

# Narrative Identity and Self-Perception: A Phenomenological Study on the Use of English Language of BSED Students in Koronadal City, Philippines

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## Abstract

English is both an academic subject and a way for Filipino students to define themselves and evaluate their self-worth. Numerous Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) students use English for purposes beyond language acquisition. This usage affects students' self-esteem, school participation, and others' opinions. English competence has been studied extensively, but its effects on students' identity and self-perception have not. This study examines how BSED students develop their narrative identity and self-perception through the learning of English at a regional college in the Philippines, and how students' perception of themselves as English users influences their learning and performance in school. In many classrooms in the Philippines, English is more than just a subject; it shapes your identity, builds your confidence, and affects how much you value yourself. While much research highlights language skills, few studies explore how English learning affects how students define who they are. This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach, gathering data from seven BSED students through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method. Results show that identity and confidence develop gradually, shaped by early exposure, peer and teacher feedback, cultural beliefs, and school tasks. Some students felt empowered by public speaking or recognition, while others struggled with fear and self-doubt. Identity was found to be ongoing and shaped by social settings. The research suggests that English education should support not just skill-building, but also self-belief. Teachers and training institutions should use reflective, supportive practices to help students grow. The findings also point to the need for more research on language identity in diverse learning environments.

**Keywords:** narrative identity, self-perception, English learning, BSED students, phenomenology



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## INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, English is an official language and a standard for academic communication. How well students learn and use the language affects both individuals and society. English serves not just a school language; it is also a cultural and academic tool that supports social growth, intellectual skill, and global connection. It is important to explore how students shape their self-image through language, especially since their language identity influences their access, confidence, and sense of belonging. Narrative identity refers to the internalized and

evolving story that individuals construct about themselves, integrating their past experiences, values, beliefs, and aspirations (Murphy, 2019). It shows how people see their identities over time and in different social and cultural settings. On the other hand, self-perception refers to the image or understanding we have of ourselves – our personality, traits, emotions, capabilities, and behaviors (Jones, 2025). People's self-perception is how they see themselves at certain times or during certain activities while narrative identity focuses on how people make meaning over time. Language affects depictions of students and academic

success. Thus, this study looks at how these two ideas work together in the Philippines' English learning and use.

Moreover, Jasim (2021) highlighted that learning a second language as a professional, and speaking it fluently, provides various advantages and opportunities for human brain development, career promotion, and social activities. Increasingly, people recognize that language acquisition transcends mere grammar and vocabulary; it is perceived as a social and psychological process that alters how students view themselves within their environments. In numerous cultures, English holds significant symbolic value. Furthermore, Furuton et al.'s (2023) study showed how language represents personal identity. It depends on social and educational backgrounds. It emphasizes that daily language usage reflects cultural pride and evolves dynamically over time. Thus, this study will also investigate how students' native language use may impact their challenges in learning a foreign language.

Over the past twenty years, scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of identity and self-perception in language learning. Research indicates that English learners may alter their perceptions of their social roles, capabilities, and potential. For instance, Hauber-Özer et al. (2024) discovered that English learners contemplated their values and future goals as they transitioned into teaching roles. Gandana and Nissa (2021) and Husna and Nasrullah (2023) also revealed that students frequently discussed how learning English enhanced their personal growth, fostering greater self-awareness, motivation, and openness to diverse cultures.

However, certain studies present more nuanced or critical perspectives. Hossain (2023) and Wong (2023) explored how internal conflicts, social tensions, and cultural pressures complicated learners' journeys toward self-discovery. Rather than achieving straightforward empowerment, many participants grappled with balancing fidelity to their culture and adhering to the conventions of

English. Yuan (2023) and Peña (2022) conducted research that demonstrated how institutional and sociopolitical factors impacted learner identities, sometimes in constraining rather than liberating ways. Despite these significant findings, research gaps remain in this area. Most previous studies on narrative identity and self-perception have concentrated on institutions that are foreign, urban, or elite.

There is limited information regarding how these structures manifest in regional schools in the Philippines, particularly for Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) students aspiring to become teachers. Students must navigate their historical context while striving for excellence in English and managing various cultural and linguistic demands. Few phenomenological studies examine how these learners interpret their language journeys through their experiences. Thus, this study addresses these gaps by exploring how BSED students at a college in Koronadal City construct their narrative identity and self-image through their experiences with learning English. It also investigates how personal, academic, and social factors influence their confidence and language usage.

There were two primary reasons why this research is important. First, it enhances the students' understanding of how identity develops in less-researched or underrepresented areas. Second, it illustrates how the language learning experiences of BSED students impact their academic growth, as well as their personal and professional lives. The study emphasizes the human aspect of language education and its influence on both present identities and future classroom practices by giving voice to the learners' stories.

**Theoretical Lens.** This study was anchored in McAdams' (2001) Narrative Identity Theory and Bem's (1972) Self-Perception Theory. A 2001 book by Dan P. McAdams presented Narrative Identity Theory. Individuals create their identity through a changing personal story. This story connects the past, present, and future to demonstrate self-continuity and purpose. It

means telling a narrative about our identity, origins, and how we view ourselves and the future. In 1972, Daryl Bem proposed the idea of self-perception theory. Monitoring behaviors helps people understand their thoughts and feelings, especially without internal cues. Behavior aids individuals in understanding their own and others' attitudes.

**Research Questions.** This phenomenological study explores how Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) students build their narrative identity and self-concept as they learn English. It seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do BSED students shape their narrative identities through their hands-on learning of English?
2. How does the way BSED students perceive themselves affect their confidence and ability to use English?
3. What personal, academic, and social factors affect how BSED students see themselves and their narrative identities when they use English?

## LITERATURES

The concept of narrative identity is widely used in psychology, therapy, and cultural studies, where identity creation is considered essential to behavior, meaning-making, and self-awareness. Self-perception, intricately linked to this idea, centers on individuals' assessments and evaluations of their actions, abilities, and responsibilities, informed by their experiences (Bem, 1972).

**Studies Supporting Narrative Identity Transformation through English Learning.** English does more than help students communicate; for many learners, it changes how they see themselves. This group of studies supports the idea that learning English alters a person's narrative identity, which encompasses how they tell their life story, define who they are, and make sense of their personal growth. These studies indicate that learning English can transform one's values, self-perception, and

goals.

Hauber-Özer et al. (2024) explored how international graduate students formed teacher identities while learning English in a sociolinguistics course. Through reflective narratives, participants reexamined their beliefs, values, and self-perceptions as language users and future educators. The course prompted learners to reflect on how English influenced their life journeys and professional aspirations. Additionally, Gandana and Nissa (2021) demonstrated how exposure to English caused a shift in self-identity through autobiographical narratives. Their participant described feeling fascinated by English, superior when using it, and more self-aware. Over time, English became a means of exploring a hybrid cultural identity and helped the participant redefine herself, not as someone losing her culture but as someone growing through it.

Likewise, Husna and Nasrullah (2023) found that English learning compelled learners to reframe their identities. International students reflected on how their personal traits, religion, nationality, and even displacement shaped who they were becoming. For these students, English was not just a tool for communication; it became a lens for processing change and reimagining themselves in new environments. Moreover, Sharif and Channa (2022) studied female English learners in rural Pakistan. These women invested time, effort, and emotion into learning English despite cultural constraints. Their stories revealed how learning English influenced their views of themselves as capable, ambitious, and goal-oriented individuals. They were continually reshaping their identities in the face of gender norms and limited access.

In another study, Annisa et al. (2023) explored how rural vocational high school students connected their identities with their motivation to learn English. Many learners associated English with future success, seeing it as a way to create a different version of themselves. While some hesitated initially, exposure to the language sparked thoughts about who they

might become. Furthermore, Abdusyukur (2022) showed that Indonesian postgraduate students underwent a complicated journey of identity change. Initially, they felt disconnected from English, but later developed new identities shaped by their efforts to succeed. The process was not always easy; it involved doubts, effort, and persistence, and it altered how they viewed themselves over time.

These studies point to one clear pattern – learning English can deeply influence how students understand and narrate their identities. It pushes them to reflect, adapt, and sometimes reinvent themselves. English becomes a mirror and guide for human growth through school activities, life changes, and cultural upheavals. These students learn English and develop new identities, regardless of their circumstances.

Studies Offering Contradictory or Critical Perspectives on Narrative Identity and English Learning. While many studies suggest that English learning shape identity, others take a more critical or nuanced view. These studies question whether identity shifts are always empowering or even consistent. Some reveal that language learning may bring discomfort, conflict, or even resistance. These works do not entirely ignore the link between language and identity; instead, they focus on how challenging and unclear things can be.

Hossain (2023) examined how native Bangladeshi students learn English and how their desire to study is connected to their feelings of identity and power. While the study confirmed that learners reshaped their identities through English, it also revealed that this shift was accompanied by internal conflict. Students felt pressured to adopt imagined identities that did not always align with their cultural backgrounds. Their investment in English often felt like a trade-off between belonging and assimilation. Similarly, Wong (2023) shared her personal experiences as a language teacher in Hong Kong. Her study showed that language identity is not fixed. Instead, it changes over time, roles, and social settings. As she moved between speaking

Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, her self-image also evolved. The study raised a critical point: language learning does not always result in a stable identity and can make identity more fluid and uncertain.

In the same vein, Peña (2022) examined how English teachers help students develop what he called "critical identities." These identities involve not just learning a language but also questioning the power dynamics in the classroom. Some teachers used English to challenge prevailing narratives, while others grappled with their contradictions. The study demonstrated that forming an identity in English typically entails conflict, resistance, and the need for critical thinking. Moreover, Gutiérrez (2022) examined the responses of pre-service teachers in Colombia to an English lesson delivered from a critical, multicultural standpoint. The training helped individuals feel positive about themselves, but it also made things harder. Some individuals had a challenging time reconciling their personal beliefs with school rules. The evidence suggests that learning a language may lead to deep questions, not just about oneself but also about the systems that shape it.

Furthermore, Yuan (2023) studied Chinese English majors and how their learning experiences shaped identity across different levels– national, institutional, and personal. While students gained symbolic capital through English, they also felt the weight of external expectations. Educational structures and global English norms not only shaped their language identities but also exerted pressure. In some cases, English did not liberate; it constrained. These critical studies highlight that identity development through English learning is not always linear or positive. Learners may embrace, resist, or question the identities that accompany English. Social class, institutional norms, and political forces often play a role. These works demonstrate that language does not merely shape identity but rather negotiates it, sometimes with tension. Such evidence adds depth to the research conversation, reminding us that learners are not just shaped by English; they also reshape themselves in complex ways.

Studies Indicating Limited or Unclear Links Between English Learning and Narrative Identity. Not all research shows a strong or clear link between learning English and identity transformation. Some studies offer mixed or inconclusive results. Others reveal that language learning affects practical skills more than personal identity. This section reviews studies where the connection between English learning and narrative identity is either weak, unclear, or shaped by other factors. Jin et al. (2023) conducted a systematic literature review on the use of narrative analysis in language education. While identity construction appeared in many studies, the results were not strong enough to confirm a consistent pattern. The researchers noted the limited use of large sample sizes and inconsistent definitions of identity across the studies. Therefore, the findings suggested potential but not solid evidence linking English learning to identity development. Similarly, De Fina et al. (2021) examined how narratives shape migrant identities. Their work provided insightful examples, but it focused more on discourse and perception than on clear identity change caused by English learning. Although they acknowledged that language use reflects identity, the extent to which English directly transforms narrative identity remained uncertain.

Pre (2021) compared English learning in West Africa and the U.S. He noted that language learning may lead to identity shifts, but these changes were often linked to cultural immersion rather than language alone. This makes it hard to determine whether identity transformation comes from learning English or adapting to new environments. Moreover, Jiang (2023) explored how ambiguity tolerance, reading strategies, and anxiety affect English learning. His study found that these psychological factors strongly impact language performance. However, it did not confirm any significant changes in learners' identity. The results suggest that internal learner traits play a larger role than identity shifts during language acquisition. Likewise, Alotaibi and Abahussain (2024) studied Saudi "English as a Foreign Language" (EFL) students and found

high motivation and cultural appreciation for English. Even so, most participants had not developed a foreign language identity. English helped with academic and career goals, but it had little effect on how learners perceived themselves beyond the classroom.

Furthermore, Lopes and Ortenzi (2022) worked with younger students to explore whether English played a role in their present or imagined identities. Although students became more aware of English's value, the change in self-perception was limited. The researchers concluded that more time and deeper engagement were needed before identity changes could fully emerge. Together, these studies remind us that identity transformation is not automatic or guaranteed. Learning English may improve skills or offer opportunities, but not all learners internalize it deeply enough to reshape their narrative identity. Often, identity remains stable, or shifts occur for reasons unrelated to language use. These findings highlight the complexity of identity and suggest that other forces, such as context, culture, or personal goals, may matter more than the language itself.

The literature review identified three main perspectives on English learning and narrative identity. Several studies show that learning English significantly improves identity, self-awareness, confidence, and personal goals (Hauber-Özer et al., 2024; Husna & Nasrullah, 2023). However, several researchers argue that identity shift may include internal disputes and cultural tensions rather than merely positive changes (Hossain, 2023; Wong, 2023). Additionally, when the link between English learning and identity is ambiguous or confined, cultural immersion or individual circumstances may have a greater impact (Pre, 2021; Jiang, 2023). This study shows the complexity of identity formation via language learning, admitting different outcomes and the need for greater research into contextual influences and personal differences.

In summary, the literatures presented shed light on how English learning affects narrative identity, although the findings vary. Much

research supports language-based identity transformation, while other research highlights its complexity, conflicts, and ambiguities. This research helps to understand diverse experiences and identity formation. Future research should examine complex psychological and socio-cultural circumstances, language acquisition progression, and how learners manage competing identities. This study may guide instructors and students to create more thoughtful and supportive language-learning settings.

## METHODS

**Research Design.** The study employed phenomenological techniques to evaluate the lived experiences and viewpoints of BSED students in the City of Koronadal, South Cotabato. Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that tries to comprehend a phenomenon from the perspective of individuals who have encountered it. Anchoring on this viewpoint, the researchers of this study focused on individuals' ideas by investigating their experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions with participants. This approach stresses subjective experiences, perceptions, and interpretations, seeking to uncover the essence of a phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014). Therefore, phenomenology was chosen as the research framework for this study, as it allowed for a complete evaluation of the BSED students' experiences and opinions.

**Participants and Setting.** This study was conducted at a private college in Koronadal City, South Cotabato, Philippines, a first-class city in Mindanao's SOCCSKSARGEN region. Koronadal, or Marbel, is a regional administrative center and a developing education, trade, and cultural center. Many schools in the city cater to students from South Cotabato and its surrounding areas. These students originate from various places and communicate in different languages. English serves as the primary language of instruction in the top schools within the city. Such an environment makes it a wonderful place for research on

learning English and building identity. The selected institution provides a Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) degree with a complete English curriculum.

The school where the participants were outsourced was chosen due to its accessibility, appropriate curriculum, and the students' English and multilingual abilities. The research involved seven (7) students currently enrolled in a BSED program at a college. The researchers employed purposive sampling to choose students who had the relevant traits. To be included, participants had to (1) be enrolled in the BSED program; (2) be at least in their second year or beyond to confirm that they were getting enough academic English instruction; (3) be willing to talk about and contemplate their language learning experiences; and (4) be able to clearly explain their thoughts and experiences during interviews or focus group discussions. The following were not included in the participants' list: First-year students, who had not much experience with the English curriculum or with the school in general; non-BSED students; and, students with clear communication problems that may make it difficult to gather data. The above requirements ensured that the selected participants were able to articulate how learning English influences narrative identity and shapes self-perception.

**Instrumentation.** A semi-structured interview guide questionnaire, with personal in-depth interviews, were employed as techniques to identify the lived experiences of BSED students specifically on how they construct their narrative identity and self-perception through English language learning. The instrument was checked and validated by the adviser, including an expert researcher, to confirm its clarity, reliability, and congruence with the research goals and objectives. A set of ten (10) developmental questions in each of three central research questions was given. One-on-one interviews were conducted, and a focus group discussion followed. Interviewees' responses were recorded verbatim through the use of a voice recorder ensuring that no data was changed or altered.



**Data Collection.** Before collecting any data, the researcher ensured that all permissions were secured. Approval from the school's president was granted, and the adviser was consulted to ensure the process followed ethical standards. Participants were informed of their rights and clearly stated that their names would not appear in any part of the report. Seven BSED students shared their personal stories about learning English. All of them signed a consent form after learning about the study's purpose and their roles in it. The students willingly participated in the study after being informed of the study's aims, procedures, and ethical precautions. The recruiting method includes personal invitations to eligible students who meet the inclusion standards. Students who expressed interest were asked to contact the researcher for screening and scheduling. Once everything was in place, data collection began. Everything was retrieved soon after each interview session to ensure that no important details were lost.

**Data Analysis.** Interview data was thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis helps uncover and understand qualitative data themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method involves identifying key themes and patterns in a dataset. Applying the above procedure, the researchers carefully examined the interview transcripts to uncover common themes and patterns among the research participants.

**Ethical Consideration.** Before the interview, the researchers acquired a written consent from the participants. The researchers guaranteed the confidentiality of all students who participated in this research. This is to safeguard the people who are taking part in the research (Baez, 2002). Hence, no identities were divulged. Participants were told that they can leave anytime if they feel uncomfortable with the questions especially if their emotions would affect their mental health. Collected information, particularly identifiable recordings like voice data, were securely stored and accessible only to authorized individuals. After the study's completion, all identifiable data were securely disposed to further ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality.

## RESULTS

This section presents the key findings elicited from the interviews and focus group discussions with BSED students. The themes below reflect common patterns, personal insights, and social influences that shaped the participants' identity as English learners.

Constructing Narrative Identity through English Learning. The students' stories show that their identity as English learners takes shape over time, built on early exposure, informal influences, and personal struggles. From this analysis, three key themes emerged: early learning at home and school, media as an informal language teacher, and struggles that build confidence.

*Relevant Theme 1: Early Learning at Home and School.* Early home and school experiences have a significant impact on how students learn language and form their identities. Home settings that expose students to active language through books and conversation, as well as formal educational settings that promote learning and peer interaction, help students develop excitement, confidence, and strong narrative identities based on their command of language. In a study of language anxiety among Filipino undergraduate education students, they said that being positively exposed to English early on, either through family or structured school settings, made them more confident and less anxious about using it (Jugo, 2020). In the same way, research on Filipino youth found that early social experiences shape their identities and affect how they learn as adults (Banzon-Librojo, 2023). Many students began learning English at home or during early schooling. Supportive environments gave them a foundation and shaped their initial identity as language learners. The following are statements from some participants.

Participant 1 (P1) said, "My first teacher at home was my mother." She explained that her mother taught her how to count and recognize animals in English, which made her familiar with the language early on.

Similarly, P4 recalled, “My earliest memory was in grade 6... our teacher made us read in front,” and she said this gave her confidence and helped her take English more seriously.

Likewise, P6 shared that “learning English was not difficult at first since it's my second language at home,” and this early exposure helped her develop a wide vocabulary.

These statements show that when students are introduced to English in a familiar and supportive environment, they are more likely to feel comfortable and confident as they continue learning. These early experiences laid a strong foundation for positive language identity.

*Relevant Theme 2: Media as an Informal Language Teacher.* The results are similar to the importance of cartoons, music, and other media in the participants' stories. Entertainment media played a central role in shaping language habits and enjoyment. Aside from school and home, many students credited entertainment media with helping them learn and enjoy English. Some students watched movies on TV to gain additional knowledge in speaking and writing the English language. The role of media and informal learning as tools for language development is significant. Zekri's study (2020) on Algerian EFL students shows how media and social factors can shape students' identities and confer them power. Other participants shared their ideas.

P3 said, “Watching cartoon movies helped me,” and she added that her turning point came when she understood the full lyrics of Katy Perry's “Roar” for the first time.

P5 also shared, “I always watch movies,” and although he did not understand the language at first, he learned through subtitles as time went by.

Likewise, P1 explained that “cartoons helped me gain more knowledge,” and she emphasized that they made her more aware of using English words in everyday life.

Together, their responses show that the media played a major role by making English feel less like a subject and more like something they could use naturally and enjoy.

*Relevant Theme 3: Struggles That Build Confidence.* Learning a new language is challenging, especially for students who do not speak English as their first language in school and social settings. This theme explores how personal problems, emotional roadblocks, and everyday disappointments can help students move forward by learning the English language. Recent research found that learning problems, such as anxiety and self-doubt, were common. For example, Filipino students' fear of speaking in front of others and negative self-image were found to make it much harder for them to learn English. However, overcoming these problems led to personal growth and improved fluency (Jugo, 2020). Furthermore, narrative inquiries in Indonesia show how personal struggles and classroom dynamics affected the long-term development of EFL learners' identities (Sudarwati et al., 2022). While early exposure and media were helpful, many students admitted that learning English came with emotional challenges and setbacks, but these struggles helped them grow. By constantly exposing themselves on social media, they gain more confidence, as shared by some participants.

P2 said, “Learning English was hard. I wanted to cry,” but she also said that with the help of her teachers, classmates, and herself, she kept going and learned little by little.

P6 reflected that “I experienced culture shock in college,” and although she had a wide vocabulary, she was shy about expressing her emotions in English, which affected her confidence.

P7 emphasized, “To be confident, you must study and apply it,” and he explained that understanding the proper structure of English helped him become more fluent and sure of himself.



These stories reveal that confidence does not come easily, but it builds slowly through effort, support, and learning from mistakes.

BSED students construct their English learner identities through a mix of early experiences, media exposure, and overcoming personal challenges. Their journey is not just about learning grammar or vocabulary; it's about gradually becoming someone who sees themselves as capable, through consistent effort and support from their surroundings.

Self-Perception Influences Confidence and English Proficiency. The students consider themselves to be English learners, which affects how willing they are to use the language. Self-perception includes how they rate their abilities, how they deal with problems, and what they think they can do. For many students, this internal view either gives them the guts to speak up or stops them from trying. The way they talk about their experiences reveals the complex link between mindset, confidence, and improvement. From this, three major themes were identified: self-perception as a barrier or motivator, moments that shape confidence, and responses to mistakes and judgment.

*Relevant Theme 1: Self-efficacy as a Barrier or Motivator.* This theme stresses how English self-efficacy may help or hinder learning. Certain people with strong self-efficacy are more driven, persistent, and risk-taking while utilizing the language. Some people struggle with confidence, causing concern, avoidance, and self-doubt. Positive or negative self-efficacy affects students' English engagement and progress. Students who believed they were better at English were much more confident when using it. This finding supports the idea that how students perceive themselves can either help or hinder their progress (Amro & Maniam, 2019). Students often described their self-perception as the first hurdle or first help in learning English. Some saw themselves as weak or unprepared, especially because they did not use English at home. Others recognized their growth over time and began to believe that progress was possible, especially with consistent practice and support.

P1 shared that "I used to feel insecure about how I spoke because I wasn't fluent, yet I saw my mindset grow over time as I gained confidence and competence through learning."

Likewise, P2 explained that "my confidence was low around professionals because I feared judgment, yet I motivated myself to keep learning until I reached my goals."

P7 said, "I doubted my ability to learn English since we didn't use it at home, but my confidence improved through my college experience, where I encountered new words and began using them in real sentences."

These students show that the way they see themselves can limit their ability or unlock it, depending on how they respond to those doubts. It's either to hold them back or help them rise.

*Relevant Theme 2: Moments with Self-reflection that Shape Confidence.* Self-reflection helps students comprehend their language abilities and improves their English communication skills, which may affect their narrative identities. Positive reflections boost self-confidence and motivation, whereas negative reflections first cause doubt but motivate students to improve. These reflective examples show that self-awareness is essential for language learners' growth and identity building since linguistic confidence is dynamic and unique.

This theme shows how quiet moments of self-reflection significantly shaped students' confidence in using English. Self-reflection allowed students to track personal growth in a way that classroom performance alone could not fully capture. Jaucian (2023) demonstrated that the flexible use of English by Filipino vloggers on digital platforms like YouTube allowed them to express their identities. These public displays of language skills contributed to their development of more confident English-speaking identities (Jaucian, 2023). In addition, Liu and Sun (2021) noted that within the broader Southeast Asian context, students in Asian English settings experienced "critical moments" where their skills were tested in public or

professional environments. Successfully navigating these situations often led to an increase in their confidence. While self-perception plays a steady role, many students described clear moments that had a strong impact, either boosting their confidence or making them question themselves. These moments often happened in school, through activities that forced them to speak, or through reactions from others.

P3 said that “Confidence grew when I gave a speech in front of many students as part of the student government, and my teachers gave me positive feedback, which made me feel proud.”

Similarly, P6 explained that “I used to avoid speaking in public, yet through repeated practice in debates and hosting events, I became more comfortable using English.

In contrast, P5 shared that “I often avoided answering questions in class because I’m worried that my grammar was wrong, and this fear caused my anxiety and hesitation.”

Data reveals that reflection shapes students’ self-image, which in turn shapes their English confidence. Students who believe in themselves based on their actual experiences and deliberate considerations are more inclined to speak out, take risks, and improve. Self-reflection based on fear or failure might impede growth. Students’ self-image impacts English proficiency and confidence. This makes it a key internal factor in language learning.

*Relevant Theme 3: Self-Improvement as Responses to Mistakes and Judgment.* Mistakes and judgment may be used to enhance language abilities through self-improvement. Students learned from setbacks to reflect and grow. This strategy boosts resilience, proactivity, and self-confidence. Some were discouraged by judgment, while others learned to accept corrections and move forward. A study found that students with high self-determination and growth mindsets were also more likely to see setbacks as opportunities to learn and perform better on English tasks over time (Yin et al., 2022). Other participants shared their thoughts.

P1 said, “I used to feel frustrated by her poor grammar and compared myself to fluent speakers, but I’ve learned that English doesn’t define intelligence, and now I see mistakes as a chance to improve.”

P4 added that “I no longer let mistakes weigh me down and instead make sure to fix them the next time I speak.

P2 explained that “hearing negative gossip about my grammar made me feel small, yet I’ve learned to block out those voices and focus on improving myself.”

These students reveal that while external judgment can be painful, learning to reframe mistakes as learning tools is key to growing in confidence and skill.

Ultimately, the themes indicate that self-perception functions as both the foundation and the lens through which English students interpret success or challenges. This element determines students’ emotions toward failure, praise, or criticism, and whether they see the learning process as static or dynamic. A strong and positive self-image improves confidence and facilitates rapid English learning. In addition to formal education, it is vital to provide an atmosphere in which students may reflect on themselves and evaluate their activities constructively.

Interplay of Personal, Academic, and Social Factors in Narrative Identity and Self-Perception. Students’ confidence and identity as English learners do not develop in isolation. Instead, a mix of personal interests, school experiences, and social expectations shapes how they see themselves. Three relevant themes emerged: personal habits and traits shape confidence, academic experiences build and test identity, and social and cultural contexts influence language perception.

*Relevant Theme 1: Personal Habits and Traits Shape Confidence.* The theme stresses how students’ habits and characteristics influence their English confidence. If they read, discuss, and watch English programs on social media

often, they may be able to overcome their fears and speak English more effectively. Speaking English daily helped students build their confidence. Hard work, a positive attitude, and effective classroom instruction all contribute to developing that confidence.

Jun (2025) wrote about how an English teacher from the Philippines built his language and cultural identity through habits he set for himself, such as journaling, self-reflection, and reading. His story shows that traits like curiosity and resilience can help a person develop their identity over time, especially when they lack support from institutions. Students indicated that watching TV, writing, and listening to music have boosted their English confidence. Some participants stated:

P3 said, "Watching English movies and reading books helped me improve my speaking. I wanted to express myself better, which kept me learning."

Likewise, P6 explained that "listening to English music and receiving encouragement from both my school and family helped shape my identity and gave me the confidence to try, even though I knew I still had more to learn."

P7 added that "my love of writing, especially in essay competitions, exposed me to new words and grammar issues, which I then corrected through practice, and that process made me feel more prepared and confident during exams."

These stories show that when students consistently engage with English in personal ways, they begin to build confidence naturally because they see real progress from their efforts. Personal routines foster gradual, self-led improvement.

*Relevant Theme 2: Academic Experiences Build and Test Identity.* Academic experiences shape students' identity and English proficiency. Presentations, debates, and writing projects enhanced the self-esteem of students. Positive outcomes boosted their English-speaking confidence and belonging, while failures

spurred reflection and improvement. These events acted as watershed moments, allowing students to identify their talents and form a stronger linguistic identity. Mosquera-Pérez and Losada-Rivas (2022) conducted a study showing how Colombian EFL teachers became more self-aware, confident, and research-oriented through reflective practice and positive reinforcement in school settings. School environments, teachers, and tasks like debates or recitations created spaces where students' identities were both challenged and affirmed.

P1 said, "My college teachers were very supportive, which helped me face my fear of public speaking and slowly build my confidence."

P4 shared, "My teacher complimented me during a classroom recitation, and that simple recognition boosted my confidence and made me believe more in my ability to speak well." Similarly, P3 also said, "My presentation and writing tasks made me nervous sometimes, especially in debates, but doing them well made me feel proud since they helped me build my confidence step by step." She admitted that presentations and debates initially made her nervous but completing them successfully gave her a sense of pride, and her confidence grew stronger step by step.

These experiences show that learning English in school is not just about grades; it's also about how teachers and academic tasks help students see themselves in a new and more capable light.

*Relevant Theme 3: Social and Cultural Contexts Influence Language Perception.* The pressure or support from families, communities, and cultures affected how students used and perceived English. Some students felt supported, while others faced pressure or judgment that influenced their confidence. A study in Indonesia looked at how cultural expectations and community pressures affect an Indonesian EFL teacher's ability to balance religious, social, and academic roles in building their identity (Rahman & Kurniawan, 2022). Similarly, Banzon-Librojo, (2023) examined

Filipino teens who were in trouble with the law and demonstrated how even groups that are often overlooked can create coherent narrative identities. Other participants said,

"Being a Bisaya speaker made it hard for me to translate certain words into English" (P1). Although it sometimes discouraged her, it also reminded her that English is broad and complex, which kept her curious and engaged. P3 noted that in her community, "English speakers are seen as smart and successful, which puts pressure on me to perform, but it also motivates me to study harder so I can live up to those expectations."

Meanwhile, P7 shared, "People expect me to be fluent because I am an English major, and although that adds pressure, it pushes me to practice and become more confident in using the language."

These responses show that students do not learn English in isolation; their social surroundings and cultural identities play a significant role in how they approach the language and how they feel about their progress. BSED students develop their narrative identity and self-perception through a combination of personal effort, academic experiences, and social influences. Their confidence does not stem from a single source; it is built slowly through habits, shaped by teachers, and tested by community expectations. When all these elements work together, students begin to see English not just as a subject but as part of who they are becoming.

## DISCUSSION

This study sets out to understand how BSED students build their sense of identity and self-worth through learning English. The rationale stems from a clear gap – while English is widely used in Philippine classrooms, most studies focus on language skills, not on how English learning shapes a student's view of themselves. Thus, this research examined the students' lived experiences to see how early exposure, school activities, and social contexts influenced their

identity and confidence in speaking English. The purpose of this study was to address a gap in our knowledge of how learning a language benefit not just skill acquisition but also personal development and identity formation.

To begin with, the findings suggest that narrative identity begins to form well before formal instruction takes hold. For many participants, early exposure to English through media, family, or community planted the first seeds of self-definition as English learners. Some described watching cartoons or listening to pop songs in English during childhood, which unconsciously shaped their comfort and attitude toward the language. These small but frequent exposures laid the groundwork for more deliberate language use later in life.

In support of this, the developmental pathway aligns with McAdams' (2001) theory that individuals build their identity through a constantly evolving life narrative. Experiences are not stored in isolation but are woven into coherent personal stories that help people make sense of who they are. In this context, English exposure became more than just linguistic; it became autobiographical. Students used their English experiences as landmarks in their identity-building process.

Moreover, self-perception theory also plays a role here. According to Bem (1972), individuals form attitudes and beliefs by observing their behavior. Participants who found themselves responding in English or choosing to speak it in class came to see themselves as capable, even without initial confidence. Behavior preceded belief. This feedback loop of action and identity development emphasizes that language learning is more psychological than mechanical.

Correspondingly, many students described specific events that either boosted or hurt their confidence. Speeches, contests, group work, and teacher feedback all played key roles. These experiences served as what McAdams (2001) calls "nuclear episodes," key moments that shape how we see ourselves. Some participants shared how being complimented

for speaking English gave them pride, while others recalled freezing in class, which created lasting doubt.

Consistent with recent research, Hauber-Özer et.al. (2024) noted that reflective engagement in language use significantly boosts identity development. This study's findings echo this: when students were given chances to reflect, present, or perform, they constructed clearer self-definitions. Conversely, instances of embarrassment frequently resulted in avoidance and silence, which gradually shaped their self-perception as "insufficient" or "hesitant to communicate."

Building on this point, these changes are not fixed but fluid. As Gandana and Nissa (2021) argued, identity is hybrid and always shifting, especially in multilingual settings. The participants revealed similar patterns, being confident in one setting but unsure in another. This study shows that identity is context-dependent, often recalibrated based on peer interaction, authority feedback, and social comparison. The pressure to speak English well is shaped not only by academic requirements but also by cultural expectations. In the Philippine context, English is tied to social mobility, intelligence, and success. Some students internalized these ideas and felt intense pressure to perform well. Others resisted the pressure, finding it inauthentic or elitist. These tensions reveal that language identity is not neutral; it is shaped by power, access, and expectations.

Reinforcing this perspective, Yuan (2023) emphasized that institutional environments often limit identity growth by enforcing rigid norms. The research findings support this claim. Students felt constrained by rubrics, grammar-focused curricula, and teacher bias. Those who were not fluent from the start found fewer opportunities to grow. Thus, institutional practices can either support or suppress identity exploration.

On the side of research integrity, several biases could have affected the findings. First, social desirability bias may have influenced how

participants talked about their English use. Knowing that the interviewer was an educator might have led them to highlight their strengths and hide their struggles. Second, the researchers' shared background with participants may have introduced interpretive bias. The researchers' familiarity with local contexts allowed for richer interpretation, but it could also lead to assumptions. To mitigate this, the researcher used peer debriefing and member checking throughout the analysis.

Theoretically, the study contributes to narrative identity theory by showing that identity construction is not only autobiographical but also instructional. Classroom experiences, especially performance-based ones, shape students' self-narratives. It also expands self-perception theory by suggesting that self-concept in multilingual settings is not always a personal observation but is deeply social.

From a pedagogical standpoint, educators should understand that every interaction in the classroom affects how students see themselves. Feedback should be growth-oriented, not just corrective. Language teachers should create reflective and performance-based activities where students can develop both skills and self-belief.

Teacher education programs should also consider training future educators to be sensitive to identity formation in language learning. Recognizing that language instruction is identity instruction can help make classrooms more inclusive and empowering.

In summary, this study indicates that BSED students gradually build their English identity through early exposure at home, cultural expectations, and classroom experiences. Their confidence and self-perception develop over time, shaped by how they are taught, corrected, and encouraged. Teachers should use regular feedback, reflective activities, and student-centered tasks to help learners feel more capable and heard. For teacher education programs, it's important to include identity-aware teaching strategies that promote both skill and self-belief. Lastly, future researchers

may explore how language identity forms in other learning spaces, such as online platforms, bilingual households, or informal peer settings, to capture a fuller picture of how English learning shapes.

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