Self-regulation and Self-identity Changes among Iranian EFL Learners

Anahita Estehmami (Corresponding author)

Master Graduate, Dept. of English Teaching, Imam Reza International University,

Mashhad, Iran.

Email: estehmamianahita@yahoo.com

Behzad Ghonsooly

Professor, English Language Department, Ferdowsi University,

Mashhad, Iran.

Email: ghonsooly@um.ac.ir

Nahid Royaei

PhD student, English Language Department, Ferdowsi University,

Mashhad, Iran.

Email: royaei_nhid@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the probable association between self-regulated strategies and self-identity changes among Iranian EFL learners. To achieve this purpose, 80 EFL students were selected according to convenience sampling from different language institutes in Mashhad. They were requested to complete the ' Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaires' (MSLQ) and 'Self-identity Changes' questionnaires. The findings yielded via correlation supported the theoretical expectation of a linkage between self-regulation and self-identity changes. The result revealed that there is a significant relationship between teachers' self-regulation high scores and self-confidence changes. Subsequent data from step-wise regression indicated that among sub-components of self-regulation, regulation, efficacy, and intrinsic value are the best predictors of learners' self-confidence changes. The conclusions and implications of the research are further discussed with reference to earlier finding.

Keywords: Self-regulation; self-identity changes; EFL learners; Efficacy; Intrinsic value

1. Introduction

For enriching the quality of teaching as well as learning and also tackling with many unpredictable problems encountering in educational context we need a toolbox of strategies along with body of awareness (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). As Larsen-Freeman (1997) proposed an interesting metaphor "chaos/complexity theory" for second language acquisition in which SLA is viewed as a dynamic, complex, and nonlinear process that even the minor things should be taken into consideration (Brown, 2007). In accordance with learning a second language, a second identity is achieved; so confronting new culture may result in changes

in the learner's perceptions of the world, self-identity, belief system, feeling, emotions, function, and communicating (Brown, 2007).

"Self-regulation (or self-regulated learning) refers to learning that results from students' self-generated thought and behaviors that are systematic oriented toward the attainment of their learning goals" (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2003. p.59). Self-regulated learning respects both personally directed forms learning like discovery learning, as well as social forms of learning such as seeking help from classmates, parents, teachers (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2007, cited in Zimmerman, 2008). According to Bandura, (1993) providing students with self-regulatory abilities lead to their educational achievement as well as lifelong learning (Young, 2005).

Since through learning process we represent who we are and what we are able to do, we can have an experience of identity (Wenger, 1998, p.215 cited in Pavlenko &Norton, 2007). Norton (1997, p.410), defines identity as to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future. Hall, Cheng, and Carlson, (2006), negotiated a usage-based view of language knowledge that viewed human learning via involvement in interaction and activities using cultural means and they found that concerning social and cultural status, individuals differ in their participation (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

The major purpose of the current study is to empirically explore the theorized association between self-regulation and self-identity changes among Iranian EFL learners. The researcher of the present study set out to investigate this association based on logical reasoning that based on sociocultural learning theory, cultural factors play a significant role in developing learners' self-regulation and this self-regulation is improved in a meaningful and collaborative environment (Butler, 2002). Self-regulation consists of three subcomponents: self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction (Schunk, 1996). *Self-observation* (italics in original) refers to intentional focus on individual behaviors encompassing determinants and wills, *self-judgment* (italics in original) includes the consistency between individuals present performance level and their goals and *self-reaction* (italics in original) refers to humans evaluation of their performance (Schunk, 1996) which is according to Paris and Winograd, (?) generally, people tend to evaluate their own behavior when they feel these behaviors are compatible with "their preferred or desired identity". So it was hypothesized that such a link exists between these constructs.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Self-Regulation

Self-regulation can be defined as self-generated thought, feeling, and actions for attaining academic goals (Zimmerman, 1998, p.73). Pintrich (1999), proposed a model of self-regulated learning consisting of three main classifications of strategies: (1) cognitive learning strategies, (2) self-regulatory strategies to control cognition, and (3) resource management strategies. Derived from the Weistein-Mayer' study (1986, cited in Pintrich, 1999) cognitive learning strategies can be manifested as rehearsal, elaboration, and organizational strategies; in that these strategies can be employed in a wide range of tasks including simple memory task (e.g. remembering words, lists) or to more difficult and complicated tasks involved comprehension of the information (e.g. understanding a piece of text or a lecture), (Pintrich, 1999).

Rehearsal strategies deal with the recitation of materials to be learned, highlighting text in a passive and unreflective way. Theses rehearsal strategies can assist learners to devote more attention and choose the significant knowledge from lists of items and keep information active in working memory (Pintrich, 1999). Elaboration strategies concern with summarizing the material to be learned, being conscious of analogies, interpreting the learned knowledge to someone else. Organizing strategies requiring deeper processing concern behaviors like finding the main idea of from text and employing various particular techniques for selecting and organizing the ideas in the materials.

Metacognitive and self-regulatory strategies include three general categories: planning, monitoring, and regulating (Pintrich, 1999). Planning refers to students' learning such as setting goals for studying, skimming a text before reading and performing a task assessment of the required problem. Monitoring of one's thinking and academic behavior is a critical factor of self-regulated learning. Weinstein and Meyers (1986, cited in Pintrich, 1999) imply that all metacognitive strategies have a function of monitoring of comprehension where learners check their understanding against some self-set goal. Determining a goal or some norms are an essential part of self-regulation (Pintrich, 1999). Monitoring activities consist of tracking the attention while reading a text or listening to a lecture, self-testing via applying questions about the text material to control for understanding. Regulation strategies are close to monitoring strategies and when learners set a goal, they monitor their learning based on their determined goals and these monitoring process provide the for regulation processes to provide behaviors consistent with pre-set goals.

Resource management strategies include techniques that learners employ and control their environment such as controlling their time, effort, study environment, teachers, peers by application of help-seeking strategies (Pintrich, 1999). Attributional feedback is influential in self-regulated learning since it enhances both learners' motivation, their sense of efficacy, and achievement (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2003). When learners set a goal, they find a sense of efficacy which encourages them to devote more time and effort to achieve their goals (Schunk, 1996).

Drawing some ideas of mainstream psychology, (Boekaerts, 1997; Boekaerts & Niemirierta, 2000) design a model of self-regulation in which learners confront two priorities in the educational context (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). The first priority leading to increase resources is obtaining growth goals such as learners understand their knowledge fully or add cognitive or social skills. The second priority is when students sustain emotional well-being within reasonable bounds; this situation occurs when students protect their ego. Boekaerts postulates that learners attempt to modulate these two priorities (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). Boekaerts proposes two parallel procedures that derived from classroom self-regulation; Top-down regulation and bottom-up regulation (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). Motivational factors like personal interest, values, and expected satisfaction encourage mastery attempts in top-down self-regulation. Winne (1995) determined some features of self-regulated learners in the form of the cognition, emotion, and action of top-down SR (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005, p.203).

When they begin to study, self-regulated learners set goals for extending knowledge and sustaining motivation. They are aware of what they know, what they believe, and what the differences between these kinds of information imply for approaching tasks. They have a grasp of their motivation, are aware of their affect, and plan how to manage the interplay between these as they engage with the task (Winne, 1995, p.173).

When environmental factors stimulate self-regulation process, the bottom up self-regulation happens. In this type of self-regulation, the role of feedback is significant (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005).

2.2 Identity

Traditionally, identity like other individual factors (e.g. learning styles, motivation, etc…) were respected fixed, unitary and decontextualized; however; recently, following poststructuralist theories of identity, it is viewed as dynamic, context-based, and context-producing specially historical as well as cultural studies (Norton & Toohey, 2011). In a similar vein, Gao, Li, & Li (2002) with respect to social constructivist, claim that identity is regarded as socially constructed and socially situated. In this perspective, while context 'pushes back' on individuals' claims to identity, individuals also try to conceive identities that they wish to claim (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Drawing Bakhtin' s emphasis on the role of position in conversation, a great deal of identity and language learning researchers focus on how the positioning among involved participants is formed by context (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Poststructuralists regard identity as contingent, shifting and context-dependent and that while identities or positions are often given by social structures or ascribed by others, they can also be negotiated by agents who wish to position themselves (Norton & Toohey,2011). Menard-Warwick views customary educational curriculum and tasks and powerful social discourse, limit learners' options for ideal identities (Norton & Toohey, 2011). She recommended teachers should have an awareness of students' positioning in learning discourse and design facilitating students' attempts to remove disempowering tendencies of the linguistic practices of their new culture. The term investment proposed by Norton (1995) derived from the idea of Bourdieu's cultural capital (Norton, 2010) when she recognized that high levels of motivation does not essentially lead to good learning. Unlike preceding studies on motivation which focused on humans' personality as internalized, ahistorical, and fixed construct, investment gives prominence on learners' changeable identity which shift from across time and space and regenerated in social interaction (Norton, 2010). If learners invest in a second language, they realize that this investment contributes to enriching their cultural capital which as the result aids to reassessment of learners' sense of themselves. (Mckinney & Norton, 2007).

A conceptualization of subjectivity as multiple, non-unitary, and dynamic for identity pave the way this fact that people are not fixed in a particular situation and this idea contribute to offer pedagogical practices to have the potency and the capacity of transformation in providing language learners more powerful positions compared with insider or outsider the classroom (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

"We humans are capable, through our imagination, of perceiving a connection with people beyond our immediate social networks. Our orientation toward such imagined communities might have just as much impact on our current identities and learning as direct involvement in communities of our everyday life" (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, p. 670).   In essence, learning English as a second (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) is not considered as a matter of code switching (Lin, 2009). The interpretive principles and paradigms in learners' natal culture may have an effect on many dimensions of learner's second language learning Hinkel, 1999, cited in Lin, 2009). By the aid of learner's home culture, learners can confidently understand pragmatic implication of the target language and develop in target language communicative activities (Lin, 2009).

To the researcher's best knowledge no study has been done to date explore the probable relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-regulated strategies and their self-identity changes. Furthermore, this study investigates the positive predictor/s of EFL learners' self- identity changes among sub-capabilities of self-regulated strategies. Therefore the current study aims to answering:

1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' motivational and self-regulated strategies and self-identity changes?
2. Among the sub-components of motivational and self-regulated strategies, which of them are the best predictors of learners' self-identity changes?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

A total of 80 EFL students (N=80) took part in this research. The majority of these participants graduated in different branches of English, 28 had MA or student of MA in English teaching, 18 had BA in English literature, 23 had MA or student of MA in English translation. 11 of these participants were from engineering and applied sciences. 34 students were male and 46 ones were female. All of them were from different language schools in Mashhad, a city in the northeastern in Iran. Their age varied from 23 to 49 years old. Their English background varied from 2 years to 9 years.

3.2 Instrumentation

3.2.1 Motivated strategies for Learning Questionnaire

To measure students' self-regulated strategy use, they were given the (Motivated strategies for learning questionnaire) MSLQ designed by Pintrich and DeGroot, (1999). The test compromised 44 items which is classified into two main categories; the motivated beliefs include three subcategories: self-efficacy (9items), intrinsic value (9items), and test anxiety (4items). The self-regulated learning strategies encompass two subcategories: cognitive strategy use (13 items) and self-regulation (9items). In the current study the Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .75.

3.2.2 Self-Identity Changes

For evaluating learner's self-identity changes, self-identity changes questionnaires designing by Gao et al., (2007) was applied. This form includes 24 items which has 6 types. Each type has 4 items. Gao, et al. (2007), provide a definition for each category as follows:

- *Self-confidence change:* Change in the perception of one's own competence.
- *Additive change*: The coexistence of two sets of languages, behavioral patterns, and values, each specified for particular contexts.
- *Subtractive change*: the native language and native cultural identity are replaced by the target language and target cultural identity.
- *Productive change*: the command of the target language and that of the native language positively reinforce each other.
- *Split change*: The struggle between the languages and cultures gives rise to identity conflict.

- *Zero change:* Absence of self-identity change.

In order to suit the Iranian EFL context, the word Chines changed to Persian. The full score of each type of self-identity change was 20, with 12 as the critical value between changed and unchanged states (Gao et al., 2007). In the current study the Cronbach's alph for this instrument is .70.

3.3 Procedure

The process of data collection was carried out for three weeks. The participants were given the MSLQ and Self-identity Changes Questionnaire to fill in for 30 minutes. In order to give participants confidentiality, they were asked not to write their names so the two questionnaires were coded numerically. For analyzing the data, the researcher applied SPSS 20 program. To explore whether there was any correlation between learners' self-regulated learning strategies and self-identity changes, Pearson-product moment correlation was employed. At the end by applying step-wise regression the researcher found out which subcomponent of motivation and self-regulated strategies are best predictors of self-confidence changes.

4. Results

In order to determine whether a relationship exists between participants' self-regulated learning strategies and self-identity changes, a bivariate correlation was performed, the result of which revealed a significant positive correlation between the self-regulatory strategies and self-confidence changes.

Table 1. Correlations

		Self-Regulation Total	Self-Confidence Changes
Self-regulation total	Pearson Correlation	1	.565[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	80	80
Self-confidence changes	Pearson Correlation	.565[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To further analysis the data, the researcher conducted the regression analysis with a Stepwise method. The results revealed that which subscales of MSLQ are best predictors of learners' self-confidence changes. The best predictor was regulation that can predict learners' self-confidence changes (Adjusted R^2=.23, p<0.5), indicating that students who scored high in regulatory strategies benefit more confidence in their foreign language learning compared with students with low scores in the regulatory strategies. The second positive predictor is efficacy which account about 0.21(p<0.5) of the variance in self-confidence changes. Finally, the third best predictor is intrinsic value, accounting about 0.16(p<0.5) of the variance in self-confidence changes.

Table 2. Stepwise regression analysis predicting self-confidence changes

	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Beta
Regulation	.494	.244	.234	1066328	.494
Efficacy	.475	.225	.215	1068365	.475
Intrinsic Value	.418	.175	.166	1073769	.418

5. Discussion

Consistent with the hypothesized relationship between students' self-regulation and their self-identity changes, the results of researcher's findings demonstrated a significant correlation between students' motivational and self-regulated strategies and their self-confidence changes. In other words, the learners who apply more motivational and self-regulated strategies in EFL learning situations are more confident than learners whose self-regulatory strategies are low. This is in line with theoretical pervious study; "Self-regulated learners approach educational tasks with confidence, diligence, and resourcefulness. Perhaps more importantly, self-regulated learners are aware when they know a fact or possess a skill and when they do not. Unlike their passive classmates self-regulated students proactively seek out information when needed and take the necessary steps to master it" (Zimmerman, 1990, p.4). Both self-regulation and identity share ideas with goal orientation theory; self-regulation and goal orientation (Pintrich, 2004), identity and goal orientation (Kaplan & Flum, 2010). Goal orientations can be regarded as rather comprehensive social-cognitive mental frames that lead people in interpreting situations, processing information, confronting tasks, and coping with challenges (Kaplan & Flum, 2010).

Based on of Vygotsky's study of individual's regulation process, Postholm (2011) refers to the social community as the departure point of individuals' regulations, a process that gradually will be internalized by the learners, thus becoming one of the individuals' skills. This signifies the important role of social context on self-instruction (Postholm, 2011). From another perspective, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as "knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions, as exemplified by educational or technical qualifications" (1991, p.14, cited in Menard-Warwick, 2005) reflects cultural equipment as important factor in forming EFL learners' interaction (Menard-Warwick, 2005). Social constructivist theory of self-regulation is based on cognitive development (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2003). Developmental theories shed light on the concept that human beings have an intrinsic motivation to learn, discover, understand, and control their environment (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2003). People put meaning on their conceptions of their prior experiences (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2003). Interpreted in the educational context, it seems sensible that learners devoting more motivation in challenging task and can control and monitor their required task are make sense of their learning process better than their classmates who lack motivation and manipulation of their task. Within psychology-based research, "the idea that students' self-beliefs play a central role in their academic success is so widely accepted that self-constructs are a regular staple in studies of academic

motivation" (Pajares & Schunk, 2005, p.95, cited in Mercer, 2011). In a similar vein, Marcia (1980) refers to identity as internal self-constructed, dynamic organization of people's capabilities, beliefs, and people history. The better developed this construct the more cognizant people seem to be of their own uniqueness and similarities to other people and of their own strength and breakdowns in perceiving the world (Marcia, 1980). The less developed this construct, the more confused the people about their qualities from others and depend more on external sources for assessing themselves (Marcia, 1980).

The researcher's second question aimed at exploring statistically which components of EFL learners' self-regulation are the best predictors of self-confidence changes. The results indicated that regulation, efficacy, and intrinsic values are the positive predictors of self-confidence changes respectively. It is in line with pervious theoretical study. Capara et al. (2008) states some prominent features of self-efficacious students: when confronting with school tasks, self-efficacious students are confident in managing task difficulty, dealing with difficulties as challenges, devote more effort to accomplish their academic task which contribute to their learning improvement. In another study, Shunck (1990) pointed to self-evaluation as a sub process of self-regulation and mentioned that when learners set a goal and judge about their goal process, they find enrichment in their efficacy as a consequence goal achievement encourage students to set new challenging goals. This self-efficacy is under the influence of learners' abilities, prior experience, beliefs about learning, instruction, and the social context (Schunk, 1990).

Regarding intrinsic value as the third positive predictor, achievement goal orientation and identity formation styles tend to share some concerns within the scope of identity and educational motivation as well as their probable associations (Kaplan & Flum, 2010; Both components focus on the importance of mental frames that guide adolescents in making sense of their experiences, world as well as in performance (Kaplan & Flum, 2010). These concepts depend on self-development and self-enhancement motives that encourage people to manage and adapt to the physical and social environment (Erikson, 1968; White, 1959, cited in Kaplan & Flum, 2010).

6. Conclusion

Regarding Kramsch's words (2001) "learning another language is not like learning math or word processing. Especially in adolescence, it is likely to involve not only the linguistic and cognitive capacities of the learner as an individual, but her social, historical, emotional, cultural, moral sense of self as a subject" (p.12, cited in Lin,2009), Lin (2009) suggests L2 curriculum should respect students' mother cultural identities and should also encourage learners to be aware of their own cultural values and beliefs since through these appreciation and respect toward their home culture, the learners can develop their second or foreign language learning achievement more successfully (Pierce,1995, cited in Lin, 2009). Teachers with high level of efficacy are aware of applying the appropriate strategies at the apt situations which improves both teachers and learners' autonomy (Randi, 2004), particularly these days of post method era that according to Kumaravdivelu (2006) "the post method learner is an autonomous learner. Because language learning is largely an autonomous activity, promoting learner's autonomy is vitally important".

The current study has some limitations: first the role of gender, English learning background, learners' degree are not taken into consideration statistically. So it is recommended that a further research including

these factors will be needed. Second, all the participants' mother language was Persian. In the researcher's view point it is interesting to carry out a research and see how other learners of other languages make sense of the culture of the target language and whether the second or foreign language learning influence on the same ways as Iranian learners or not.

7. References

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Questions applied in the current study

The following scales and items represent the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) that was used in this study to measure students' motivational beliefs and self-regulated learning. The numbers next to the items reflect the item's actual position on the questionnaire. Items marked (*R) were reflected before scale construction. There were 56 items on the questionnaire, but only 44 were used in this study to form the following five scales" (Pintrich & De Groot, 1999, p. 40).

Motivational Beliefs

A. Self-Efficacy

2. Compared with other students in this class I expect to do well.

7. I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course.

10. I expect to do very well in this class.

11. Compared with others in this class, I think I'm a good student.

13. I am sure I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned for this class.

15.1 think I will receive a good grade in this class.

20. My study skills are excellent compared with others in this class.

22. Compared with other students in this class I think I know a great deal about the subject.

23. I know that I will be able to learn the material for this class.

B. Intrinsic Value

1. I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things.

5. It is important for me to learn what is being taught in this class.

6. I like what I am learning in this class.

9. I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in other classes.

12. I often choose paper topics I will learn something from even if they require more work.

17. Even when I do poorly on a test I try to learn from my mistakes.

18. I think that what I am learning in this class is useful for me to know.

21. I think that what we are learning in this class is interesting.

25. Understanding this subject is important to me.

C. Test Anxiety

3. I am so nervous during a test that I cannot remember facts I have learned.

14. I have an uneasy, upset feeling when I take a test.

24. I worry a great deal about tests.

27. When I take a test I think about how poorly I am doing.

Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

D. Cognitive Strategy Use

30. When I study for a test, I try to put together the information from class and from the book.

31. When I do homework, I try to remember what the teacher said in class so I can answer the questions correctly.

33. It is hard for me to decide what the main ideas are in what I read. (*R)

35. When I study I put important ideas into my own words.

36. I always try to understand what the teacher is saying even if it doesn't make sense.

38. When I study for a test I try to remember as many facts as I can.

39. When studying, I copy my notes over to help me remember material.

42. When I study for a test I practice saying the important facts over and over to myself.

44. I use what I have learned from old homework assignments and the textbook to do new assignments.

47. When I am studying a topic, I try to make everything fit together.

53. When I read material for this class, I say the words over and over to myself to help me remember.

54. I outline the chapters in my book to help me study.

56. When reading I try to connect the things I am reading about with what I already know.

E. Self-Regulation

32. I ask myself questions to make sure I know the material I have been studying.

34. When work is hard I either give up or study only the easy parts. (*R)

40. I work on practice exercises and answer end of chapter questions even when I don't have to.

41. Even when study materials are dull and uninteresting, I keep working until I finish.

43. Before I begin studying I think about the things I will need to do to learn.

45. I often find that I have been reading for class but don't know what it is all about. (*R)

46. I find that when the teacher is talking I think of other things and don't really listen to what is being said. (*R)

52. When I'm reading I stop once in a while and go over what I have read.

55. I work hard to get a good grade even when I don't like a class.

Appendix 2. Questions used in this study

Self-identity changes questionnaire, Gao et al., 2007, as mentioned in 3.2.2, the word Chines changed to Persian

Self-confidence change

1-I feel terrific when I find my command of English is better than that of others.

2-English learning has a great impact on my self-confidence.

3-When I have difficulties in English learning, I begin to doubt my own ability.

4-Whenever I have overcome a difficulty in English learning, I can feel my own growth.

Additive change

1-I can easily switch between Persian and English according to situational needs.

2-I am relatively confident when speaking in English, and relatively modest when speaking in Persian.

3-I prefer to listen to the original English dialogue when watching English movies, just as I enjoy the original Persian dialogue when watching Persian movies.

4-I have an English name in addition to my Persian name. They are used in different situations.

Subtractive change

1-With the improvement of my English proficiency, I feel my Persian is becoming less idiomatic.

2-After learning English, I feel my behaviors have become somewhat Westernized.

3-After learning English, I have developed repugnance to some Persian conventions.

4-After learning English, I have begun to reject some traditional Persian ideas.

Productive change

1-With the improvement of my English proficiency, I can better appreciate the subtleties in Persian.

2-After learning English, I find myself more sensitive to changes in the outside world.

3-After learning English, I have become more understanding and can better communicate with others.

4-As my ability of appreciating English literature and arts increases, I have become more interested in Persian literature and arts.

Split change

1-I feel weird when my speech in Iranian is subconsciously mixed with English words.

2-I feel a painful split when I switch between English and Persian behavioral patterns.

3-When parting with foreign friends, I'm frequently confused as to whether I should shake hands or hug and kiss.

4-After learning English, I'm often caught between contradicting values and beliefs.

Zero change

1-No matter which language is used for expression, I remain to be myself.

2-I have not felt any change in myself after learning English.

3-An instrument is an instrument. It is impossible for me to change into another person after learning a language.

4-For me, it is meaningless to talk about personal changes after learning English.

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