts." Bennett through his definition emphasizes that knowledge alone is not sufficient to develop intercultural competence and that other affective factors such as: motivation, empathy and enthusiasm are to be considered in the process of gaining the intercultural communicative competence.

1.3 Byram's Components of Intercultural Competence

Byram incorporates 5 key components that define intercultural competence .the components of ICC are knowledge skills and attitudes. According to Byram (1997) attitudes are the very foundation of intercultural competence. He refers to them as:

Curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours…, a willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging.

This means that one should show positive attitudes towards language learning and towards people from other countries and communities in order to achieve individual and societal communication. Byram (1997, p. 8) argues that knowledge is another factor that increasingly promotes to the formation of person's intercultural competence. He explains that knowledge does not necessarily mean to have detailed facts about the target culture but rather on how its social communities function. Hence, we can say that knowledge of social groups and their practices is a key element in becoming interculturally competent. Finally, Byram added two skills which he considered crucial and are extremly dependent on the participants' knowledge and attitudes. First we have skills of interpreting and relating which Byram (1997) considers as:

The ability to interpret a document from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events to one's own. The second type of skills is that of discovering and

interacting, and they are defined as the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. (P. 98)

According to Byram (1997) intercultural competence cannot be successfully achieved merely through focusing on acquiring native-like fluency but rather it is a set of intertwined skills and attitudes that should learned and finehoned through the year.

1.4 The Importance of Intercultural Competence

The awareness that learning a foreign language is inevitably intertwined to learning about the target culture has been present in the field of foreign language learning since many years, in the past few decades there has been a growing consensus on the importance of teaching ICC in foreign language teaching as a field that enables learners to effectively interact with people from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds and provide them with so called components and dimension that allow them to interact with foreigners with a view that bridges differences, diffuses conflicts and embraces others.

In today's global world, acquiring intercultural skills offers a cross-cultural dimension for learners and provides a room for reflection and mutual exchange of relevant content which encourages critical thinking and the learner's capacity for self reflection. It appears crucial that ICC increases the individual's capacity to constructively deal with cultural diversities, this capacity cannot completely avoid and eliminate conflicts between individuals but it allows them to efficiently cope and positively handle cultural differences For this reason, intercultural competence not only fosters one's knowledge and understanding of people from diverse cultural backgrounds; but it also enhances one's self knowledge and understanding.

It is of paramount importance to emphasize that being interculturally competent has a privileged role in changing individuals perceptions within intercultural encounters, ICC is in fact perceived to be a lifelong developmental skill that is a result of fine-honed cultural awareness and consciousness.

1.5 Identities in a Modern World

In this electronic world ones' identity is more likely to be influenced and shaped by technology .Willem (2005, p. 2) notes that " modern science based technology has become a

prominent feature of our lives reshaping our identities and relationships", this highlights that our identities are strongly manipulated by the amount of time we spend socializing and communicating with people from different backgrounds. Shohat and Stam (1996, p. 145) also add that "The contemporary media shape identity" for these scholars each interaction with members from different social and cultural affiliations forms and molds the identities of those who get immersed in nowadays digital era, these social interactions change the perceptions of one's identity each time they go online; hence, their identities are more subjected to become affected and redefined by this new information communication technology era.

1.6 From Cultural to Intercultural Identity

As our world becomes more technologically connected, a person's identity is more likely to witness a shift from cultural to an intercultural one, this transition in fact not only makes individuals effective in communicating in the new culture but also help them handle complex intercultural encounters in a flexible mature manner.

1.6.1 Cultural identity

The concept of "(cultural) identity has received massive attention from scholars of communication and culture for the past few decades. Collier and Thomas (1988, p. 113) two founding theorists of cultural identity define it as an "identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has shared systems of symbols and meanings as well as norms/rules for conduct" Similarly. Jackson .R (1999), a pioneer of cultural contract theory, refers to cultural identity as

> The sense of belonging to a cultural community that reaffirms self or personhood for
> the individual and is created by: people their interactions, and the contexts in which
> they relate. Cultural identity is comprised of values, mores, meaning, and customs
> used to relate to the world; it continually defines what it was and what it is and what is
> becoming. (P. 10)

Jameson (2007, p. 199) also refers to cultural identity as "an individual's sense of self derived from formal or informal membership in groups that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions, and ways of life".

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These definitions offered by Jackson and Jameson both emphasize that cultural identity is always associated with the group of people you belong to. The individual's sense of belonging serves as crucial ingredient in forming the cultural identity and that cultural identity relates how a person operates with his culture and how these cultural relationships, in turn, impact his life.

1.6.2 Intercultural transformation

As a progressive stage of the in individual's intercultural communication Kim (2001) in her theory of communication and cross cultural adaptation introduced three interrelated aspects of adaptive changes that individuals undergo as they attempt to develop their intercultural competence: (1) functional fitness, (2) psychological health, (3) the emergence of intercultural identity.

Through repeated connections between people from the host culture, individuals can achieve an increased functional fitness. This facet of intercultural communication is an important aspect of the transformation since it can only be gained through different experiences one might have with people from different cultures therefore , we can resume that functional fitness is directly linked to how capable are individuals to respond to encounters maturely . Once these encounters are effectively managed then the psychological health will be established. Psychological well-being is a crucial aspect of the intercultural transformation since it helps individuals reduce their level of stress when dealing with strangers. Functional fitness and psychological health according to Kim (2001) are very indispensable elements that contribute to the emergence of a new identity, an identity that is neither completely attached to the cultural identity nor detached from it.

1.6.3. Intercultural identity

Intercultural identity has always occupied a central place in the scope of social sciences as it has been a subject of interest by many scholars particularly by Young Yun Kim, a professor and researcher in the department of communication. The term came into light with the emergence of her theory "Communication and cross cultural adaptation" in 1988. Kim (2001, p. 65) in her definition states that intercultural identity is considered as "the ability to grow beyond one's cultural relativism to adapting another intercultural character which is likely to be a result of one's personal capacities to function in a multicultural context" and that "just as cultural identity serves as a linkage between a person and a specific cultural

group , the emergent identity links a person to more than cultural group". As an extension of her definition she also states that" intercultural identity is not a fixed psychological state but a developmental continuum on which strangers travel. As they undergo adaptive changes in host communication competence (most notably, language competence), their internal conditions change from monoculture to an increasingly multifaceted character "

Through a series of intercultural encounters the individual's identity starts to shift from wholly mono-cultural to gradually intercultural this shift doesn't come without certain cost as Kim states because the individual's self will be torn between remaining faithful to the original identity and feeling the need to embrace another alternative one to fulfill the demands of today's global world.

Kim (1995, p. 348) argues that" intercultural identity is an identity that conjoins and integrates rather than separates and divides" this explains that showing complete cultural adherence to the original culture does no longer function in our era and that adapting intercultural identity does not separates one from his original identity but rather complements his cultural affiliations with the intercultural skills.

1.7. Intercultural Personhood

The concept of intercultural personhood was first developed by Young Yun Kim (1992) to describe a person whose original identity underwent fundamental transformations to reach the intercultural identity. Intercultural personhood according to Kim is an identity that extends beyond the limits of one's original cultural affiliations to embrace and tolerate other cultural differences among People Larry ,Richard ,Porter ,Edwin, Daniel and Catolyn (2014, p. 405) refers to the intercultural personhood as: "a way of life in which individual develops an identity and a definition of self that integrates rather than separates " the also added that" intercultural personhood projects a kind of human development that is open to growth a growth the perimeters of one's own cultural upbringing."

Similarly, Kim (1992) states that

Intercultural personhood represents one who has achieved an advanced level in the

process of becoming intercultural and whose internal attributes are not rigidly defined

but open to growth beyond the psychological parameters of any one culture. As such

the intercultural person manifests attitudes that are less ethnocentric and more

embracing of different cultural mindset with a clearer and more tolerant sensitivity and behavioral repertoire" (P. 253)

In this definition, Kim refers to intercultural personhood not as a special product of advanced stage in the intercultural communication process, but rather as a psychological mechanism which ultimate objective is to transform individuals' state from completely ethnocentric to ethnorelative. This transformation is only achieved through extensive prolonged intercultural experiences over time.

1.8 Foreign Language Learning Through Virtual Communities

Learning a foreign language needs special competences that go beyond merely memorizing new phrases and words. Good language learning environment is a crucial factor that should be taken into consideration in building sustainable learning outcomes. Virtual community is a good language learning environment that contributes immensely in stimulating language learning and providing sufficient exposure of the foreign language.

Virtual communities are social platforms where language learners can develop a constructivist learning atmosphere that extremely valorizes social participation and exchange between people who are perceived to be from different geographical locations. They offer golden opportunities for EFL learners to maximize their language learning through taking part of online conversations with foreign speakers. Virtual communities serve as a genuine tool that enable learners to authentically negotiate meaning and collaboratively investigate real-world issues which later allow learners to gain firsthand experience in navigating their learning experience.

Using technology and virtual communities for the purpose of developing language learning encourages knowledge sharing and create an environment where individuals from different geographical and cultural backgrounds, these virtual communities can be used as an efficient and an effective communication channel for problem-solving and information sharing

1.9 Acquiring Intercultural Competence Through Virtual Communities

The intercultural competence has increasingly become one the most important skill in this 21st Century and has increasingly been a subject of great interest by scholars,over this

time, many of them have identified a number of certain tools and variables that contribute to the development ICC. Virtual communities are one of those tools that pave the way for learners to acquire better intercultural skills.

Using virtual Communities as a medium to interact with foreign speakers for the sake of developing Intercultural competence appears to significantly increase individual's cultural awareness and intercultural formation between members. Aamy Ogan and Chad Lane (2011, p. 501) assert that "Virtual learning environments provide new and unique ways in which to convey cultural knowledge and develop intercultural communication skills" by this they mean that immersive virtual communities have a great impact on developing learner' culture related skills as they have a miraculous ability to shape his intercultural competences. Students with the ability to understand, navigate and work with technology will automatically develop a sense of embracing other cultural differences. Ozok .A and Zaphiris.P (2009, p. 553) argue that "digital students demonstrate a behavioral flexibility towards technology use that can be leveraged to encourage students to embrace cultures different from their own." In short, we can say that for them the more digitally literate you are the better interculturally competent you will be.

Virtual communities are powerful environments for knowledge transfer particularly for intercultural competences. The important role of the VCS lies in enabling learners to cope with intercultural interactions and precede full interaction with members from different areas of the world which is a key challenge to building a solid sustainable intercultural competence.

1.10 Constructivist Learning

In the past few decades, constructivist learning has become one the most adopted ideologies in the field of foreign language learning .This approach to teaching and learning is based on the very basic premise that learning is a result of ongoing efforts and mental construction processed by the learner .According to Piaget (1955) as cited in Jannison and Ogborn (1994, p. 55) learners needs to be proactive in the way they learn, that is learners should shape their knowledge in light of what they encounter in real life situation so that they construct a solid understanding of their surroundings .Constructivist approach offers learners instructional strategies that are congruent with self directed learning premises by viewing learner as an agent who is extremely urged to be actively involved in his learning process what makes the process of learning more likely to lead to deeper, and longer lasting academic achievements.

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1.11 social Constructivist Learning

Social Constructivist learning is a learning environment which describes the way in which students or learners construct their new understanding and knowledge during the process of social interaction with others. Vgotsky's theory (1978) stresses the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition, as he strongly emphasized that community plays a central role in the process of "making meaning". Vygostky believed that cognitive skills are embedded in social contexts and that social interaction is what determines learners' knowledge construction for him Learners first succeed in performing a new task when they perform it with the contribution of other member and after the social interaction comes the internalization of the task so that he will be able to perform it on his own in the coming experiences. In this way, social interaction is advocated to be a mediator of constructing new knowledge.

1.12 21st Century Literacy

Learning to use technology is an essential digital literacy skills for 21st century learners .It is undoubtedly the medium through which learners can co-construct meaningful knowledge across diverse multicultural and transitional contexts.

1.12.1 Digital literacy as a Component of Life Skills

The term digital literacy was introduced in 1997 by Paul Gilster in his book Digital Literacy .the author offers a wide range of definitions focusing on the ability to effectively understand and use information provided by the Internet. Paul (1997) states that

Digital literacy is the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computer. The concept of literacy goes beyond simply being able to read; it has always meant the ability to read with meaning, and to understand. It is the fundamental act of cognition. Digital literacy likewise extends the boundaries of definition. It is cognition of what you see on the computer screen when you use the networked medium. (P. 1)

Paul in his definition insists that digital literacy goes beyond merely reading and absorbing information from the internet, digital literacy is about critically understanding and

evaluating information using a range of electronic infrastructures. He also emphasizes, in the last sentence, the relevant usage of skills is crucial and that digital literacy is more than just a skill but rather an important lifelong learning tool.

In attempt to determine the concept of digital literacy, Jisc (2014) a UK funded body which provides information on ICT and digital tools defines the concept as:

Those capabilities which fit an individual for living, learning and working in a digital society.Digital literacy looks beyond functional IT skills to describe a richer set of digital behaviours practices and identities. What it means to be digitally literate changes over time and across contexts, so digital literacies are essentially a set of academic and professional situated practices supported by diverse and changing technologies.

Jisc's definition indicates that one key to becoming digitally literate requires one to have certain critical capacities and skills using digital technologies, which one develop according to the diverse changing of technologies.

Digital literacy is highly considered as one of those important competences that support self and lifelong learning .Thanks to its versatility, digital skills allow individuals to acquire fundamental key competences like: creativity, critical thinking and critical cultural awareness without which one will not manage to achieve successful virtual encounters in today's digital world.

1.12.2 The 21st Century Learner

In this technologically advanced world, learners are more required to adapt a variety of qualities and skills that go far beyond just mastering core subjects. From Millenials point of view mastering technology is often viewed as one the manifold competences that help individuals not only to cope with today's interconnected world but also to provide people with a large bulk of survival strategies that allow them to fit in today's era. Donald Tapscot (2008) refers to this category as "Net generation" who considers technology as an integral part of their lives and that "technology is like air" for them. According to many authors being

 "digital native", "tech savvy" or even "digital immigrant" for the late comer generation are one of the key features that characterize a 21ˢᵗ century learner , a learner who has grown up immersed in technology and whose way constructing knowledge is always shaped by the available technological tools around him.

Being a 21ˢᵗ century learner requires of all individuals to adopt key competences that allow them to survive and thrive in this 21ˢᵗ century Era. Martha .H Patton .A and Leonie .S (2011) identified some characteristics which learners need to develop in this 21st Era they assert that:

> The challenges of the 21st century place demands on young people to be good learners: they need to be resilient learners; to be able to make mistakes and learn from them; to be independent learners; to be willing to take ownership of their learning; to be flexible learners and ready to use different learning strategies to navigate and adapt to a rapidly changing world. (P. 1)

21ˢᵗ century learning paradigm offers a unique opportunity for learners to evolve and develop new learning methods that facilitate the delivery of new knowledge and information, learners for these authors are agents who are asked to improve, refine and maximize their learning level on a more ubiquitous scale and this can only be achieved through acquiring some basic learning features such as flexibility, autonomy and self direct learning.

1.13 Conclusion

The pervasive use of technology has remarkably alerted and changed many aspects of our social lives, this change include acquiring key transferable intercultural skills that help individuals negotiate multiple identities among which, intercultural identity. Being frequently

Present virtual communities allow individuals to build solid skills which are deemed crucial in the process of forming the intercultural identity for being always immersed in virtual communities enables learners to interact, communicate and create new social relationships that help them construct a new alternative identity rather than being strictly committed   to   the   original   one.

Chapter Two: Research Methodology

2.   Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present and discuss the methods that we used in order to achieve accurate results. This study will employ three different data collection methods, a questionnaire, an experiment and interview. First we begin by providing a rationale for using a mixed method research, followed by a description of how informants were selected and chosen. Finally we conclude our chapter by providing a through explanation of how experiment questionnaire and interview were conducted.

2.1 Rationale for Mixed Method Research

The mixed research method used in this research included three types of data collection tools: questionnaire, experiment and interview. Combining these three methods have provided with a holistic analytical framework to better understand the nature of virtual environments and their effective role in shaping learner's intercultural identity. The primary reason to utilize mixed method research was the belief that this method will provide a thorough analysis of the user behaviors in social environments regarding identity change and formation. Hall and Hall (2008, p. 124) explains the significant importance of using mixed method research they state that this method "provides a wide variety of data sources to assist in understanding complex phenomena as it offers a greater opportunity for presenting greater diversity of views. A mixed method research was the best method for the different views and perceptions regarding the effect of virtual communities on the participants' identity for it has reflected different voices and perspectives and it has given us a wide range of chances that have enabled the researcher to unearth deeper understanding of his topic.

2.2 Informants Selection

Informants selected for this research can best be considered as exemplary model who provide a flavor of nowadays digital environment mainly in virtual communities. The very first criteria that we have taken into account when selecting the informants was the time our informants used to spend in Virtual communities, informants were chosen based on how actively they were involved in virtual communities and how frequent registered member they were. Our informants were individuals who were to log on their virtual communities at least twice or thrice a week if not more, this have reinforced the credibility and increased the possibilities of validating or not validating our research hypotheses and expectations.

Chapter Two: Research Methodology

2.3 Informants

Our informants consisted of 15 active members who were involved in one or more virtual communities at the time of this study. Out of the 15 informants, 10 were female and 5 were male. The informants ranged in age from 21 to 23 years. They were master one and two students of language and communication at the university of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis Mostaganem. The amount of time they spent online varied from 7-6 hours daily. The majority of our informants were active members of social network platforms mainly Facebook.

2.4 Context

The virtual online environment was a primer place where our experiment took place, we have involved 15 participants from the university of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis Mostaganem to participate ,share and exchange learning experiences with people from culturally diverse backgrounds, the reason behind our choice was that our Algerian context has best corresponded to the parameters of our inquiry in other word , this context has been an ideal element that has helped us reach accurate results that correspond to our hypotheses

2.5 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection tools that we have used in this study were experiment, questionnaire and interview. These three significant instruments were meant to provide valuable data that might not otherwise be possible to gather regarding the power of virtual communities in shaping one's intercultural identity.

2.6 Questionnaire

Designing a questionnaire was a complex process for us as we needed to ensure that the questions asked will lead us to a particular state of knowledge. The questionnaire as a data collection tool was considered as an integral method in our research as it was an optimal method that has provided us with different kinds of interpretations. Questionnaire as a common research strategy has helped us evaluate the effectiveness of our topic by asking questions and collecting as many answers as possible. Moreover this method to conducting research was of paramount importance in our study since it could either approve or disapprove facts and results that has been initially drawn in our hypotheses. This study has utilized more open indeed questions and the main reason for this choice was to gather as much information as possible regarding the sample population so as to draw conclusions and

validate our expectations regarding the role of virtual communities in forming the learner's intercultural identity.

2.6.1 Criteria for selecting participants of the Questionnaire

 ≺. The participants of questionnaire had member of popular virtual environment like : online Forums, Facebook etc.

 ≺. It was necessary that participants understand the problem area of study , therefore participants had to be be students of the same area of research as the researcher

 ≺ The participants were required to have foreign friends in their social media pages so that they understand better the problem of the study and help the researcher reach more informative insights

2.6.2The Questions design

Questions 1 to 3

1.Age ………………………………….

2.Gender

A) male …………………….   b) Female…………………

3.Email ………………………………………………………………………………………..

Questions one to three were basic typical background questions which were considered important in conducting any research since they have allowed us to gain detailed descriptions and insights into the circumstances of each respondent. First of all it is beneficial to start the questionnaire with questions that are easy to answer for the respondents, secondly it is essential for us to know such basic information about the informants.

Question 4 to 5

In question 4 and 5 we have asked our participants questions to find out how attached our respondent were to their technological devices and how much time they usually spend in the Virtual community

Chapter Two: Research Methodology

4.I use computer (smart phone)

All the time ☐   sometimes ☐

 Occasionally ☐   Rarely   ☐

5.What type of virtual communities are you familiar with

Facebook ☐   blogs ☐

Skype   ☐   online forum discussion ☐

Others…………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………….

From the answers of questions 4 and 5 we were be able to explore the participants tendencies regarding the type of virtual community that they have found themselves more comfortable with as well as the amount of time they were likely to spend in these platforms . This could provide us with a holistic view about the role of VCs.

Question 6 to 8

6.Communicating with English language speakers is

Important ☐   very important ☐   not important ☐

7.I think that my linguistic competences are sufficient to communicate with them?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Important ☐   very important ☐

Justify   your   answer   ……………………………………………………………………
8.knowledge of another culture is

Important   very important   not important

Questions 6, 7 and 8 were designed to allow the respondent to state freely whether getting in touch with foreign speakers is important for them or not . In this questions the research has given the space for the respondents to justify the choice they have made . By asking them to explain, it was clear for us whether or not the question we have designed was lucid. Such a test was important as far as validity and credibility of the research are concerned. Through the sixth question we have tried to investigate whether the linguistic

competence of the language is sufficient for the respondent to build solid intercultural relations with the target speakers as we have asked the participants to justify also their choice. The last question aims to define the importance the word 'culture' has to the respondents. This question was designed to allow the researcher to understand the participants attitudes towards the concept of culture and whether or not this concept means something to them or not.

Question 9

Virtual communities can	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Foster intercultural skills				
Enhances individual's linguistic competence				
Provide individuals with authentic exposure to language				
Help individuals build an intercultural identity				
Encourage constructivist learning				

Through this question we have intended to investigate the important role virtual communities play in shaping the individual's knowledge.

Question from 10 to 12

9. According to your knowledge, what does the concept of intercultural identity mean?
………………………………………………………………………………………………..
10. Please specify to what extent can virtual communities provide situations that allow you shape your intercultural identity

☐ To a great extent

☐ To some extent

☐ A little

☐ No, it can not

11. In light of what you experienced, please explain how could virtual communities contribute to the development of your intercultural identity?

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These last three questions have aimed to unveil the reciprocal relationship between virtual communities and building intercultural identity.

2.7 Experiment

In all research areas, experiment is needed for explanatory and exploratory purposes to answer "Why" and "How" questions. Our experiment was a two weeks investigation with members who were actively involved in various virtual settlements. the experiment has involved 15 participants who were given structured topics to discuss with their foreign friends.

The experimental study we have conducted took place mainly on Facebook and Whatssup. The participants have discussed various topics including stereotypes, taboos and the different cultural habits and traditions of each culture mainly that of the target one. The participants were asked to feel free to discuss and explore the different stereotypes taboos and cultural habits of both cultures, this way we could better analyze and unveil the role virtual communities in identity formation.

2.7.1 Phases of the Experiment

Phase One

Our very early phase was collecting adecquate participants that had to be committed and willing to take part of our experiment as they had to be people who should be familiar with some key concepts of our research .These criteria solely meet with Master one and two students of Language and Communication stream.

Phase Two

In the second stage we have attempted to explain to our participants the aim behind this study and behind the research questions we aim to answer

Phase Three

In the third phase we have attempted diligently to find foreign speakers from diverse cultural background so that they contribute in our experiment .This process of finding

foreigners have ended up by opting for American , Indian and British native speakers to take part of the inquiry

Phase four

After the selection of the participants the process of the experiment has started to come to light. Exchanging point of view ideas and thoughts about the designed topics already structured has been a primer element that have characterized this phase ,this part of this phase has been of great importance since it has paved the way for us to analyze and validate our hypotheses.

Phase five

In the final phase we have collected as much screenshots as possible from the participants since the inquiry took place only in virtual environments through digital gadgets then we have analyzed each reaction and response made and given by the participants.

2.7.2 Obstacles Faced When Conducting the Experiment

When undertaking our experimental part, we have faced some very complex hurdles that have obstructed our journey of research. Lack of commitment was a primer obstacle that has hindered us from finishing our experiment on the scheduled period of time. A second problem was the unavailability of some participants, most of them have claimed to be either busy or uninterested to be part of the experiment and the third obstacle was the unavailability of some foreign speakers. This problem in particular has been of a great concern for us since we were obliged to find the right persons and schedule discussions according to their time zone.

2.8 Interview

To know and better understand the thought processes of our informants, it was necessary to conduct an interview. Through this data collection tool, informants could bring up topics and ideas that they were unable to discuss in the questionnaire. This method has allowed us to dig deeper in the informants perceptions towards virtual communities and its power to develop the intercultural identity it has also enabled us to understand more when answers of some participants in the questionnaire were ambiguous . Interviews for this study

were mainly conducted through an online medium due to the unavailability of the majority of the participants.

2.8.1 Criteria for selecting Interviewees:

∢. Interviewees were expected to show total readiness to participate in the interview.

∢. The interviewees had to be active members in any social media so that they give more meticulous answers about the phenomenon of virtual communities.

∢. The interviewees had to be knowledgeable enough regarding the English language, preferably they had to be students of English.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has portrayed the reasoning for the application of certain data collection methods as it has described other related issues that were encountered during the data collection process. Throughout this part we have attempted to illustrate and highlight the instruments context and participants that were integral part of our research with which we could gather more insightful results that will be presented in the third chapter.
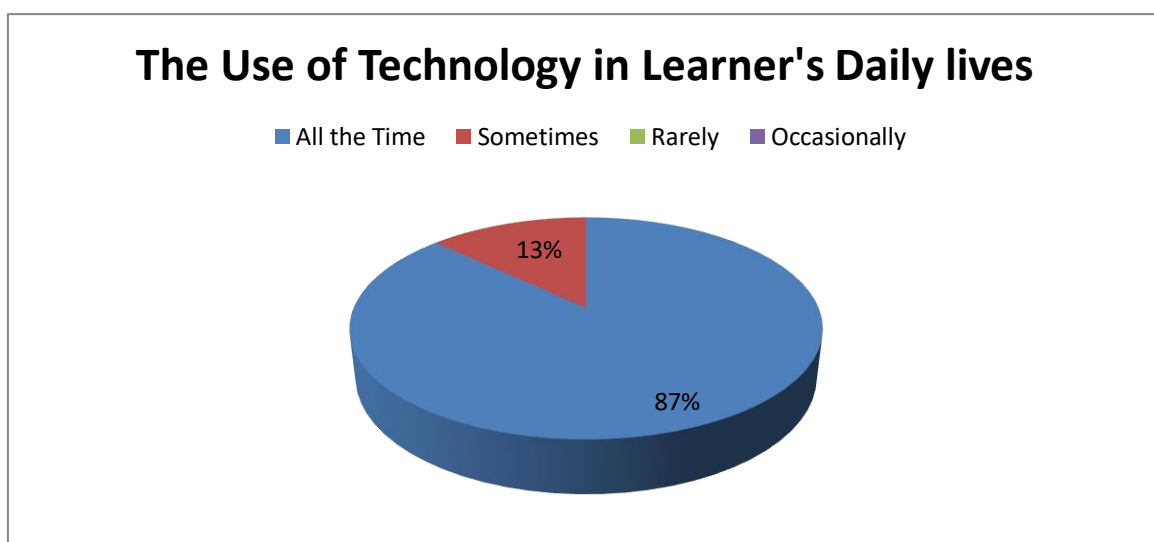
Chapter Three: Data Analysis and Results

3. Introduction

The main objective of our research is to inspect the use of virtual communities and their impact on shaping the learner's intercultural identity. All through we attempt to use a mixed method research to uncover the results of the investigation; hence, this section of the research gateway aims to report the finding extracted from the data collection tools. First we start by presenting the results obtained from the learner's questionnaire then to deeply analyzing the experiment and interview conducted with the participants and finally we conclude our chapter section by giving recommendations.

3.1 Analysis of the Questionnaire

The aim of using questionnaire in this study was to reveal whether virtual communities can take the form of communities that help individuals impart crucial intercultural skills and add value to the formation of their intercultural identity. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections. The first section sought to examine the importance of technology in the participants daily lives and how depended our participants were to it . The second section aims to reveal the importance of culture for them and whether or not this concept has a significant role to play in the process of their knowledge acquisition and the third sections aims to draw links between the use of virtual settlement and development of the intercultural identity.

3.1.1 Learners Answers on the Use of Technology in Their Daily Lives

The Use of Technology in Learner's Daily lives

■ All the Time ■ Sometimes ■ Rarely ■ Occasionally

13%

87%

Graph 1: The Use of Technology in Daily Life

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Graph 1 displays the amount of time our participants usually spend using Technology. This chart shows that 87% of our learners use either their computers or smart phones daily and 13% of them stated that they sometimes use these two technological tools.

3.1.2 Learner's Responses on the Type of Virtual Communities Our Participant Are More Familiar With
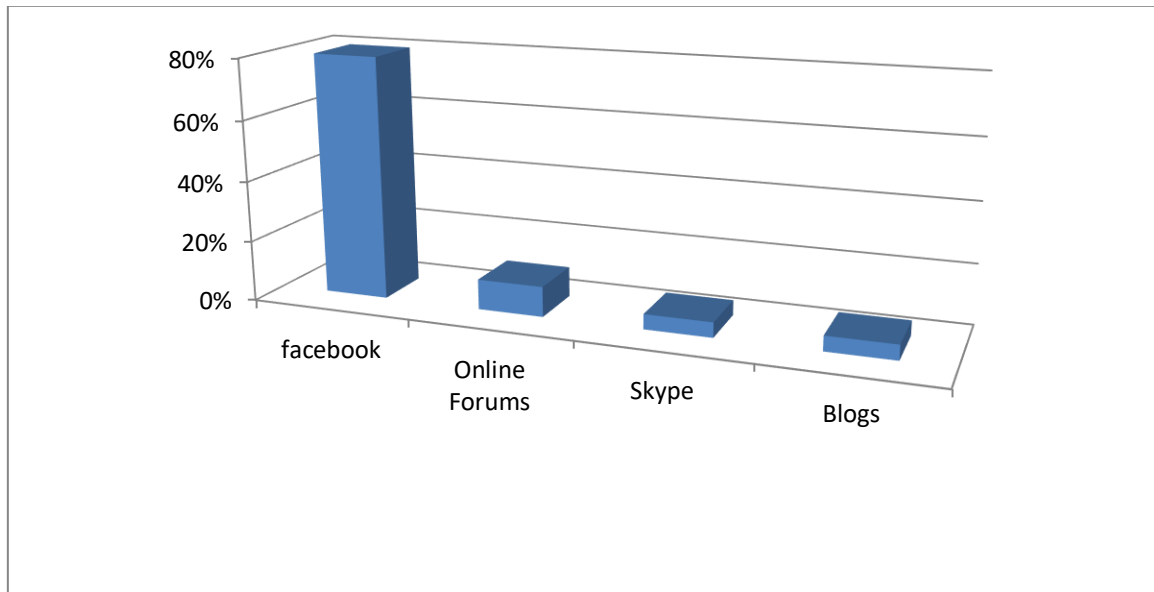
Graph 2: Type of Virtual Communities Our Participants Are More Familiar With

The above graph represents the widely used virtual platforms by learners. As expected, the results obtained from the graphs report that Facebook is the largest and widely used social media platform by learners for 80% of the participants access Facebook on a daily basis and consider it as the primary platforms that plays an advanced role in their lives.10% report that they use online forums and 5% claim that they are more acquainted with using skype more than facebook and forums where no one uses blogs as a virtual community. As an option to suggest other virtual platforms our participants chose Viber, Instagram and Whattsup as additional choice

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3.1.3 Learner's Responses on the Importance of Speaking with English Language Speaker through the Internet
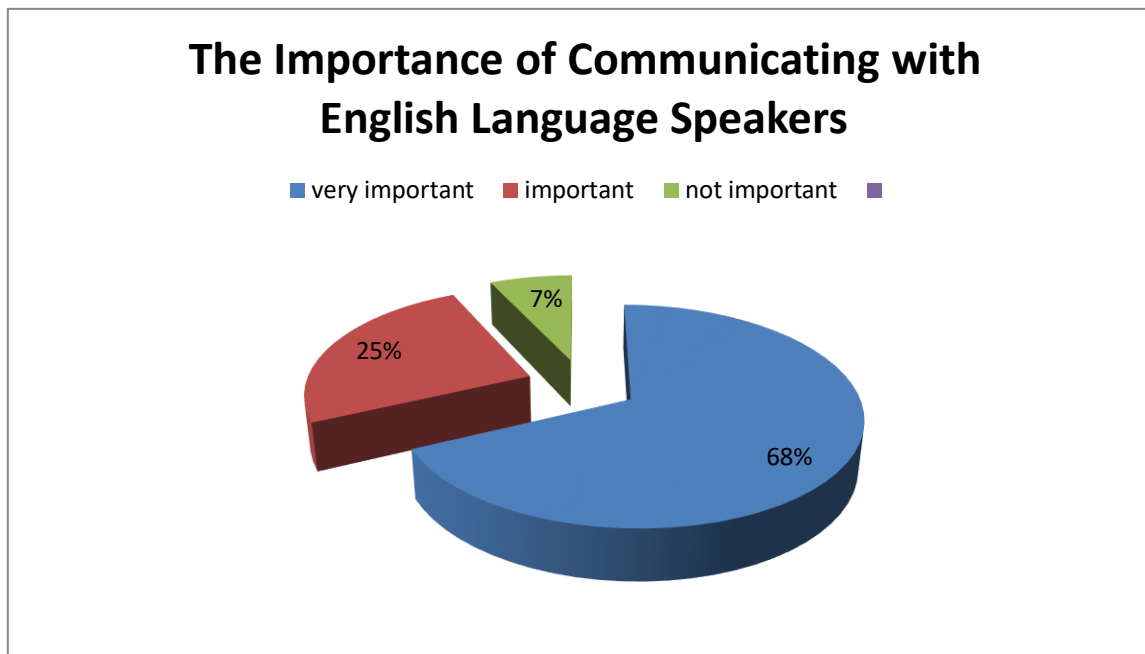
Graph 3: The Importance of Communication with English Language Speakers

Graph 3 serves to indicate the degree of importance communicating with English language speakers entails. 68% of the participants replied that getting in touch with English language speakers is of paramount importance, 25% claimed that is important whereas 7% replied that is not important at all.

3.1.4 Learner's Answers on Whether Their Linguistics Competences Are Enough to Communicate with English Language Speakers

	Numbers	Percentage
Yes	14	93.8%
No	1	6.3%

Table 1: Learner's Opinions on Competences Required for an Effective Communication with English Language Speakers.

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Almost all of our participants are satisfied with their level of language proficiency since 93.8% stated that their linguistic competence is sufficient for them to have an effective communication with foreign speakers.

3.1.5 Participant's Answers on the Importance of Knowing Other's Culture
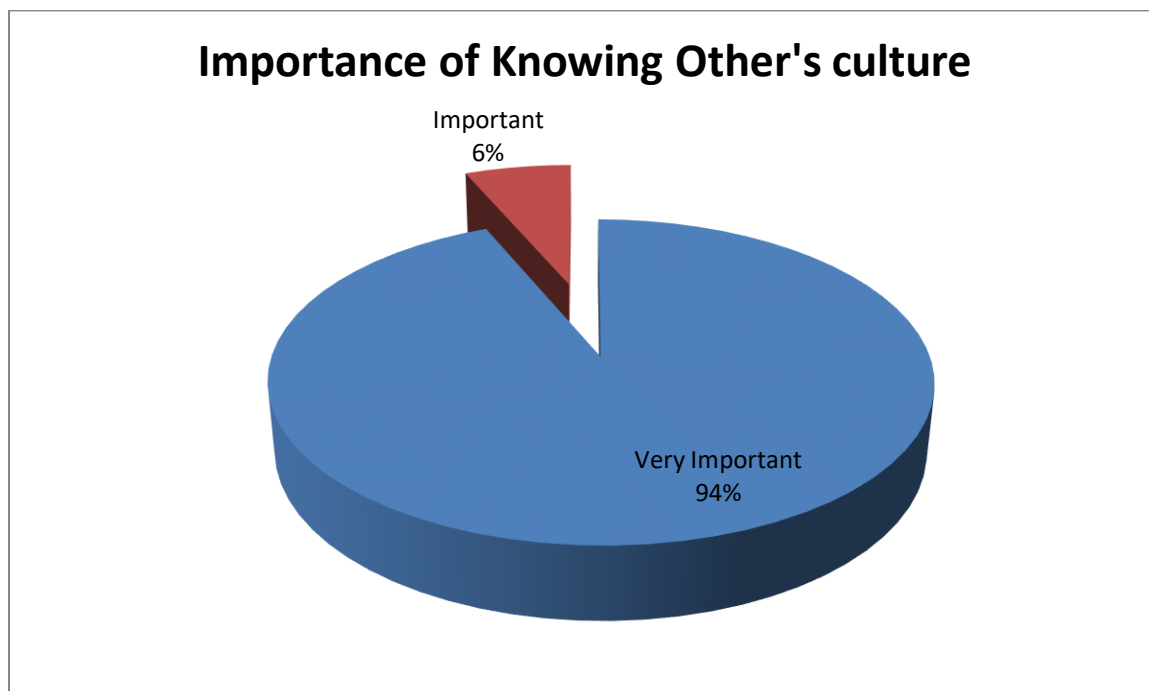
Graph 4: Importance of Culture

This chart represents the degree to which learning about other cultures is important. 94% responded that learning about other cultures help us to communicate with people and handle cultural clashed with them whereas 6% claimed that learning a language does not neccessirly correspond to knowing its cultural background.

3.1.6 Participant's Answers Regarding the Situations that Virtual Communities Can Provide to Develop Intercultural Competence

	Numbers	Percentage
To a great extent	**8**	**50 %**
To some extent	**7**	**43.8%**
A little	**1**	**6.3%**

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Table 2: The Extent to Which Virtual Communities Can Provide Situation to Develop Intercultural Competence

This questions attempted to examine the extent to which can virtual platforms provide situations that help learner's develop intercultural competence. Answers regarding this question were various for each participant had his own point of view according to the experiences he lived. One of the participants claimed that:

P1 "*Since virtual communities are used by different persons from different cultures and religions so it is an absolute fact that these cultures are going to be shared and exchanged similarly and consequently a bunch of people are going to adapt each other's knowledge and cultures.*"

P2 "*People from various cultural backgrounds use Facebook, twitter, blogs and message boards or forums to interact. In this way, everyone is being exposed to so many communicative opportunities to gain intercultural input, and thereby, build the intercultural competence.*"

P3 "*Many cultural aspects can be exposed by different people via fb pages blogs and forums including different practices such as humour, sarcasm and irony these aspect help us gain intercultural competence and therefore build the intercultural competence.*"

The majority of the responses provided showed positive views regarding the role virtual communities play in shaping their intercultural competence for they confirmed that getting in touch with foreign speakers though the internet and each one had his own experiences to narrate; however some of the participants explained that virtual communities may not be the only source that enhance our culture related knowledge and that other factors may intervene in shaping our intercultural competences.

P1 "*virtual communities are not the only source or encounter which can foster that knowledge , a case in point is reading literature , watching movies, etc*"

P2 "*Virtual communities are not the major means to build intercultural identity. they do contribute to be aware of certain things but do not entirely shape your identity culturally unless you embrace a reflective mind by connecting what you know with what you do not know, and here I refer to the other.*"

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3.1.7 Participants Perceptions Regarding the Concept of Intercultural Identity

Intercultural identity is often defined as something richer, broader, and more flexible than the original identity. Our participants confirmed again the complexity of defining this concept for 5 out 15 learners gave us the definition of intercultural competence rather than defining intercultural identity. One of the participants describes below what intercultural identity means to him:

P1 "*Intercultural identity epitomises diversity in perspectives and consideration of differences extant in cross-cultural instances. To have an intercultural identity signifies the possession of characteristics that reflect more than one culture. It also includes practicality founding one's skills of communicating with people from another culture in a manner that suggests that he or she belongs to it*".

Other participants also described intercultural identity and stated

P2 "*It refers to one's self-perception and how he/she views himself/herself. It is that feeling of belonging to different ethnic groups and not only one. It may be said that Intercultural identity is that identity which can adapt to different cultural situations and participate in intercultural dialogues* "

P3 "*I believe it is more than having one single culture in ones' own life, intercultural identity. It is an identity in which a person is able to deal with various identities equally as well as understanding, respecting them.*"

P4 "*It refers to the identity constructed upon the notion of tolerance towards other cultures and open-mindedness away from ethnocentrism and monoculturalism.*"

P5 "*Intercultural identity means knowing more than one's own culture and putting yourself in other people shoes.*"

3.1.8 Learners Defining Intercultural Identity as Intercultural Competence

P1 "*The ability of interacting with others from different cultures, with on obstacles.*"

P2 "The *ability to accept and adapt to others cultures without losing your own.*"

P3 "*It is a range of attitudes that allow you to communicate effectively with foreign speakers.*"

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Usually, people see identity as a very broad and difficult concept to define however the majority of our participants were fully aware of the meaning intercultural identity entails and gave different perceptions and views regarding the meaning of this concept.

3.2 Analysis of the Interview

After collecting data through a questionnaire and an experiment, interview was our third option to guarantee the credibility of our research .One of the main focuses of this interview is to examine the relationship between virtual communities and intercultural identities and to explore what role virtual communities play in the formation and development process of intercultural identity of the learner.

Since our interview was build upon investigating the interconnectedness between virtual communities and intercultural identity formation process, our questions laid greater stress on examining the concept of virtual communities and the situations that can happen within these online realms that help shape individual's intercultural identity.

3.2.1 Question 1

In your opinion, do virtual communities help you become more interculturally competent?

P1 "*Well, I think it can but as I have already stated is not the only source that can do that we have other means that can foster your intercultural competences like reading literature watching movies and travelling why not.*"

P2 "*Yes they do. Well personally, most of my development in this regard has been achieved on message board, maybe because of the asynchronous nature of communication, this beside the fact that topics are classified so if a topic is about cultural differences you will only have conversations about those topics plus the discussion never moves on or expires you can come back after a month and still ask people and share your knowledge.*"

P3 "*As I am so attached to my technological devices and all the time connected to them virtual communities helped me a lot to acquire key competences among them the intercultural competence.*"

3.2.2 Question2

In your opinion, are virtual communities a primary source that help you build your intercultural competence?

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P1 *"Yes to a certain extent , but not because they are the only source to that but because real life encounters are not possible for me to have it i.e they are primary source only because there is no alternative."*

P2 *"Yes they help me a lot building my intercultural identity."*

P3 *"Well, I would name them as a source but not primary."*

P4 *"Of course exchanging thoughts with people from different cultures help me build my intercultural identity."*

3.2.3 Question 3

In light of what you have experienced in the experiment, please explain to what extent could virtual communities contribute to the development of your intercultural identity?

P 1 *"Hum…..throughout my experience, I could discover that USA does have a culture because I have always had that stereotype that says American people are cultureless. This experience allowed me to move from a state where I believed that I should not adapt other's way of living into a state where I started reconsidering my very own culture, so I think it helped shaping it to a great extent."*

P 2 *"In my experience , I noticed that American people pay greater interest on their daily lives practices they take picture of each activity they practice this bothered at first but as the experiment was said to be a 2 weeks experiment I then understood that their daily lives activities and practices are sacred."*

3.3 Discussion of the results

This study represents a systematic effort to understand how the virtual community can be used as a functional tool that foster learner's intercultural identity and shape his intercultural identity as it also portrays the experience of virtual community members in interacting with other users from different geographical, social and cultural backgrounds.

Throughout our study we asked two research question which were answered through our data collections tools the first questions is :How does learners engagement in virtual communities help learners gain intercultural competences? As an answer to this questions different views have been extended and introduced among the many answers we got ,almost the majority of them claimed that Since virtual communities allow different people from

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different geographical , social and cultural backgrounds to connect with each other then automatically cultures are going to be shared and exchanged which lead individuals to adapt new cultural diversity and develop their sense of intercultural competence. The second question is: to what extent can virtual communities develop EFL learner's intercultural identity? Participants replied that virtual communities help them a lot in the process of their intercultural identity formation in a sense that they provide them with various situations and experiences that they shape their intercultural identities.

From the data analysis we could deduce that Intercultural identity and as any other type of identity exists in every single individual and can only be shaped switched according to the varying situations and circumstances the person experiences from getting exposed to different cultural encounters .Virtual communities therefore are a means that allow individual's switch this identity from the original cultural identity to the intercultural one.

Members reported that through interacting with people in virtual communities their intercultural identity can be continuously shaped and improved and this is due to the high dynamisms of such communities whereas for some, online spaces are additional places that help them reinforce their culture related knowledge when the classroom environment is not sufficient for them to acquire such basic competences.

Kim (2001) stated that intercultural identity is a developmental part of the three most central facets of intercultural transformation: functional fitness, psychological health and intercultural identity. In this respect, the intercultural identity is considered as an identity that develops over time through a series of experiences that the person's character undertakes, and this was the case, in the situation of our participants with virtual communities when they experienced several discussions with English language speakers through two week of experiment.

Through our analysis of the experiment we could not fully confirm that our learners have had that extremely intercultural mindset with the partners they were communicating with on the contrary, through the screenshots we could notice that there were some clashes between our participants and the foreign speakers; however, These misunderstandings and conflicts that we noticed, are in fact, integral part of the intercultural identity development process and they usually in the end lead to the psychological growth of the individual's intercultural identity.

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3.4 Conclusion

Based on the results that we came up with through questionnaire, interview and the experimental part, we could therefore conclude that our participants showed major positive views toward virtual communities as an efficient means that contribute to the formation process of their intercultural identities .Virtual communities are places where the self is entirely allowed to live without being strictly constrained by the original identity , this freedom increases   individual's sense of intercultural identity and makes him more interculturally open in handling cultural difference in other word, Online communities offer individuals unique opportunities through which they can face challenges and learn how to avoid them in coming experiences this way individuals will develop solid intercultural skills and grow into greater self integration beyond the parameters of one's own culture.

General Conclusion

The present inquiry was an attempt to explore the prominent role that virtual communities play and whether or not these virtual settlements can act as a functional and powerful tool in the process of adaptation and intercultural identity formation in the case of our participants. Throughout the study, our data managed to validate that online virtual environments has the potential to maximize learner's intercultural skills and allow one's identity to undergo gradual process of transformation from wholly mono-cultural to intercultural. Through our investigation we could explore the participant's views regarding the impact of virtual communities upon their intercultural identity and how these online platforms helped them create a new identity out of the many complex situations they encountered, situations where their identities became more flexible and no longer rigidly adhered to the original identity.

The first chapter started with providing a theoretical framework on which the study is based. In this section of research many complex terms and theories related to intercultural identity have been amply emphasized and deeply discussed. We discussed the role of virtual communities in facilitating the adaptation of the intercultural identity and how online situations can support individuals to become interculturally literate depending on the extent of their participation in virtual communities.

Because this study focuses on individual's experiences and thoughts regarding the use of virtual communities in shaping their intercultural identity, a mixed method was the most appropriate way to approach the topic.

Questionnaire was our first data collection instrument through which we could gain insights regarding the use of virtual environment in developing intercultural identity, then we conducted our experiment which serves instrumental interpretive tool that aimed at engaging 15 participants in online discussion with English foreign speakers to examine how these participants can develop ways of dealing with intercultural situations and respond appropriately and effectively to them. After the questionnaire and the experiment we conducted an interview. The idea of a research interview is to further explore the thoughts of our participants and dig deeper in the learning experience they went through during the experiment.

Through our study we discovered that our participants are more technology inclined learners who navigate new information and knowledge mostly over the internet .The majority if not all ,consider virtual spaces as a primary source through which they experience original intercultural encounters that enable them to effectively deal with cultural differences in the host milieu.

According to the results, virtual communities can be very helpful for learners in the adaptation process to a new culture in many ways, it can help them become more interculturally wise; however we cannot deny that this study revealed again the difficult nature of both identity and culture and how confusing was to meticulously define each concept correctly .

Finally, it is important to state that the data collected from this study did strengthen the view regarding the role of virtual spaces as a useful tool the develop learner's intercultural identity However, it is important to bear in mind that all the ideas and opinions expressed in this study are only views of a few individuals and something that works for them does not necessarily work for someone else.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Among other options that contribute to the development process of the intercultural identity are, telecollaborative projects, integrating intercultural competence in the programs and using ICT in the classroom.

Telecollaborative Projects

Among the various methods and techniques that can foster intercultural identity formation are telecollaborative projects. A telecollaborative is an educational venture, usually authored by a classroom teacher, that involves students and teachers in different locations using Internet tools such as email, blogs, web conferencing working on a specific project .Such connection that teachers provide to learners will undoubtedly develop their intercultural skills and shape their intercultural identities

Teaching Intercultural Competence in Schools

Incorporating the teaching of intercultural competences in programs is a key challenge to build a better community with sustainable cultural awareness. The cultural dimension has been thought of as one the most central pillars that sustains educational development and promote intercultural mindset among individuals in that it helps learners survive in today's global world. Teaching interculturality offers a cross-cultural dimension for educators and learners as it provides a room for reflection and mutual exchange of relevant content which encourages critical thinking and the learner's capacity for self reflection. For that integrating intercultural competence in the programs is a crucial element that helps construct learners with sustainable intercultural skills and form their intercultural identity.

Using ICT in the classroom

The opportunities for cultural contact provided by the internet and technology create an effective environment for the learners to acquire intercultural skills. The shift from learning a certain culture and learning how to utilize the knowledge you gained in appropriate context is crucial. For that we suggest that integrating ICTs in the classroom would be a helpful element that reinforces learner's perceptions toward intercultural skills.

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Appendices

Investigating the role of virtual communities in shaping learner's intercultural identity

Dear participants,

This questionnaire is part of my master dissertation which is aimed primarily at uncovering learner's perceptions towards virtual communities and their effect in shaping and developing their intercultural identity. Please be assured that all your responses will be kept entirely anonymous and used solely for the purpose of this thesis.

Part One (Personal Information)

Age ☐

Gender: Male ☐

Female ☐

Email:

……………………………………………………………………….......

Part Two (Unveiling the Role of Virtual Communities in Forming the Intercultural Identity)

I use computer or smart phone

All the time ☐   rarely ☐

Sometimes ☐   occasionally ☐

What type of virtual communities are you familiar with

Facebook ☐   Blogs ☐

Skype ☐   Online forum discussion ☐

Others………………………………………………………………………………

Communicating with English language speakers is

Important ☐   very important ☐   not important ☐

I think that my linguistic competences are sufficient to communicate with them?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Justify your answer

....

....

To have knowledge of another culture is

Important ☐   very important ☐   not important ☐

To identify the role of virtual communities, please specify to what extent you agree to the following statements

Virtual communities can:	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Foster intercultural skills				
Provide authentic exposure to language				
Enhance learners linguistic competences				
Encourage constructivist learning				
Help individual build an intercultural identity				

Please specify to what extent can virtual communities provide situations that allow you shape your intercultural competence?

☐ To a great extent

☐ To some extent

☐ A little

☐ No, it can not

Explain

Can you please explain how could virtual communities contribute to the development of your intercultural identity?

……………………………………………………………………………………………….
………………………………………………………………………….......................
....
....
....
....

Thank you for your contribution